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# DISSERTATION

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HANNAH MORE:  
MORALIZING THE BRITISH NATION

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For Gerald !

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Of all the principles that can  
operate upon the human  
mind, the most powerful is –  
Religion.

John Bowles

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## I. Introduction

### General Remarks

Before I started this study my interest in and knowledge of Hannah More was poor. In fact, I only took notice of her rather accidentally as the woman who had firmly refused to read Mary Wollstonecraft's passionate *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792. A woman who found it not worth her while to direct her attention to a book so famous nowadays but rather complacently asked "what rights?", and who thought that women were equipped with ample rights so they need not strive for more, necessarily raised my disdain and curiosity alike. Who was that woman who so vehemently thought that women should fill the station of life they were born into, like the poor, and to "study to be quiet"?<sup>1</sup> What woman could possibly refuse rights for women at a time when revolutionary ideas inspired by the French Revolution seemed to work pro women and seemed to open a chance to improve their position in a society which was on the brink of change? My awakened interest made me open the chapter upon the life, as I came to know, of a highly celebrated woman, if not the most celebrated of her time: celebrated for being among the literati, at home in all genres, writing plays, poems, a novel, and tracts to counteract revolutionary trends; a patriot, a philanthropist, educator, and, above all, a moral instance; a woman who set up schools to save the souls of children and adults from eternal damnation by teaching them to read the Scripture; and who, for the sake of the preservation of a sound social order based on a God-ordained hierarchy and on Providence, ventured to improve the morals of a whole nation at all levels, from the very top to the very bottom; and who, for that purpose, wrote a range of tracts, essays and spiritual books which all became bestsellers. Hannah More's fame spread far beyond Britain, and all her writings gained extreme popularity as the number of editions clearly prove. The question which unavoidably followed, was: why was this fame

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah More, "Village Politics", *Works* Vol. I. p. 63. See also Kevin Gilmartin's essay "Study to be Quiet' Hannah More and the Invention of Conservative Culture in Britain". *ELH*. Vol. 70.2, Summer 2003. pp. 493-540.

not handed down to posterity? The answer seemed as obvious as it seemed simple: many of Hannah More's ideas are too much against the grain of modern attitudes to be taken seriously any longer: for instance, her unwavering belief in and obedience to the symbiosis of King, Church, and Government as inherited and sacred institutions; her notion that the social attention for the poor was not the duty and responsibility of the government, but rested on the benevolence of the rich. In our modern society there is no room for such ideas. We do no longer accept our lot as God-given. We are no longer children of Providence. We are, in the strict sense, no longer religious, at least not in the sense of over two hundred years ago. This background must be taken into account when making an effort to understand Hannah More's spirit, which was overwhelmingly that of her age she uncompromisingly adhered to.

It thus seemed unfair not to pay the deserved attention to a woman, however anachronistic she may appear in our days, who truly lived a life full of purpose – even if she might have stood up for things wrong in our eyes, but with the conviction of doing the only right thing – namely to keep up an order which “always was and always will be”<sup>2</sup>. She did not believe in change for the mere sake of change, but she believed in zeal without change. As an ardent Evangelical within the Anglican Church she saw it as her mission to make this life and this world a preparatory and transient stage for the life hereafter. The rich, whose moral state was deplorable, had to improve their manners in order to give a good example to the poor. The poor were to be educated to be able to read the Bible, for God's reign to come was all they had to hope for. And even the education of the future heiress to the throne was her concern. The poor, for sure, evoked her particular attention, for their salvation was truly at stake, easily led astray and seduced as she believed them to be. Their education was thus in no way intended by Hannah More as a means of climbing the social ladder, since writing was not included in the curriculum for the poor and reading was confined to the Scriptures and ‘safe books’, to which she made an enormous contribution.

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<sup>2</sup> *Isaiah 57:7-10; Psalm 98 or 98:1-6; Hebrews 1:1-12; John 1:1-14.*

It seems certainly not correct to assert that Hannah More, after her death until very recent years, when efforts were undertaken to revise her place in literary history, sank into oblivion. Several biographies which appeared in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries prove the contrary. Of course, she became in later years chiefly remembered for her association with great men of letters – as, for instance, Johnson, Macauley, Walpole and DeQuincey - and for her most remarkable and still readable tracts, and not as one of the *Twelve English Authoresses*<sup>3</sup>, among whom she held a leading part. That Hannah More, spoilt by praise and eulogy, had also her critics was inevitable. The critical voices are also dealt with in this thesis and range from Birrell, Sydney, Shaw and Walcott to modern critics.

The recent efforts to re-evaluate her place in literary history have evolved into a modest but sustained renaissance of recent date, with debates pro and contra Hannah More. The perception that we must

[...] consider the literary work as it is a kind of statement which can never be dissociated from either the time in which it was made or the time in which it is known: i.e., when the work was written or when it was (or is) read,<sup>4</sup>

has led to more understanding for Hannah More and her work. Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, for instance, is said to have contributed to the respectability of the novel.<sup>5</sup> Sam Pickering even thought "that the way for the novel's respectability and resulting acceptance by reading public, was paved, not by Scott, but by Hannah More."<sup>6</sup> The use of fiction in her *Cheap Repository Tracts* for propagandist purposes, as, for instance, in her *Village Politics* (1783), made a remarkable contribution to the modern short story. Her *Tracts* became also "an important model for the next generation of female social writers". (Krueger, 95)

Hannah More's didactic use of literature as a means to an end may be regarded as her trademark. It is this purposeful and utilitarian use of her writings Hannah More imperturbably held on to throughout her life, which made her authentic and trustworthy. Maybe we can only do her justice by

<sup>3</sup> L.G. Walford. *Twelve English Authoresses*. London, 1892, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> "Historicism Once More", *The Kenyon Review*, 20 (Autumn, 1958), p. 566.

<sup>5</sup> See Sam Pickering's "Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* and the Respectability of the Novel in the Nineteenth Century". *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, LXXVII-1977, pp.78-85.

<sup>6</sup> "The Novel in the Nineteenth Century". *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, p. 78.

seeing herself and her life and work this way, namely as having an unequivocal religious didactic aim.

### **Research materials**

The main contemporary sources this thesis rests upon are the two volumes of the *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, which also include some pages of her diary, edited by William Roberts in the year of Hannah More's death in 1833. Another contemporary source are her *Works* Volumes I and II, published in 1843 and 1847 respectively. Of great value proved to be the *Mendip Annals*, a journal of the Mendip schools, written by Martha ('Patty'), Hannah's gifted sister, edited by Arthur Roberts, the son of William Roberts, and published in 1858. Very helpful was the Reverend Henry Thompson's *The Life of Hannah More with Notices of her Sisters*, published in 1838, as a serviceable corrective to Roberts' *Memoirs*. References in letters to and from her contemporaries as well as subsequent biographies of early and later date and a number of critical essays and reviews, some of which were published while this thesis was in progress, were a valuable asset to this project. The availability of primary sources has changed for the better in recent years. However, as they are still scattered all over the world, intensive reference to the aforementioned contemporary sources was necessary.<sup>7</sup>

A close look at Hannah More's life by means of biographies tells us that it was marked by very distinctive periods with differing literary output, activities and changes of residence. All these biographies have their merits, although some also deserve to be read with a critical eye. William Roberts, Hannah More's first biographer, whose *Memoirs of Mrs. Hannah More*, published in 1834, served as the basis for many subsequent biographies, leaves a lot to be desired in many respects: in Roberts' desire

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<sup>7</sup> See *The Literary Manuscripts and Letters of Hannah More*, traced by Nicholas D. Smith, published in 2008. They also prove one more time that the letters published by William Roberts in his *Memoirs* were "only a fraction of her overall correspondence". (Preface, XXV).

to keep anything away from her that might possibly infringe on Hannah More's high reputation, made him make, at times, quite disastrous editorial interferences in the form of textual changes and curtailing of her letters. John Gibson Lockhart's early review of this biography, published in the *Quarterly Review* of November 1834, took it severely to task. "Had it been possible for any literator, with Mrs. Hannah More's correspondence at his command, to produce an uninteresting work [...]," he wrote, "we are obliged to confess our belief that the task must have been accomplished by Mr. Roberts." Lockhart drew attention to many an incongruity in Robert's biography which was the result of the latter's great anxiety 'to rescue' Hannah More.

Luckily, the Reverend Henry Thompson published his biography *The Life of Hannah More: With Notices of Her Sisters* in 1838, which was carefully annotated and a welcome corrective to Roberts' biography. These biographies were followed by Thomas Taylor's *Memoir of Mrs. Hannah More with Notices of her Works and Sketches of her Contemporaries* in 1838. Anne Katherine Elwood's biography *Memoirs of the Literary Ladies of England* (1843) drew heavily on Roberts, Thompson and Taylor; so did Henrietta Maria Julius in *Hannah More, auch ein Schriftstellerleben* (1849).

Helen C. Knight's *A New Memoir of Hannah More, Life in Hall and Cottage* appeared in 1851 was followed by Anna J. Buckland's *The Life of Hannah More, A Lady of two Centuries* in 1882.

Apart from several short and recurring biographies in magazines, Charlotte M. Yonge's *Hannah More*, published in 1888, was the last biography to appear in the nineteenth century. Although Yonge also availed herself in the main of the biographies so far published and did not furnish the reader with new details, her biography has a singular charm. It is also of particular interest as it reflects a High Churchwoman's view of an Evangelical. "The Dissenters were beginning to take umbrage at Hannah's doings, and the High Church suspected her independence," she worried, and that "[s]he was advised to 'publish a short confession of her faith', as her attachment both to the religion and government of the country had become questionable to many persons." (103) Quite obviously, in

retrospect, Yonge did not share these apprehensions, and felt most sympathetic towards her. But she certainly located “[d]istrust of what is known as Evangelicalism, partly of its doctrines, and chiefly of the narrowness” (153) in *Coelebs*. With Yonge’s biography, the sequence of biographies published in the nineteenth century ended.

The new century began with Marion Harland’s *Hannah More* in 1900. In the preface, addressed to her sister, she was “[t]hinking and dreaming” of “Sunday Reading” of her childhood: what “an oasis in the Sahara of bound sermons and semi-detached tracts were *The Works of Mrs. Hannah More*.” (iii) Her memory of Mrs. More’s works was still very much alive and connected with the “many lines [the two sisters] learned by heart on Sunday afternoons in the joyful spring-time” when they were obliged “to clear the pages every few minutes of yellow jessamine bells and purple wisteria petals, flung down by the warm wind.” (v) It was a memory still reminding her of “the good smell of lavender and thyme, of southernwood – and of rosemary.” (vi) Harland painted a truly impressionistic picture to which the reader cannot help but to warm up.

*Hannah More. A Biographical Study* by Annette M. B. Meakin, was to follow in 1911. Originally, Meakin had not intended to write a biography but “simply to present to her readers that picture of Hannah More which [her] researches and a careful perusal of her correspondence and works have left so vividly in [her] own mind,” she noted in the preface. About eighty years after More’s death, Meakin’s comparing the former with Mary Wollstonecraft is of some interest. Meakin does not give preference to any of the two writers but stresses their difference in approaching the same ends along very different lines. More “approaches the Woman Question from the standpoint of a Christian moralist” and “as a humble exponent of Christ’s teaching,” thus observing her duty as a Christian. (322-23) Wollstonecraft, on the other hand, writes as “one who wanders far from the limits prescribed to her sex.”<sup>8</sup> Both works, More’s *Strictures* and Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*, in Meakin’s opinion, deserve a special place, namely side by side, on the bookshelves. Meakin was rather critical of several points in Yonge’s biography. She certainly did not share the

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<sup>8</sup> Meakin citing Hannah More, p. 322.

appreciation of M. G. Jones (1952) for Yonge, a later biographer who in turn declared Yonge's biography to be one of the best. On the other hand, despite its obvious merits, Charles Howard Ford (1996) termed Meakin's biography "typically uncritical and superficial" in its apologetic attempt to rehabilitate More. (Preface, IX) His position seems difficult to comprehend.

In 1920, G. Lacey May, M.A., compiled a volume, *Some Eighteenth Century Churchmen; Glimpses of English Church Life in the Eighteenth Century*, (Studies in Church History), in the form of biographical sketches, which "gives glimpses into an age of great unbelief and immorality in the world at large and of great sloth in the English Church in particular." (11) In it Hannah More was placed between such celebrities and churchmen as Samuel Johnson, George Whitefield, John Wesley, John Newton, William Cowper, Bishop Porteus, Bishop Watson, George Crabbe, and William Wilberforce. It was more than unfair to reduce the fame of Hannah More to that of an "elderly strait-laced spinster who wrote tracts", as she was often handed down to posterity. This appraisal was doing her memory anything but justice, May claimed. Not only was she the friend of brilliant men and herself a popular writer, "but [she] also did more than anyone else in her lifetime to bring before the notice of the careless rich the sufferings and ignorance of the English poor." (166) May confessed, though, that her works did not contain "much which is likely to find a permanent place in English literature," even [...] [if] in her own days, they enjoyed an enormous popularity." (184) Hannah More also found entrance into several other biographical sketches contained in this useful book.

M. G. Jones' biography *Hannah More* (1952) is, to my mind, still one of the very best ever written on More. Sympathetic, but nevertheless a critical and careful study, her book saw in More the "influential person for what she was – a lively creature, honest, frank, full of moral courage, immensely concerned for human welfare; a bestseller, to be sure," so Judges.<sup>9</sup> Maybe Jones' writing, as A.V. Judges perceives it, was "somewhat allusive", but he seems perfectly correct in stating that it was "the nature of the disputes in which [Hannah More] got herself involved,"

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<sup>9</sup> Judges, A. V. Review of "Hannah More" by M. G. Jones. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (May, 1954), pp. 185-186, p. 185.

what truly “caught the imagination of her contemporaries”.(Judges, 186) Even if Judges deplores that the meaning of the issues pertaining to the religious and social forces should have been treated more plainly, M. G. Jones’ biography leaves little to be desired, for even E. M. Forster in his biography of Marianne Thornton (1797 – 1887), who adored Hannah More, praised Jones’ biography as an “excellent book”, which had made it “possible to get a clearer view of that ‘bishop in petticoats’ and to realise her warmth and charm.”<sup>10</sup>

Had there not been May's contribution (see above), four decades would have elapsed between Meakin's and Jones' biographies. However, it took over four decades from Jones' biography until in 1996 three biographies, namely those of Demers, Ford and Stott, appeared. This coincidence, for which no explanation could be traced, was the beginning of a modest renaissance of interest in Hannah More, which brought forth some excellent essays and studies, some of them rather critical of her clinging to the old order, some sympathetic because of her unwavering moral attitudes.

Patricia Demers’s *The World of Hannah More* appeared in 1996 as “a form of literary biography anchored in the work itself,” as she states in the preface. It rests, thus, less on the life of the protagonist but endeavours a close analysis of her major works instead. However, as Janis Dawson critically remarks, “Demers’s discussion of *Strictures*, as well as More’s other texts [...] is presented in relation to More’s various political and social writings rather than in terms of a modern feminist analysis of the text.”<sup>11</sup> But it is precisely this analysis of More's oeuvre within its political and social setting which was of particular interest for this study. One of the special merits of Demers’s biography is that it departs from many a received idea that has “encumbered our understanding of More and avoids many of the pitfalls of presentism characteristic of similar studies.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> E.M. Forster. *Marianne Thornton. 1797 – 1877. A Domestic Biography*, p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Janis Dawson. Review of “The World of Hannah More”. *The Lion and the Unicorn* 22.2 (1998), pp. 257-58.

<sup>12</sup> Dawson, p. 256.



Charles Howard Ford's biography *Hannah More: A Critical Biography*, too, appeared in 1996. It is another literary biography of Hannah More meant as a re-evaluation of her life and works. Instead of being a "full-scale biography", it consists "almost entirely of a close analysis of More's own words."<sup>13</sup> Ford's endeavour is to present More not simply as a reactionary but as a serious political reformer, with moral renewal and, at the same time, the preservation of the established social and political order in mind.

Anne Stott's biography of Hannah More also came out in 1996, the same year as Ford's, and was titled *Hannah More. The First Victorian*. It is "a revisionist account of More, in which she emerges [...] more as a Whig constitutionalist than as a Tory die-hard."<sup>14</sup> It is a thoroughly researched biography which "brings together as no other biography of More [...] an exploration of the breadth and depth of More's life and work and the context of her times."<sup>15</sup> The mix of chronological and thematic organization, very much alike M. G. Jones', unavoidably resulted in repetitiveness in places but does in no way prevent this book from being a respectable effort to redeem More from the disregard she had slipped into. Interesting is Stott's understanding of the interaction of the Anglican Church and the structures of authority at the beginning of nineteenth-century Britain. It is only in this context that the Blagdon Controversy, to which the biography gives much room, is to be understood. Judy Simons, who wrote a rather humorous but in no way flimsy review of Stott's biography, states that "More emerges as a tireless campaigner for humanitarian causes," even though her writings are often repetitive and a "mishmash of contradictory statements" (especially in the case of *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*). While Judy Simons would not have Hannah More on her "personal list of fantasy celebrity dinner guests", she confesses that Stott's book convinced her that "here was a formidable woman, of foresight, conviction, pioneering

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<sup>13</sup> Julie S. Gilbert. Review of "Hannah More: A Critical Biography", by Ch. H. Ford. *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), p.322.

<sup>14</sup> Susan Pedersen. Review of "Hannah More. The First Victorian" by Anne Stott. *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 109, No. 3 (Jun., 2004), p. 975.

<sup>15</sup> Shirley A. Mullen. Review of "Hannah More. The First Victorian" by Anne Stott. *The Journal of Modern History* 78 (June 2006), p. 487.

spirit, and determination, and one moreover who had an undeniably influential effect on the modern age.”<sup>16</sup>

Karen Irene Swallow Prior’s doctoral dissertation on *Hannah More and the Evangelical Influence on the English Novel*, submitted in 1999, although not a biography in its true sense, for only one Chapter deals with More’s biography, is an extremely close and fine study of the didactic tradition and the Evangelical influence on the novel. Prior stresses More’s life as that of a moral instance. Her thesis chapter on *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* was published as book in 2003 under the title *Hannah More’s Coelebs in Search of a Wife. A Review of Criticism and a New Analysis*.

Robert Hole’s introduction to the *Selected Writings of Hannah More*, which he edited in 1996, also deserves special attention. It not only contains in concise form More’s biography, moreover it introduces her before the background of the French Revolution and the changing political and social order she was so reluctant to accept. To her, the well-established link between religion and order in the state could only be overthrown by destroying the religion that sustained it. Since More was conscious that “religion and morals will stand or fall together” (*Strictures I*, 40), she consequently concluded that, in order to overthrow religion, first the morality that supports it must be destroyed. Robert Hole presents Hannah More as a stout believer in “rights as concrete privileges [...] given to specific groups” and in the “divinely ordained social hierarchy, [as] one of the cornerstones of the traditional order”, with all its consequences also for women as subordinate to men.<sup>17</sup>

For the sake of completeness, it must be mentioned that in 1802, when the ‘Blagdon controversy’ was still raging, the Reverend William Shaw published a most insulting ‘life-time biography’, under the pseudonym of Archibald MacSarcasm. Although Shaw took pains over reviewing all of Mrs. More’s works known so far, and even though some of the points of critique may deserve at least consideration, his deplorable efforts to

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<sup>16</sup> Judy Simons. Review of “Hannah More. The First Victorian”. *The Modern Language Review*. Vol. 100. No. 1 (Jan. 2005), pp. 203-205, passim.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Hole. *Selected Writings of Hannah More*. Introduction, pp. VII – XXXVIII, passim.

infringe upon her reputation are too obvious, and tell more about the writer himself than about the accused woman.

Apart from biographical memoirs, Hannah More is also profoundly discussed by Ford K. Brown's *Fathers of the Victorians*, published in 1961; in Anne K. Mellor's *Mothers of the Nation*, published in 2000; and Mona Scheuermann's *In Praise of Poverty*, published in 2002. The works mentioned certainly do not lay claim on completeness. In the absence of additional book-studies a range of essays and reviews have appeared in recent years, which were also a great asset to writing this thesis and will be adequately mentioned in it.

### **Aims of this thesis**

One of the primary objects of this thesis is to trace the impetus of Hannah More's crusade to moralize the British nation in times of political trouble and corroding morals, another to search in her writings for the driving force, which made her increasingly focus on a life of strong spiritual, moral and philanthropic leaning. That she was merely in quest of a purposeful pursuit after her return from London's fashionable life to Bristol seems out of the question, because many diary entries which stem from this period of her life are marked by a wish to seek for more closeness to her Creator.

The question how Hannah More's Evangelicalism and her high moral demands interacted with her belief in God-given hereditary rights and the providential social order forms the centre of this thesis. So does the question as to *whether, how* and to what *extent* More instrumentalized her growing Anglican Evangelicalism to achieve her moralizing goals. The study also raises the question how she succeeded in coping with her Evangelical religiousness in the face of growing patriotism, when even the slightest deviation from the doctrines of the Established Church assumed a taste of 'infidelity'. As the question of the state of Britain's morals was also a concern to many of More's contemporaries, it was a further object of this thesis to summarize their opinions for reasons of comparison.

This investigation into Hannah More's moral crusade covers the period when she wrote her moralizing pamphlets addressed to the rich and influential; but also the period when she began to handle the school scheme for the poor, a project which was intertwined with philanthropic activities; and the period when she wrote her *Tracts*. The latter served two purposes: first, as an antidote to the new political currents, which she abhorred; and, second, as means of providing the children of the poor with 'safe reading'. This meant to provide them with books which did not trigger in them those dangerous libertine ideas which were threatening to overthrow state and church, hereditary rights and social order. Her self-imposed mission was to raise the depraved morality, which apparently existed in all social strata. She was convinced that only sound morals as the supporting pillars of society could guarantee the maintenance of the political status quo in which she believed. The period between her withdrawal from London to Bristol and the writing of the only novel she ever wrote, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, then, was the chapter in More's life during which she sacrificed all her labour to the raising of the moral state of a whole nation.

With the exception of the *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795 – 1797), and partly of the *Strictures* (1799), however, not sufficient attention has been paid in essays, biographies and studies to her moralizing pamphlets written in those years, especially with regard to Hannah More's (Evangelical) motives: *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society*, 1788; *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World. By one of the Laity*, 1790; *Remarks on a Speech of M. Dupont, made in the National Convention of France, on the subjects of religion and public education*, 1793; *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 1799; *Hints towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess*, 1805; and *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, 1808.<sup>18</sup> Even if *Strictures* and *Coelebs* have been somewhat better off in this respect,<sup>19</sup> of

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<sup>18</sup> Even if some of these writings, like *Remarks*, *Hints* and *Coelebs*, are not analyzed in detail in this thesis, they are frequently referred to.

<sup>19</sup> The *Strictures* are given attention in many biographies; "*Hannah More's Coelebs in Search of a Wife. A Review of Criticism and a New Analysis*" by Karen Swallow Prior appears to be the closest and best review so far.

all moralizing pamphlets *Estimate* has found least interest by critics in critical essays and papers to this day, in spite of the fact that it is More's 'manifesto' of her undivided dedication to Evangelical Christianity, underlining her unbending vision of hereditary rights, the God-given social order and morals based on religion. To offset this neglect in analyzing More's moralizing writings, with particular emphasis on the Evangelical influence, as a supporting factor of the status quo of the social hierarchical order, is another goal of the thesis. It also focuses on the question whether Hannah More, contrary to her steadfastly maintaining the opposite, had an affinity for Methodism. There are several instances in the thesis which seem to substantiate this assumption.

The sifting of the biographies on Hannah More, her letters, and the available material about her, then, show a remarkable shift from a London literary celebrity to a deeply religious woman, a woman who was inspired by the providential Evangelical mission to restore the British nation to its former high moral standards. For this purpose, she availed herself in the main of those strategically well-dosed pamphlets dealt with in this thesis, which proved her to be not only a tirelessly catechizing moralizer but also a convinced patriot, educator and a disseminator and defender of 'true Christianity'.

The choice of the moralizing writings discussed in this thesis followed the consideration that they formed a well-calculated pattern. If *Hints* (1805) was not, as initially planned, included in this study, the reason was that, pertaining to the future sovereign, it was not generally applicable, and would have gone beyond the scope of this thesis. As for the *Cheap Repository Tracts*, they are frequently referred to in this thesis.

It is the aim of this thesis to arrange the chapters in a way so that they form an interacting unit. Each chapter, however, also has its individual legitimacy and is meant to illustrate how Hannah More, albeit keeping to much the same subject matters, kept changing her focus.

### **Arrangement of individual chapters**

Chapter II is dedicated to Hannah More's eventful life. It gives due attention to changing moods and places by attempting to fit periods and fields of interests together. This may, occasionally, give the impression of going back in time. However, as this method was also used by M. G. Jones, whom this chapter much refers to, and Anne Stott, it might also serve this thesis. The length of this chapter can be explained by the design to draw a picture of Hannah More, providing the necessary background information for a better understanding of her activities. It also serves as a reference for those works mentioned, but not treated, in this thesis.

Chapter III is of particular importance as it illustrates the religious, political and philosophical background of a restless time charged with growing tension arising from the French Revolution, the up-keeping of the *ancien regime* and new reformatory political ideas and challenges. It is also intended to inform the reader about the difference of the Evangelicals in the Church of England (Anglican Evangelicals) and the evangelical sentiment inherent in all those who were seized by the Religious Revival of the eighteenth century (as, for instance, the Methodists). The chapter also informs about the debate on divinely-ordained monarchs and the providential hierarchical social order. If this background had not been elaborated to some extent, a proper understanding of More and her time would have seemed impossible.

Chapter IV is the centre of this study. It deals with the work and activities of Hannah More which aimed at the moral improvement of the British nation as a whole. To save the nation from French influence and to keep up the old order, were some of the principal elements of her educational, patriotic and moralizing writings and covered the period from her withdrawal from London to Bristol until the production of her first and only novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, when she created, with her heroine, the ideal of the English lady, who was later to become the ideal of the Victorian woman. The pamphlets analyzed in this thesis, *Thoughts* (1788), *Estimate* (1790) and *Strictures* (1799), were addressed to the rich and

influential, whereas More's school schemes and charities, carried by her compassion for the poor and her impetus to save them for the life to come, were dedicated to the pitiable and poor inhabitants of the Mendips.

Finally, Chapter V looks at Hannah More's moral crusade, which was not only done by explaining to the rich their responsibility for returning Britain to an idealized moral state, which Hannah More envisaged as 'things as they were'; but also by her endeavour to pave the way to heaven for the poor, in compliance with her Evangelical sense of mission. By the time of Hannah More's death in 1833 she had outlived her time, and her vision of a life which merely served as a transitory state for the one to come seemed almost outdated. She was unwilling to see that another kind of transition was setting in before her very eyes. However, as a true representative of her time she clung to what was her ideal: the symbiosis of king, church, and state, the divine social hierarchy, and an all-regulating Providence.

## II. Hannah More: Concise Biography

### Early Years in Bristol

Hannah More was born in 1745 in the parish of Stapleton, county of Gloucester, as the youngest but one of five girls. Her father, Jacob More, schoolmaster and a convinced High Church man, with good connections to pious men, set the scene for Hannah's later religious outlook by endowing his daughters with the knowledge of the classics and French. Hannah had stood out from her sisters from early childhood. Her capacity for learning was unusual, and as far as mathematics was concerned even beyond that of boys, a sign of lack of femininity in the late second half of the eighteenth century. Before very long the sisters saw themselves educated and independent enough to set up a boarding school for middle-class girls in 1757. The five girls' joint venture, which taught languages, music, dancing and the like, in conformity with the standard curricula of those days, soon gained popularity. The background of this growing interest in the education of girls was much enhanced by the idea of supplying a competitive marriage market with 'accomplished' females.<sup>20</sup> One of the boarders of the school was the daughter of the later Bishop of Norwich, Dr. George Horne, an early indication of the well-functioning religious network Hannah More was going to build up in the course of her life. Her talent for writing became apparent soon, and she found a use for it on all kinds of occasions, becoming a local celebrity. Before long she had a chance to introduce her talent for drama at the boarding school. Her *Sacred Dramas*, published not before 1782, were acted by the pupils in the school, followed by *The Search After Happiness*, which was to fill in the void of 'proper' plays for young girls at boarding schools. This little drama with a moral background, written by pious Hannah More at seventeen, was published in 1773 and soon made its round in many schools. It was to become one of the cornerstones of her future success as a writer. Hannah More's early

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<sup>20</sup> Hannah More must have looked back to these early days of their boarding school teaching with ambivalent feelings, when the uselessness of such tuition was to dawn upon her.



popularity did not fail to become known to wealthy William Turner, whose cousins were pupils at the More girls' boarding school. Charmed by a few of Hannah's verses, Mr. Turner, two decades Hannah's senior, proposed marriage. With the proposal accepted, Mr. Turner suddenly seemed to feel discomfort at the thought of a nuptial tie. The marriage was postponed three times for reasons unknown to this day. Humiliated, Hannah More put an end to this episode by breaking the engagement. However, William Turner, eager to make amendments for his misbehaviour, settled an annuity upon her, without her knowledge and consent. It must have soon dawned upon her that she now had the resources for leading the life of an independent writer, which made her literary triumphs in London possible, giving her also the chance to set up her Sunday schools in the Mendips years later. That the ballad *The Bleeding Rock* was a possible consequence of the experience with William Turner is held to be impossible, "since the sisters were not women to wear their hearts on their sleeves!" (M.G. Jones, 17) Hannah More decided never to marry, and in consequence turned down John Longhorn's subsequent marriage proposal. Instead, Hannah More turned to writing plays seriously.

Her first play was *The Inflexible Captive*, which she introduced in 1774 on her first annual visit to London, a habit she was going to keep up during the forthcoming two decades, but not before having become acquainted or having made friends with celebrities and dignitaries like John Langhorne, Edmund Burke and Bishop Newton, to name but a few. In London she was not only welcomed by the Blue Stockings because of a recommendation of famous Mrs. Boscawen, she was also to face the biting criticism of satirist John Wolcott ("Peter Pindar"), the famous editor of Shakespeare's plays George Steevens, and John Williams, whose critiques were "marked by low malignity"<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> John Taylor Esq. "John Williams". *Records of my Life* (1832) 1:276-81.

## The London Experience and the Bluestockings

Once she had arrived in London, possibly in 1774, in company with two of her sisters, Hannah More's admiration for genius was gratified by being introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Garrick only a week later. Garrick at fifty-seven was drawing to the close of his career as a famous actor in Shakespearean plays, and had inflamed Hannah's desire to see and hear him act. He was delighted at the young woman seemingly endowed with promising talents for the stage. Before long, she became acquainted with the choicest society of the metropolis, meeting also "the sublime and beautiful Edmund Burke!" (qtd. in Roberts I, 37), Sally More, Hannah's elder sister, reported from London. Six weeks were spent on Hannah More's first visit to the world of literature, but she returned to London again the following year, 1775, when she met Mrs. Montagu, Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Boscawen<sup>22</sup>, and on another occasion Mrs. Hester Chapone, too. This very year, Garrick made up his mind to stage Hannah More's first play, the classical drama *The Inflexible Captive*, at the Bath Theatre Royal. The prologue was written by Longhorne, the epilogue by Garrick himself, and it turned out to be a big success. Thus ended Hannah More's second visit to London, lasting another six weeks; her next visit was planned for January 1776. She returned from London with much praise and flattery in her baggage. Her heightened self-confidence made her courageously send Alderman Cadell a newly written legendary tale of *Sir Eldred and the Power*, and in addition the short poem the *Bleeding Rock* she had written some time ago. She thus initiated a most productive relationship with Cadell which was to last for nearly forty years. Hannah More's absence from Bristol in 1776, planned for six weeks, was to take six months. Newly attained success and applause had made it unavoidable. Garrick generously pushed Hannah's career, often addressing her in his letters as "Nineship", "My dear Nine",<sup>23</sup> or "My dearest of Hannahs" in letters written in 1777. (qtd. in Roberts I, pp. 72, 73, 74 ) In the same year her tragedy *Percy* was accepted for performance at Covent Garden, making Hannah More's presence in

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<sup>22</sup> In a letter to one of her sisters she rendered a vivid portrayal of these ladies.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Samuel's 1778 engravings *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain* depicted her as an important member of the Bluestocking circle.

London necessary again in November. The play was received triumphantly and performed for nearly unprecedented twenty-one nights. But for a few exceptions, critics were unanimously full of praise.

Hannah More's absences from Bristol began to grow longer. In 1778, for instance, she returned after five months, only to immediately go back to London again after Garrick's sudden death, on January 20, to attend to his widow. Thanks to the success of her two plays and Garrick's encouragement, Hannah More had ventured on a new play, *The Fatal Falsehood*. However, Garrick died before it was completed. Nevertheless, it was produced in 1779. Compared to *Percy*, it had a run of three nights only. Hannah More realized that it was Garrick who would have boosted the play, and she grew keenly aware of what she owed to him in her career as a dramatist. Without Garrick's patronage she felt very much left alone. *The Fatal Falsehood* was to be her last venture in the field of drama. An additional reason for Hannah More's sudden and irrevocable break with the stage could also be the consequence of an embarrassing incident which happened on the second night of the play, when Hannah Cowley, a rival playwright, loudly cried out "That's mine! That's mine!", and Hannah More was openly charged by the critics with stealing the plot from a play of Mrs. Cowley. *Albina* had been read and subsequently refused by Garrick some years earlier. Hannah, feeling innocent, got involved in a severe war of paper defending her newly gained reputation as a dramatist. It was the first but not the last time that Hannah More saw herself under the suspicion of plagiarism.

With Garrick's death, an era in Hannah More's life came to an end. Garrick certainly was one more milestone in her life; and five years were to elapse until her decision to retreat to Cowslip Green in order to serve a higher vocation.

Hannah More's social success in London was also enhanced if not grounded on her being accepted by the Blue Stockings coterie. Their aim was to bring any promising wit, literary or otherwise, together with well-known celebrities in order to exchange views on current topics. Always on the lookout for young talents, they regarded Hannah More as the very person they wanted. As the dignified ladies were without exception middle-

aged, Hannah's youth was an additional tribute in her favour. Three of these ladies, Mrs. Montagu, 'Queen of the Blues', Mrs. Carter, and Mrs. Boscawen were the spearheads of "this new and curious world, compounded of learning and fashion" (M.G.Jones, 51). They took Hannah under their wings because patronage of genius was privilege and duty alike.

Very soon in 1775, owing to the initiative of Sir Joshua Reynolds, she met the famous moralist Dr. Samuel Johnson. As the story goes, Hannah More somewhat overdid her flattery to him, although cajolery was according to social conventions the order of the day. However, this was no splint in the eyes of Dr. Johnson for he very soon took to Hannah's enthusiasm and straightforwardness. However, they also disagreed on many issues. Worst of all, Dr. Johnson had no regard for Milton, and he criticised Hannah as a Protestant for reading the wrong books. To one of her sisters, Hannah More wrote in 1781 that Johnson alleged "that, as a good Protestant, I ought to abstain from books written by Catholics." However, when she "was beginning to stand upon ... [her] defence" he made amendments by assuring her that he was glad she should be reading pious books at all, written "by whomsoever". (qtd. in Roberts I, 124) Of her male acquaintances Dr. Johnson was, without doubt, the most prominent.

Mrs. Montagu, who much admired Hannah More's essays, plays and ballads, became her friend. This friendship lasted until Montagu's death in 1800. But Hannah also gained the friendship of Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Boscawen. These friendships at the highest level handed Hannah More from one dinner party to the other, entailing also many private invitations. At one very exclusive dinner party Hannah More met Horace Walpole, a highlight of her social career. A friendship began which was to last twenty years, until Walpole's death in 1797. Walpole mockingly addressed her as "Holy Hannah" and "my dear Saint Hannah", for he was not at all religious and often rallied More for notorious "sabbatarianism" (qtd. in Jones, 72). As much as they disagreed on many questions at the beginning of their acquaintance, in the end it was only religion upon which their opinions diverged a lifelong time. Walpole and More shared also their dislike for "the new 'philosophical serpents', 'the Paines, the Tookes and the

Wollstonecrafts.” (Jones, 71) To this friendship we owe a great many letters. Walpole, whose fame was later grounded on the mass of letters he had left for posterity, chose Hannah More as one of his correspondents. This correspondence was to paint for posterity a vivid social picture of the second half of the eighteenth century pertaining to all fields. But we owe to this friendship also a very personal letter of Hannah More’s to Walpole dated June 1787. It is one of the most moving she ever wrote, putting their joint feeling for “dear infirm, broken-spirited Mrs. Vesey” (qtd. in Roberts I, 267) at the centre, describing in parabolic language her purity to “rather resemble that innocence which is the ignorance of evil, than that virtue which is the conquest over it.” (qtd. in Roberts I, 268) Walpole, so More, presented himself to her not only as a wit but as “the tender-hearted and humane friend” of the lady in question. These lines show Hannah More’s growing affection for Walpole in a “remarkable friendship in process of formation” (M.G. Jones, 69). Her famous poem *Bas Bleu*, written in 1782 and addressed to Mrs. Vesey, More’s “masterpiece of fugitive verse” (M.G. Jones, 58), is an eulogy on the Blue Stockings and a keen summary of the goings-on in their salons.

Much as Hannah More was praised and flattered, critical voices cropped up, too. Her sabbatarian principle for instance, though she was willing to offend against it for exquisite assemblies of society when her presence was required, was viewed with a disapproving eye. Her habit of assiduously praising or her never making a discrediting remark against anybody did not meet with general approval. And most interestingly, it was regretted by one distinguished lady, Mrs. Walsingham, that Hannah More “was not a stronger feminist!” (qtd. in Jones, 57) Mrs. Thrale also belonged to those with a critical voice. However, when she got married to Mr. Piozzi and Hannah More did not join the indignant chorus of opponents to this marriage, she had won the day and the two ladies developed friendly terms.

Hannah More met or re-met many dignitaries of ecclesiastic or worldly calling, with the exception of rare contacts to statesmen and politicians. Both ecclesiastics and laity did not dither to show their appreciation for a high-minded and intellectually ambitious literary woman of such high moral

standards as Hannah More was. She was able to count on their support when the rising tide of the Blagdon controversy over her teaching methods nearly wracked her nerves. She could rely on her effective alliances forged during her time in London with bishops like Watson, Horne and Porteus<sup>24</sup> to name but a few. They all corresponded with her diligently over years. Horne incited her to write her didactic essay *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society*, published anonymously in 1788; Porteus pushed her to write her most popular *Tracts*, commencing in 1792. His enthusiastic eulogy of Hannah More in his ‘charge’ to the clergy of his diocese, praising her as the most accomplished moralist, induced satirist ‘Peter Pindar’ to write his notorious *Nil Admirari* making great fun of Bishop Beilby Porteus. Porteus in October 1799 complained in his letter to More: “No, I am determined never to say a civil thing to a lady again as long as I live.” (qtd. in Roberts II, 52) But this incident did not infringe on Porteus’ and More’s friendship in the least. He even bequeathed money to her for the purpose of supporting her school schemes.

The mentioning of all these divines is of particular interest in as much as they all shared to a more or less large extent a belief in God-ordained power.<sup>25</sup> Their influence upon Hannah More must have been paramount; and to be accepted by men of such moral standards must have elevated Hannah More enormously in her own eyes and in the eyes of others. Hannah More, then, was not only the protégée of eminent worldly men and women, she was also the ‘darling’ of Anglican High Church men, a circumstance which did not even change when More eventually turned to Evangelicalism. To receive “three sprightly copies of verses from three of the gravest men in England,” Hannah More wrote to her sister in 1782, “is no small compliment.” She alluded to Lowth, Horne and Porteus, who thought it proper to honour her with little epigrams, men “whom posterity will hardly believe to have written epigrams,” so More. (qtd. in Roberts I, 142) It must have been her consistency in religious matters, her unwavering belief in and conviction of morality based on religion as a possible answer to questions raised in the context of social order, and her belief in life to be only the preparatory stage for a life to come, which must have made her a

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<sup>24</sup> For their role in Hannah More’s life see also chapter III of this study.

<sup>25</sup> The question of God-ordained power is extensively treated in chapter III of this thesis.

valuable moral instance at the end of the eighteenth century, a period so destitute of morality. These themes ran like a thread through all didactic essays, the *Strictures* and *Coelebs*, establishing her reputation as 'antifeminist', for the station in life women were born into had to be fulfilled to the best of their knowledge and without complaining. This insight, however, seemed to be addressed foremost to women of the lower orders without prospect of climbing the social ladder. Their task was to live a moral life pleasing to God, saving their souls by being obedient and "study[ing] to be quiet!". ("Village Politics", *Works I*, 59)

London was also the scene for a great blow to Hannah More. However painful it must have been for Hannah More, posterity was given an interesting hint at her attitude towards the lower orders which, then, was in perfect agreement with that of the higher ranks. Her expectation of gratitude as a reward for her benevolence was badly disappointed. In her new high-flying social position she ventured a patronage for a poor Bristol milk woman, Ann Yearsley, she deemed to have poetic genius and who immensely impressed Hannah More, who went so far as to even employ her time in instructing this wretched and totally uneducated woman, with five children and an unpromising husband, in the basic rules of writing verses. Besides, More introduced her to women of consequence, and successfully raised a subscription for this poet to be. When Ann Yearsley's first volume of poems was well received, Hannah More, who always had a practical hand in monetary matters, with the best intention, instead of handing the proceeds over to Yearsley, invested them, with the intention to secure a reliable income for her and for her children. The gesture was well meant, but Ann Yearsley, who had expected the yielding of her poetical work would be handed over to her, had ill feelings about Hannah More's patronizing. She had not reckoned with Yearsley's deep-rooted pride, and Yearsley failed to see More's positive intentions. Neither of the two women wanted to lower their sights, and a fierce quarrel entailed with much negative publicity for Hannah More. Yearsley's 'ingratitude' much angered More who, too, would not let the business rest, and was unable to reconcile with Yearsley. She was simply unable to change her spots and to see also her opponent's position of injured pride, and her hankering after approval and self-determination. Hannah More was truly unable to see the lower

orders' capability of going about their own business, without dictate or patronizing from above. In fact, Hannah More's controversy with Ann Yearsley is exemplary for the condescending manner in which the higher ranks dealt with their inferiors.

### **Return to Bristol and New Humanitarian Interests**

What really made Hannah More return to Bristol again is still left to speculations. Was it the religious indifference and lazy charity of the majority of her London friends or London's 'ungodliness' altogether? Was she looking for a more satisfactory mission to give more meaning to her life? Or, did she realize after all that without the famous Garrick's support her star as a dramatist would soon diminish? Or, was it a conglomerate of it all? Maybe her piety, which was often met with ridicule and amused intolerance, provided an additional reason for turning her back on London. She seemed to get tired of those often overcrowded salons and dinner-parties and of her present life in the polished set. Was she thinking about a readjustment of it, to give her life a new and more serious meaning? Even early in her London time, she remarked in a letter to her family in 1776:

I find my dislike of what are called public diversions greater than ever, except a play; and when Garrick has left the stage, I could be very well contented to relinquish plays also, and to live in London, without ever again setting my foot in a public place. (qtd. in Roberts I, 50)

In May 1786 she wrote to her sister, "I have naturally but a small appetite for grandeur, which is always satisfied, even to indigestion, before I leave this town; and I require a long abstinence to get any relish for it again." (qtd. in Roberts I, 239) Somewhat earlier she wrote, "I intend to get off all summer invitations, that I may have the more time for Cowslip Green, which place, I hope, will favour my escape from the world gradually." (qtd. in Roberts I, 236) Roberts insinuated that "[a]fter the surprise of her sudden elevation and distinction was over, her first love appeared to return." And he went on saying that



her thoughts revolted against the system in which she was implicated, and often broke out in the language of becoming indignation against the manners of those who were raising altars to her genius. (Roberts I, 232)

Fact is her changing interests, which were developing more or less unremarked by her surrounding friends over a long period, became eventually obvious and rang in the new era in her life. When London ceased to be the centre of her life, she kept abreast with London society by regularly paying visits. In retrospect it should be mentioned that although she had got tired of her London surroundings, she seemed to thoroughly have enjoyed her close contacts to and friendships with the rich and the great, the famous and the learned for a while, as her vivid letters to her sisters proudly reveal.

Her new humanitarian interests, her social and charity activities, her patriotic tracts and defence of the old order, were preceded by an intensive search for her right place within the Anglican High Church. This search turned out to be a long-drawn-out and often frustrating way, at the end of which she proved to be “a woman of considerable independence of mind”, as M. G. Jones put it. (Jones, 102) Hannah More’s search for Christian truth finally and unavoidably led her to the vocation of ‘doing good’, which ‘providence’, as Hannah More must have perceived it, had assigned to her. She seemed to have perceived a certain indolence in the Anglican Church and felt it badly needed inspiration and new impulses. Her turning to the Evangelicals within the Anglican Church was a chance to live up to this need.

## The Abolitionist

A consequence of her new humanitarian activities, understood then as charity, one of the dominant Evangelical graces, was a joint engagement with other abolitionists to stop the Slave Trade, of which Bristol with its sugar-refining industries and the needed workforce was the centre. William Wilberforce brought the question of the Slave-Trade before Parliament in the name of the *Committee for die Abolition of the Slave Trade*, and Hannah More hastened to complete her famous poem *Slavery* for this particular event in 1788. What had begun with so much zeal, however, became a tiresome struggle which lasted twenty years during which Hannah More and William Wilberforce kept the anti-Slave-Trade movement going. They were joint by their common awareness of the immorality of the age and their attempt to undertake "moral reform[s] based on Christian standards" (Jones, 92). It was an experience by which the Sunday school scheme was to benefit enormously.

William Wilberforce was also the personality to introduce Hannah More to the so-called 'Clapham Sect', a group of Evangelical clerics and laymen, all "marked by unswerving devotion to the Anglican Church" (Jones, 93). Living together in close community, they condemned, as displeasing to God, worldly pleasures like cards, dancing, plays, and novel reading.<sup>26</sup> Theirs was a critical spirit, and they were exposed "to the great danger of conceit, [and] spiritual pride". (Jones, 93) In the works of Hannah More we often meet with her censoriousness of others. With the Evangelicals' personal piety and self-discipline, their distaste for 'enthusiasm', and their fine humanitarianism, Hannah More felt very much at home; and she was welcome by all not only for her common sense and alacrity but also for her literary reputation and important connections. The abolition of the Slave Trade was one of their major concerns out of many. The way the Evangelicals lived was 'practical piety' in its purest form. Evangelicalism introduced to Hannah More the habit of celebrating family prayers, often

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<sup>26</sup> This condemnation explains Hannah More's disapproval of baby balls, dancing at her schools and novel reading in general.

referred to later on in *Coelebs*; and her 'religion of the heart' was enriched by the "religion of the home" (Jones, 96). To Hannah More religion meant both to live a life glorifying God and doing good to others. Up to this point she was entirely in line with the Evangelicals. However, "the problem she faced was the insoluble problem of God's sovereignty versus man's free will; the choice in strict logic between limited and unlimited salvation." (Jones, 98) More found that her Evangelical friends were lacking in logic by accepting "Calvin's peculiar doctrines". (Jones, 98) She was, as Wilberforce was, convinced of the radical corruption of human nature, but she was also convinced, contrary to the Calvinists who believed that God has destined some men to everlasting life and others to eternal damnation, that redemption was possible for *all*. It was this conviction Hannah More held that was going to be the basis and motor for her future moralizing schemes.

Hannah More remained an orthodox Churchwoman throughout her life, with unambiguous reverence for Episcopacy, of which her numerous friendships give evidence, and the divine institutions. In her *Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* she wrote in 1791 that "[p]erhaps there has not been since the age of the Apostles, a church upon earth in which the public worship was so solemn and so cheerful; so simple and so sublime; so full of fervour, at the same time so free from enthusiasm; so rich in the gold of Christian antiquity, yet so astonishingly exempt from its dross." (*Works I*, 276)

Not consonant with her Evangelical brethren in all religious questions on the one hand, and criticized by the Anglicans for apparently having "little to say on the sacraments and ordinances of the church" (Jones, 101) as well as for attending dissenting places of worship on the other hand, she had to face the reproach of encouraging dissent, thereby weakening the Anglican High Church. M. G. Jones, when in retrospective appraising Hannah More's religious attitude, doubts that from a Churchman's point of view she was either orthodox or a good Evangelical, for "she emerge[d] from the religious controversies [...] as a woman of considerable independence of mind [...]"

[who] decided for herself the relation of 'christian godliness' to 'christian order'." (Jones, 102)

### **Reforming the Higher Ranks**

Hannah More and William Wilberforce met in 1787. It was the same year when Wilberforce induced George III to issue his proclamation against vice and immorality, and when the Proclamation Society was established to carry it into effect. Both More and Wilberforce agreed that it was high time for the reformation of manners, and that it had to come from above. In 1788, encouraged by several clericals, she issued her *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great to General Society*. To her sister she wrote from London that in "this little book [she] had not gone deep", giving "but a superficial view of the subject." (Roberts I, 280) Highly praised and very popular, it did not, as Hannah had actually expected, shut the doors of the great and gay on her. "When Johnson died in 1785, and royal and mazarine blue slowly faded", Jones writes, "moral and philanthropic and even religious interests gradually replaced the literary enthusiasm of the earlier decades." (Jones,107-8) It seemed fashionable to deplore the morals of the day, and Hannah More's reproof of the upper class was not perceived as an offence. To her sister, however, she wrote that Horace Walpole, without mentioning the *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great*, in "a most ridiculous conversation" alluded to it by expressing his astonishment for her "having exhibited such monstrously severe doctrines." (qtd. in Roberts I, 288)

Two years later, in 1790, she ventured on a second scheme for the moral rearmament of the higher and highest ranks, *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*. A close analysis of the conduct of the great and the gay, written in the wake of the French Revolution, it was a frontal attack on irreligion, directed at "those who accepted the Bible as their guide, but made no effort to understand its principles" (Jones, 110). Their "leading

mischief" was "*practical irreligion*" opening to them the choice "between the Bible and the world, between the rule and the practice", and making them "lower and reduce the standard of the scripture doctrines" to a point which they deemed fit for their "own purposes." ("Estimate", *Works I*, 277, 279) Hannah More openly criticized the hollowness of their ceremonies and benevolence, their negligence of worship.

In comparing the two essays on the reform of the 'fashionable world', Hannah More's increasing enthusiasm becomes conspicuous. This time, not all criticism was good-natured. Her accusations were of a kind less easy to ignore; and there were not a few contemporaries unwilling to forgive. Not so the Duchess of Gloucester with Royal connections, who was prone to discussing with Hannah More "human corruption" (Jones, 113). But she had to accept the Duchess' and other ladies' compromising with her religious stances, who took religion but as "an idle speculation", as she wrote in 1795 to a friend. In the same letter she exemplified the frustration she must have felt when appraising the aristocratic attitude: "These people come to me [...], but I cannot help them." [...] I think I have done with the aristocracy. I am no longer a debtor to the Greeks, but I am to my poor barbarians." (qtd. in Roberts I, 469-70) Her new scope of duties was to be in the realm of the poor and neglected.

In 1799 she published her third and most didactic work, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*. It was addressed "to women of rank and fortune". Deeply involved in writing her tracts, she must have turned "aside unwillingly from her work with the poor to make her last appeal to the rich" (Jones, 115). The aim of the book, within the scope of the reform from above, was the regeneration of society on a Christian basis, which could be achieved by the moral excellence of educated women. (*Strictures I*, vii) More heavily criticized the faulty education of upper-class women, partly responsible for the increase of frivolity and irreligion among them. In her understanding, the source of wrong conduct was once more the denial of human corruption and atonement, both of which views she had taken over from William Wilberforce. Children, in this view, were not innocent beings but were corrupt by nature, and it was the great end of education to rectify this stage. ("Strictures", *Works I*, 404) This idea about human corruption

aroused much opposition, but atonement, with possible redemption, as a complementary doctrine of divine assistance, according to Hannah More indemnified for this harsh doctrine. Nevertheless, the doctrine of original sin applied to innocent children was found to be absurd. Criticism for instance came also from her friend, the Rev. Charles Daubeny, for her using 'imprecise language', suggesting things she had not meant to suggest. This time, many friendships ceased but the doors to others were still held wide open.

The *Strictures*, with five editions, and 19,000 copies sold, were also received with much praise. Beilby Porteus, Bishop of London, in his charge to the clergy in 1801 eulogized the *Strictures* as

a work which presents to the reader such a fund of good sense, of wholesome counsel and sagacious observations, a knowledge of the world and of the female heart, and of high-tone morality and genuine Christian piety, and all this enlivened by such brilliancy of wit, such richness of imagery, such varied felicity of allusion, such neatness and elegance of diction, as are not, I conceive, easily to be found combined and blended together in any other work in the English language. (quoted in Jones 120)

This eulogy, as mentioned before in this chapter, induced 'Peter Pindar' to write his *Nil Admirari*, attacking and ridiculing both Porteus and More. But to a woman of such courage and deep rooted Christian conviction, who as "[t]he Puritan of Horace Walpole's ridicule in 1788 [when he made fun of More's *Thoughts*], had become the Evangelical of the early nineteenth century" (Jones, 121) this must have been of little concern.

In 1784 Hannah More began to build her cottage at Cowslip Green. Tired of London and its social life as she was, her withdrawal from it allowed her to indulge in gardening, as some of her letters give evidence of. "It is a pleasant wild place," she wrote to Mrs. Boscawen in 1786, "and I am growing a prodigious gardener, and make up by my industry for my want of science. I work in it two or three hours every day." (qtd. in Roberts I, 244) And to John Newton she wrote in 1788 that "the world is not half so formidable a rival to heaven in my heart as my garden." (qtd. in Roberts I, 290) It was in these idyllic surroundings that Hannah More wrote her didactic essays for the poor and where she began to concern herself with the religious instruction of them.

The first years of the last decade in the eighteenth century proved rather tormenting to Hannah More, with the issue of the Slave Trade dragging on; her *Strictures* not being truly appreciated by her London friends; and the laborious work which was connected with the setting up the Mendip schools. Over and above loomed, as it seemed to her, her unavailing search for more closeness to her Creator. "My mind rambles through a thousand vain, trifling, and worldly thoughts, even sometimes in extremity of pain; but seldom sticks close to God and holy things," she confided to her diary on November 23, 1794, upset at having "seldom any strong religious feelings." (qtd. in Roberts I, 454) Disappointed, overworked and frequently suffering from ill health, she was seeking God's consent for her activities.

When her sisters retired from their school at Park Street, Bristol, a new dwelling to house them was built at Bath, although she "hate[d] Bath", as she wrote to Mrs. Kennicott in 1789 (qtd. in Roberts I, 342) It was to become Hannah's permanent winter residence for twelve years, Cowslip Green being too thin-walled and rather unfit for the cold season. In 1797 she wrote to Mrs. Boscawen that "Bath never was so gay, princes and kings that will be, and princes and kings that have been, pop upon you at every corner." (qtd. in Roberts II, 7) In another letter from Bath, dated 27 December 1797, she wrote to Mrs. Boscawen in a most ironic vein:

Bath – gay, happy, inconsiderate Bath! bears no signs of the distress of the times: we go about all the morning lamenting the impending calamities, deploring the assessed taxes, and pleading poverty; and at night every place of diversion is overflowing, with a fulness unknown in former seasons; and as a proof that everybody is too rich to need to stay at home. (qtd. in Roberts II, 16)

Interestingly, Hannah More did not yet see herself exempted from a society she was beginning to eye with deep suspicion and disdain.

Neither Bath nor Cowslip Green provided Hannah More, with her ever growing fame and popularity, with the calmness she was badly in need of to go on with her work for the Sunday schools. The invasion of visitors could not be stopped. It was only when she ceased to go up to London on her annual visits for a while and restricted the number of her visitors to those she could not refuse due to their social rank did she find quiet and repose.

## The Tribute to Patriotism

When Tom Paine published his *Rights of Man* on 1 February, 1791, in answer to Edmund Burke's prophetic *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, published in 1790, he ridiculed Burke's 'authority of the dead' based on the settlement of 1688, arguing that government must be based on the 'consent of the living'. Paine's writ, extraordinarily popular among the lower ranks but not regarded as dangerous by the elite, was followed up by part II of the *Rights of Man*. This time Paine showed concern for the poor and pleaded for a world revolution, theories which could no longer be tolerated by the governing classes alarmed by such general striving for liberty. It was the point when a counter-measure was seriously taken into consideration. The first was that "the circulation of it [was] stopped," Bishop Porteus wrote to Hannah More.<sup>27</sup> Rumour held for decades that Prime Minister Pitt himself requested Hannah More to write tracts as an antidote to Paine's "poison[ous]" writings.<sup>28</sup> This supposition was steadfastly denied by Hannah More, informing Mrs. Boscawen in 1793 that

[a]s soon as I came to Bath, our dear Bishop of London [Porteus] came to me with a dismal countenance, and told me that I should repent it on my death-bed, if I, who knew so much of the habits and sentiments of the lower order of people, did not write some little thing tending to open their eyes under their present wild impressions of liberty and equality. It must be something level to their apprehensions, or it would be of no use. In an evil hour, against my will and my judgment, on one sick day, I scribbled a little pamphlet called "*Village Politics, by Will Chip*;" and the very next morning after I had first conceived the idea, I sent it off to Rivington, changing my bookseller in order the more surely to escape detection. It is as vulgar as heart can wish; but it is only designed for the most vulgar class of readers. I heartily hope I shall not be discovered, as it is a sort of writing repugnant to my nature; though indeed it is rather a question of *peace* than of *politics*. [...] Having relieved my conscience by owning my malefactions to you, my dear madam, I proceed to tell you that I know no more good of the author than of the book. (qtd. in Roberts I, 430-31)

<sup>27</sup> Letter dated 1793, qtd. in Roberts I, p. 424.

<sup>28</sup> See Porteus' letter to Hannah More dated 1791, qtd. in Roberts I, p. 386 ["poison of his publication"]; also Hannah More's letter to Mr. Pepys dated 24 January 1817, qtd. in Roberts II, p. 252 ["fatal poison"].



Hannah More referred to this imputation again when in 1801 she wrote to the Bishop of Bath and Wells defending the teaching schemes in her schools on the occasion of the Blagdon controversy:

I am assured by those who have carefully read the different pamphlets against me, that while I am accused in one of seditious practices, I am reviled in another as an enemy to liberty; in one of being disaffected to church and state, in another of being a ministerial hireling and a tool of government. Nay, the very tracts are specified for which “the *venal* hireling” was paid by administration (by Mr. Pitt, I think). (qtd. in Roberts II, 72)

“*Village Politics* may be described as ‘Burke for Beginners’,” (Jones, 134), because both More and Burke shared a belief in the divine purpose in the order of things and in religion as the basis of society, and their downright abhorrence for liberty as presently practiced in France. As a strong believer in English life and Britain's exemplary institutions, Hannah More feared lest they should fall prey to alteration for mere alteration's sake. However, she would not go so far as Burke in using expressions which were deeply degrading to the poor. *Village Politics* appeared in 1792. What Hannah More could not know then, was that this tract was only to be her first contribution for counteracting revolutionary ideas in England. It uses a plain and straightforward language, defending the present constitution, condemning in dialogue form anything French, from liberty to democracy, equality, philosophy and the *Rights of Man*. It ends with Tom accepting Jack's conviction that “[w]hile old England is safe, I'll glory in her, and pray for her, and when she is in danger, I'll fight for her, and die for her.” (*Works I*, 62) The tract was a great success and congratulations poured from all sides. William Roberts, her biographer, included several letters praising Hannah More lavishly. Bilbey Porteus, Bishop of London, wrote of the “immortaliz[ation] [of] the constitution”; of the dialogue being “supremely excellent”; and of *Village Politics* as being “universally extolled” and “greatly admired at Windsor”; and that Swift “could not have done it better” (qtd. in Roberts I, 414). Mrs. Montagu saw *Village Politics* as “the most generally approved and universally useful of anything that has been published on the present exigency of the times” (qtd. in Roberts I, 414-15). Mrs. Boscawen

reported that she was diligently distributing the tract among her aristocratic friends, whose praise she poured upon Hannah More.<sup>29</sup>

Hannah More's second contribution to the pamphlet literature of the revolution was her answer to M. Dupont's atheistic speech held on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1792 in Paris. This speech was delivered in a debate on the subject of establishing Public Schools for the education of young people. With the exception of a small number of clergymen, it was received with applause. Dupont was denouncing Monarchy and Church: "The tyranny of Kings was confined to make their people miserable in this life – but those other tyrants, the Priests, extend their dominion into another, of which they have no other idea than of eternal punishment," he argued, crying out "[w]e must destroy them, or they will destroy us. – For myself, I honestly avow to the Convention, *I am an atheist!*" ("Speech of Mr. Dupont", *Works I*, 303)<sup>30</sup> In a letter to the Earl of Orford (Horace Walpole), she told him about her intention of answering Dupont's atheistic speech. She was appalled by the blindness for French impiety caused by a fondness for French customs, and had hoped that the bishops and the clergy would take some notice of the atheistic speeches of Dupont and Manvel (both of them considerable members of the French National Convention), "but blasphemy and atheism have been allowed to become familiar to the minds of our common people, without any attempt being made to counteract the poison," she complained. (qtd. in Roberts I, 421) The relatively high price for the pamphlet Hannah More justified with the fact that it was dedicated to raise funds for the poor emigrant clergy from France, who was on the point of starving, and for whom she felt great pity for being "without comforts, without necessaries, without a home, without a country." ("Remarks", *Works I*, 302)

In 1794, Hannah More's help was once more called for. Tom Paine's *Age of Reason*, a flaming arraignment of Church and clergy, made the Bishop of London seek her help again in counteracting this new provocation by writing a "very plain summary of the evidences of Christianity" (qtd. in Jones, 137), very much in the vein of *Village Politics*. This time, Hannah More most unwillingly had to refuse as her diary entry dated July 23, 1794

<sup>29</sup> See Mrs. Boscawen's letter qtd. in Roberts I, pp. 415-416.

<sup>30</sup> Hannah More's *Remarks on the Speech of M. Dupont*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edit., London: Cadell, 1793, contained also Dupont's translated speech for a better understanding by the readers.

shows: “Conjured by the bishop to answer Paine’s atheistical book, with a solemnity which made me grieve to refuse. Lord! do thou send abler defenders of thy holy cause!” (qtd. in Roberts I, 451) Heavily preoccupied with the production of ‘safe books’ for the pupils of her Sunday schools in progress of formation, she did not wish to undergo the ordeal of getting down to the problems Paine put forth.

Hannah More’s idea of ‘safe books’<sup>31</sup> called into existence the *Cheap Repository*, tracts intended for the moral and religious instruction of the lower orders in general and the pupils of the Sunday schools in particular. It was a concerted effort of herself, her sisters and friends, for which she took over the censorship and editing. Fifty out of one hundred and fourteen tracts stemmed from Hannah More’s pen and were those concentrating on morality, loyalty and religion. Her most famous one was *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, according to one of her early biographers, namely novelist Charlotte Yonge, “an idyll of religious content and frugality” (Yonge, 113) and more than any other of her tracts telling as to her attitude towards poverty as a ‘blessing’. Once more Hannah More demonstrated her conformity with Burke’s views, introducing her *Tales for the Poor* with Burke’s surmise that

RELIGION is for the man in humble life, and to raise his nature, and to put him in mind of a state in which the privilege of opulence will cease, when he will be equal by nature, and may be more than equal by virtue. (qtd. in *Works I*, 190)

Hannah More’s motive was

“[t]o improve the habits, and raise the principles of the common people, at a time when their dangers of temptations, moral and political, were multiplied beyond the example of any former period. (*Works I*, 190)

For the sake of making the tracts more saleable she cleverly used a similar format and outward appearance as the vulgar but most popular chap-books, and successfully sold over two million copies by 1795. Interestingly, the tracts not only found entrance into the households of the poor, those of the middle-class and even higher ranks bought them in more elaborate editions.

It is difficult to assess to what extent the level of morality was raised or the spirit of unrest and discontent among the poor was subdued by the tracts. Whatever the success might have been, fact is that they must have brought two worlds closer to one another: the poor began to realize that the higher orders were not faultless and the rich that they probably underestimated the poor, who were often endowed with qualities alien to the rich with their opulence, and thus better suited for the life to come. Their historical value is undeniable, for the ballads and tales covered practically all fields of human life. Clerics were “always treated with respect, since it was part of Miss More’s deliberate intention to rehabilitate them in public estimation”, so Jones (145), although More was ever critical about the Clergy’s “torpor and its worldliness” as Susan Staves puts it (Staves, 83), as well as its inactivity towards the pressing problems to educate the poor. Part of More’s mission was also to set in motion a higher responsibility for the poor. The *Cheap Repository* happened to coincide with the increased demand of ‘safe literature’, and was a good moment for Miss More to inculcate Evangelical religious principles in an age of repression and unrest. Her campaign seems, thus, to have been as much part of an Evangelical campaign as it was of an anti-Jacobin one,<sup>32</sup> which to a certain point seems to relativize the critique of the Religious Tract Society, founded in 1799, that Hannah More’s tracts “did not contain a fuller statement of the great Evangelical principles of the Christian faith.” (qtd. in Jones, 150) This remark seems highly unfair in the light of the fact that the Evangelicals’ influence, despite their lay support among the ruling classes, was still fairly limited among the upper ranks of society, which changed after 1800, with their involvement in social welfare, for which Hannah More and her friend Wilberforce were partly responsible. (Christie, 187)

Much praise and unlimited eulogy was set off by critique for the tracts. When the purpose of her tracts was linked with Hannah More’s friendship with aristocratic circles, Henry Thornton came to her rescue, informing Zachary Macaulay that neither was Prime Minister Pitt urging her to write *Village Politics* nor had anybody before her taken the trouble of writing

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<sup>31</sup> ‘Safe books’ were publications different from the old vulgar chap-books and broad-sheets and the publications of the ‘school of Paine’.

<sup>32</sup> See Susan Pedersen qtd. in Morris, *The British Monarchy*, p. 115.

anything for the poor to this effect; and that she had lost great friends in doing so, thus proving that no scruples of any kind could detain her from writing for the poor.<sup>33</sup> William Cobbett attacked Hannah More for “having taught piety and contentment to the poor; and had made one the cause of religion and the defence of the established order.” (qtd. in Jones, 147) The most severe attack, however, came from the Reverend William Shaw (‘Sir Archibald Mac Sarcasm’) in 1802. In his *Life of Hannah More with a Critical Review of her Writings* he held that

*Village Politics*, and other trash, of a more fatally inebriating quality than the gin of which she complains; and Jack Anvil, and Tom Hod, and millions more, are infatuated and deluded to join in the chace [sic], and continue in the delirious attempt of teaching others how to arrange their domestic affairs and cook their victuals. (Shaw, 19)

However, his reproach “that there is not in all her works one expression of disapprobation of wars and bloodshed, or any anxiety for the eternal fate of those who have fallen in battle” (Shaw, 115), does deserve consideration. Hannah More’s failure in this respect to behave as the true Christian she always professed to be, may, ironically, permit us to see her “bloody piety” (Shaw 122, 165) in a somewhat ambiguous light.

Progressed in age, challenged by organizing the Mendip schools and providing ‘safe literature’ for them, and lastly much displeased at the experience with her printer, John Marshall, Hannah More made up her mind to withdraw from the tracts. Upon More’s dismissal of Marshall, the latter used the fame of the tracts to produce a new series of tracts under the name of *The Cheap Repository Tracts*, most of them “innocuous” (Jones, 143), nevertheless many of them would certainly not have passed More’s censure, because they lacked her “standard of decorum” (Jones, 143). Marshall’s scheme was a “great blow”<sup>34</sup> to the *Cheap Repository*.

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<sup>33</sup> *Forster Papers*, letter Thornton to Macaulay, 20 Feb. 1796, qtd. in Jones, p. 149.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Thornton qtd. in Jones, p. 143.

### Teaching the Poor: Schools for the Mendips

In August 1789 William Wilberforce visited Hannah More and her sisters at Cowslip Green. The retired schoolmistresses and Hannah had built a house for themselves in Bath, and had begun to divide their time between Bath and Cowslip Green. On the occasion of this visit, instead of being enraptured by the enchanting landscape, Wilberforce saw Cheddar Village, a place devoid of any comfort, neither temporal nor spiritual. Much taken aback, he appealed to the More sisters to undertake something against the appalling situation he had just seen in Cheddar. Never at a loss to contribute to the moral and spiritual improvement of their fellow-citizens, the sisters worked out a plan for setting up schools in the Mendip area. Similar efforts had already been taken up, on a much smaller scale though, by Mrs. Trimmer and the Countess Spencer, who had adopted Mr. Robert Raikes' idea of a Sunday-school movement. Hannah More's letters and her sister Martha's *Journal*, opened at the end of September 1789, render a vivid picture of the strenuous time they went through when they took their preliminary steps in setting up schools in the Mendip area. On Nov. 8<sup>th</sup>, 1789, Hannah More wrote to Mr. Walpole:

I have been so long buried at Cheddar [the first Village to get a school], a wretched obscure village in the lower part of Somersetshire, among more want, misery, and ignorance than any I had supposed to exist, and where I hope to be made an [sic] humble, though unworthy, instrument of being a *little* useful. (qtd. in Roberts I, 328)

From the George Hotel in Cheddar, she wrote to Wilberforce the same year that it was one of the main preliminary efforts "to propitiate the chief despot of the village, who is very rich and very brutal" and who "begged I would not think of bringing any religion into the country; it was the worst thing in the world for the poor, for it made them lazy and useless." That "they would be more industrious as they were better principled," was entirely lost on that rich savage, Hannah went on. She and Martha ('Patty') then made eleven more visits of this kind, greatly improving "in the art of canvassing", getting better at flattering every time. Hannah More promised that her "little plan [...] would secure their orchards from being robbed, their rabbits from being

shot, their game from being stolen, [...] which might lower the poor-rates." (qtd. in Roberts I, 339) She must have rendered a good speech for, in the end, she gained "the hearty concurrence of the whole people", who even promised to send their children to attend the school. "Patty", she wrote to Wilberforce, "who is with me, says she has good hopes that the hearts of some of the rich poor wretches may be touched: they are so ignorant as the beasts that perish, intoxicated every day before dinner, and plunged in such vices as make me begin to think London a virtuous place." (qtd. in Roberts I, 339) Anyway, by their assistance a spacious house was secured. The next obstacle, and it would prove to be a recurrent one, was to procure a mistress for the *Sunday*-school. "I have", Hannah More wrote to Wilberforce, foreshadowing the problem of getting the 'right' teachers and the necessity of compromising, "employed Mrs. Easterbrook, of whose judgement I have a good opinion [...] but I am afraid she must be called a Methodist." (qtd. in Roberts I, 340 and in *Annals*, 18) As to further particulars of Cheddar, Hannah More reported the intelligence that there was "no resident curate", but one living at Wells, twelve miles distant. Service was only once a week and the only favour conferred on the place. About the incumbent of a neighbouring parish she reports that he is "intoxicated about six times a week, and very frequently prevented from preaching by two black eyes, honestly earned by fighting." (qtd. in Roberts I, 339-40 passim) The problems in setting up schools always proved similar up to a certain point but differed in degree.

The school at Cheddar, which was opened on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1789, was the first, and remained the leading one throughout the sisters' lives. It was one of three "Great Schools" (Jones, 167) to which very soon, in 1790, was added the school at Shipham, a place of independent miners, an independence, however, which, because of its declining industry, caused precarious conditions. Nailsea, which opened in 1792, was the school for a place which "aboun[d]ed in sin and wickedness, the usual consequences of glass-houses and mines." (*Annals*, 42) The school, however, was closed in 1795 because the ignorant farmers, trying to interfere in school matters, did not approve of schoolmaster Younge, a highly-qualified man, for reasons not further explained by them. The schoolmaster was then removed to Blagdon school, another school meanwhile founded. Nailsea school was

re-opened again only a year later under the tuition of a gifted young collier who was more to the liking of the farmers and the Heads of the parish. The "lesser schools" (Jones, 167) were small in size and only used as Sunday-schools and for evening readings. They suffered from the opposition of both the gentry and farmers, from the indifference of the clergy, and the difficulty of finding competent teachers. Though most of them were successful in the beginning, they soon suffered from these problems and often ended up either being closed down completely, as was the case with Sandford and Banwell, or transferring pupils and teachers to other schools, as was done with Congressbury and Yatton, whose pupils and teachers were removed to Chew Magna, close to Cheddar. Axbridge suffered a similar fate. Violent opposition of the great folk to the evening readings forced its being suspended in 1799 and the school mistress being transferred to the new school at Wedmore. It was the place where the later notorious 'Blagdon controversy' took its starting point.

Nonetheless, seen as a whole, the schools in the Mendips proved a big success. In the introduction to the *Mendip Annals*, published in 1859, the editor Arthur Roberts raised the question as to "[w]hat was the peculiar system of instruction which led, under grace, to such glorious results?" The answer was given in Hannah More's own words in quoting her letter to "the extreme conservative Dr. John Bowdler" (Stott, 120):

Let me just add, sir, that my plan for instructing the poor is very limited and strict. They learn of week-days such coarse works as may fit them for servants. I allow of no writing. My object has not been to teach dogmas and opinions, but to form the lower class to habits of industry and virtue. I know no way of teaching morals but by infusing principles of Christianity, nor of teaching Christianity without a thorough knowledge of Scripture. (qtd. in Stott, 120)

"To make good members of society (and this can only be done by making good Christians) has been my aim," she continued to explain. "Principles, and not opinions, are what I labour to give them." (qtd. in *Annals*, 6-9)<sup>35</sup> Hannah More availed herself of a language which seems narrow-minded compared to our ideas of responsibility towards poverty-stricken citizens of

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<sup>35</sup> Arthur Roberts thought that this letter to John Bowdler was "hitherto [...] unpublished" (*Annals*, 6), but as a letter in this vein was also written to Dr. Beadon, the Bishop of Bath and Wells (see H. Thompson, pp. 200-222 and W. Roberts II, pp. 67-75), it gives rise to speculation whether it was a standard explanatory letter.



today. In the light of Hannah More's unswerving belief in Providence, it signals that poverty was God-given. She was in no way indifferent to poverty, which was truly appalling at that time, but her drive was to alleviate the spiritual and moral ills rather than to change the lives of the poor beyond a certain point. For transgressing the border line between rich and poor was working against God's given order. In that static conception of the world it must have been a matter of cruelty to train a child beyond the station of life it was born into by Providence, thus raising hopes which could by no means be fulfilled. A.V. Judges puts it this way:

[Hannah More's] attitude to poverty had all the narrowness which crippled the efforts of her rich evangelical friends and supporters in the parish of Clapham. Even a balanced regimen of the three R's seemed over-liberal for the children of peasants and miners; yet what she and her sisters offered found hundreds of customers, adult and juvenile, who were by no means deterred by an attitude which cheerfully dwelt on their corrupt nature as children of Eve, and flatly refused to see prospects for them beyond their own moral reform.<sup>36</sup>

Hand in hand with the school schemes, Hannah More and her sisters founded women's benefit societies with the idea of supporting women when lying-in as well as making schools and clubs into centres of social life in order to stop the isolation and distress of the poor. "If I can do them little good," she wrote to Mrs. Bouverie in 1792, "I can at least sympathize with them."<sup>37</sup> At the end of the year, in the women's clubs 'charges' were delivered of some length by either Hannah herself or Martha. All activities of the bygone year were reviewed, evoking either praise or reproof. It was a good chance to remind the female members of the advantages they had derived "from the generosity of man and the goodness of God". (Jones, 158) The following excerpt of a 'charge' rendered in 1801 may serve as an example how extremely paternal they were, how Christianity and social order were regarded as one thing, not to be questioned by man because of their being ordained by God.

There is not now, I trust, a single house in these two parishes [in Shipham] in which there is a son or daughter who cannot read and understand the Bible: I wish I was equally sure that there was not one father or mother who has not equal pleasure in *hearing* it *read*. There is not a house on this hill where the children have not been

<sup>36</sup> A. V. Judges, *Review in British Journal of Educational Studies*, p. 186.

<sup>37</sup> See *Lady Chatterton*, qtd. in Jones, p. 157.

taught to avoid the sin of Sabbath-breaking. [...] It is with real concern I am obliged to touch upon the subject which made part of my address to you last year. You will guess I allude to the continuation of the scarcity. Yet let me remind you that probably that very scarcity has been permitted by an all-wise and gracious Providence, to *unite* all ranks of people *together*, to shew [sic] the *poor* how immediately they are dependent upon the *rich*, and to shew both *rich* and *poor* that they are all dependent on *Himself*. It has also enabled you to see more clearly the advantages you derive from government and constitution of this country – to deserve the benefits flowing from the distinction of rank and fortune, which has enabled the *high* so liberally to assist the *low*; for I leave you to judge what would have been the state of the poor of this country in this long, distressing scarcity had it not been for your superiors. I wish *you* to understand also that you are not the *only* sufferers. You have, indeed, borne you share, and a very happy one it has been, in the late difficulties; but it has fallen, in some degree, on all ranks, nor would the gentry have been able to afford such large supplies to the distresses of the poor, had they not denied themselves, for your sakes, many indulgences to which their fortune at other times entitles them. We trust the poor in general, especially those that are well instructed, have received what has been done for them as a matter of *favour*, not of *right* – if so, the same kindness will, I doubt not, always be extended to them, whenever it shall please God so to afflict the land. (qtd. in *Annals*, 243-44)

It is this very picture of paternalism and the acceptance of social wrongs that makes Hannah More's ideas of social betterment incompatible with our present idea of Christianity. Without doubt, though, this attitude was accepted with gratefulness by the poor of the Mendips.

Whatever their shortcomings were, Hannah More and her sisters did also much social work, as a side effect to their teaching schemes, in for instance their bringing people of different ranks together. Annual feasts to reward children for diligently having studied the Bible or young men and women for having lived a morally laudable life enjoyed enormous popularity, proving the Mores' great gift of organization and diplomacy. Changing roles in serving dishes, namely the rich serving the poor in a playful way, was apparently accepted without grumbling on both sides.

## The Blagdon Controversy

The school at Blagdon was the scene of the notorious 'Blagdon controversy' between Hannah More and the curate, Mr. Bere. As mentioned before, the roots and symptoms of this controversy lay in the experience the Mores had made with Wedmore. There they were reluctant in the beginning to set up a school at all so distant from their home Barley Wood. But in the face of the eagerness with which the school was generally wanted and supported, the sisters changed their minds and ignored the will of the big man of the village, by whom the idea of educating the poor was still regarded as interfering with what was pre-ordained and God-given, and who feared that he should lose their cheap workforce. Not unsurprisingly, the schoolmaster was in a difficult position when the number of pupils dwindled.

The Blagdon school, financed by Henry Thornton, was set up in 1795 after the Mores had been implored to do so. All went well at the beginning. The schoolmaster was qualified Mr. Younge, who was transferred from Nailsea. However, things went for the worse from 1798, when Mr. Bere, the curate, preached against the Trinity. In 1800, then, came a violent explosion. Bere demanded the immediate dismissal of Mr. Younge, whom he accused of Methodistical enthusiasm. This overtly given reason for Mr. Younge's behaviour had, of course, a factual background, namely the question "whether the lower orders should be educated at all, and, if so, by whom." (Jones, 172) This question was not really new but had become popular again for economic and religious reasons by the end of the eighteenth century. The workforce of the poor was badly needed, but it was feared that the newly gained ability to read would make the poor unfit for simple work; and it was also feared that the dissemination of "heterodox religious and political opinions" (Jones, 173) would be facilitated. For this reason it was important to place the Sunday school movement under the supervision of the clergy.

In 1800 the "village drama" came into full swing: the highly agitated actors were "a schoolmaster of alleged Methodistical enthusiasm, a curate smeared with Socinianism, an absentee rector, an enfeebled diocesan, a

hot-headed and far from impartial Justice of the Peace, and an imperious old bishop in petticoats, accustomed to command, convinced, not without justice, of the excellence of her schools, and strongly objecting to criticism of her underlings.” (Jones, 173) Unfortunately, Martha More’s *Mendip Annals* found a sudden end, nor did William Roberts, Hannah More’s biographer, include a sufficient number of the truly important letters which could have thrown a clearer light on the goings-on. Hannah More’s lengthy and explanatory letter to the bishop of Bath and Wells speaks for itself.<sup>38</sup> In the course of the controversy the Blagdon school was closed, to be reopened again in 1801. But since the curate Mr. Bere maintained his hostility towards the school, it was dissolved again by Hannah More. She was much attacked for being a woman without principles, who supported Methodism and was craving for power. What ensued was a war of pamphlets which lasted for three years. Hannah More refused to take legal action against these allegations. “I resolve not to defend myself,” she wrote to Wilberforce from Barley Wood in 1802, “let them bring what charges they will.” (qtd. in Roberts II, 94) That she was deeply wounded, though, by the endless abuses, she hesitatingly admitted in her letters. In her letter to the bishop of Bath and Wells she stood her point, writing that

[m]y deep reverence for the laws and institutions of my country inspires me with a proportionable veneration for all instituted authorities, whether in Church or State. [...] I will at least set my accusers an example of profound obedience to those superiors whom the providence of God has set over me, and whom, next to Him, I am bound to obey. (qtd. in Thompson, 222)

The bishop, quite obviously moved by Hannah More’s letter, deeply deplored “the malicious and groundless attacks” made on her and, convinced of her “faith” and “patriotism”, remarked:

[...] I can only say, that if you are not a sincere and zealous friend to the constitutional establishment both in Church and State, you are one of the greatest hypocrites, as well as one of the best writers, in his majesty’s dominions. (qtd. in Roberts II, 76)

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<sup>38</sup> Roberts so much feared to infringe on Miss More’s reputation that he either dismissed letters pertaining to the Blagdon Controversy altogether or interfered editorially by leaving out whole sequences or changing the meaning of sentences. An example is Hannah More’s letter to the Bishop of Bath and Wells, Dr. Beadon, in 1801. It suffered shortenings and editorial changes in Roberts II, pp. 67-75. In Thompson, pp. 200-222 the letter is given in full length, and is dated August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1802.

According to M. G. Jones, the attacks on Hannah More were caused by two unpopular concepts of hers which challenged her age: one was an implied criticism of the lives and religion of orthodox clergy and laymen; the other was “an open challenge to the monopoly exercised by the big farmers and little gentry over the bodies and souls of the children of the rural poor.” (Jones,179) And this was the actual background to the Blagdon controversy. The charge against Hannah More of being a Methodist is utterly ridiculous, for which her letters and Patty’s entries in die *Mendip Annals* give ample evidence. But it is not entirely out of the world that the difficulties in getting teachers with notable moral background made her not only in one case, as an act of despair, cross the border line and accept teachers who were at least predisposed to Methodism, hoping it would not show up.

Hannah More’s inner conflict was to be a steadfast Tory on the one hand, and to go in for antislavery and education of the poor on the other. This ambiguous constellation was just what she needed for being abused for and suspected of disloyalty to Church and State.

### **Life After the Blagdon Controversy**

Eventually, the storm of the Blagdon controversy died down. Although it ended in favour of Hannah More, it left behind much bitter feelings of humiliation and frustration; and above all, as the diary for 1803 gives proof of, the feeling of having evoked God’s displeasure was what weighed heaviest upon her, and it was her concern to find out how a woman who had dedicated most of her life to the well-being of others could range so low in God’s esteem:

O Lord, [she wrote on January 1, 1803], I resolve to begin this year with a solemn dedication of myself to thee. Thine I am: I am not my own; I am bought with a price. Let the time suffice for me to have lived to the world – let me henceforward live to Him who loved me and gave himself for me. Lord, do then sanctify to me my long and heavy trials. Let them not be removed till they have answered those ends which they were sent to accomplish. (qtd. Roberts II, 98)

Hannah More's strenuous time had reached its peak, and the death of Mr. Cadell, her much appreciated bookseller for twenty-eight years, had probably added to her ills and low mood. As the year of 1803 proceeded, Hannah More's entries more and more showed her mental torment, outing deep despair and uncertainty as to which turn to take in the future, much deploring her "[i]ndisposition of body and mind [which] ha[d] prevented [...] [her] writing." (qtd. in Roberts II, 105) If it was "too much caution and silence" she feared on January 5, (qtd. in Roberts II, 99); she was afraid of being "called enthusiastic" as someone "who used to watch for all occasions for introducing useful subjects" on May 5, 1803 (qtd. in Roberts II, 105).

When spring drew nearer and visiting the schools became the routine, her spirits rose again so that, by the end of July of 1803, she wrote in her diary: "I had hung up my harp on the willows, never more to take it down, as I thought." But animated "to write a popular song on the dread of invasion",<sup>39</sup> (qtd. in Roberts II, 106) she took it down again, in accordance with her loyalty to Church and Government. Her patriotic vein even made her offer Barley Wood, the More sisters' new home, to the commanding officers at Bristol for their stay in the event of the French landing at nearby Uphill, an offer which was declined but appreciated with thanks. As the year of 1803 drew to its close, Hannah More's restless mind seemed to get calmer, so that on Sunday, Jan.1, 1804, she could make the following diary entry:

[...] Enable me this day to pass over in review these particular mercies; among others the considerable restoration of my health and spirits; [...] opportunities of doing some good; our schools continued; [...] escape from the turbulent life of Bath; increased opportunities of reading and retirement. I have, too, to be thankful, amid grievous alarms and dangers, for many public blessings; [...] domestic grace and unanimity; for the cordiality with which all ranks have come forward in defence of the country; that a foreign invasion has been mercifully kept off. [...] let me therefore implore earthly blessings with entire submission to the Divine will. (qtd. in Roberts II, 113)

"Let me be thankful that I have a comfortable evidence of growth in grace," Hanna More wrote only a fortnight later, for her "submission to the Divine will" had endowed her with more "composure" when hearing of "new enemies" and "the malignity of old ones". (qtd. in Roberts II, 114)

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<sup>39</sup> Hannah More did not say which song she referred to.

## Educating the Future Sovereign

Along with her rising spirits came in 1805 an appeal from Dr. Robert Gray, Bishop of Bristol, to prepare a guide for the education of Princess Charlotte, heir-presumptive to the English throne. Loyal Hannah More, although convinced that there were other persons better qualified for such a duty, took it upon her to set up the rules for the instruction of the daughter of the notorious royal couple, Charlotte's parents, King George IV, and his wife Caroline of Brunswick. Charlotte was going to be nine soon, when the *Hints towards forming the Character of a Young Princess* was presented to the Royals in 1805. Hannah More dedicated the *Hints* "with respectful compliments to the Bishop of Exeter" (Jones, 187), who was much impressed by its informative nature. Queen Charlotte invited Miss More to a great breakfast party given at her honour. Thompson reported in his biography that henceforth "Mrs. More was honoured with the intimacy of some members of the royal family, having long enjoyed the esteem of all." (Thompson, 236) The formation of character was the fundamental idea of the *Hints*, to be achieved by means of a carefully chosen curriculum. History, before the background of Providence, and, as imparted by Hannah More, of astonishing simplicity, was given primary attention. However, it was presented, as Alexander Knox wrote to Bishop Jebb in May 1805, also with "some deplorable errata" (qtd. in Jones, 188). 'Revealed religion'<sup>40</sup> was characteristic of the *Hints*, but no defined doctrines were discernible throughout. Even the royal child was not exempted from Hannah More's notion of all of Eve's children being 'fallen creatures'. What made *Hints* differ from her treatment of religion in earlier didactic writings was the emphasis she put on liturgy, anticipating that the sound knowledge of it was of eminent importance for the future sovereign as "Defender of the Faith" (Jones, 189). *Hints*, although no literary masterpiece with respect to arrangement and its abrupt transitions from one subject to the other, was very well received and brought Hannah More the rehabilitation of her former

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<sup>40</sup> 'Revealed religion' is explained or disambiguated in the revelations of the New Testament, as for instance by St. John.

esteem which had suffered some damage in the course of the Blagdon controversy.<sup>41</sup>

Because of Princess Charlotte's early death in childbirth at the age of less than twenty years, it is not possible to say whether *Hints* would have had any effect on her in the long run, but her reported positive frame of mind may as well have been the result of her happy marriage.

### Writing a Religious Novel

In 1808 Hannah More published *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, her only novel. To write a novel was her contribution to a genre which was so much against her grain and so much openly and vehemently criticized by her that it must have aroused general astonishment and curiosity alike. The run on *Coelebs* was enormous, not only in England but also in America. It was an absolute best-seller, running through thirty editions of a thousand copies each prior to the death of Hannah More in 1833. Its popularity was grounded on its easy and attractive guise as "religion of the home" (Jones, 193) and on being a useful conduct book in general and for women in particular. Hannah More explained her novel scheme in a letter to Sir William Weller Pepys, written on December 13, 1809, as follows:

I wrote it [*Coelebs*] to amuse the languor of disease. I thought there were already good books enough in the world for good people, but that there was a larger class of readers whose wants had not been attended to, - the subscribers to the circulating-library. A little to raise the tone of that mart of mischief, and to counteract its corruptions, I thought was an object worth attempting.

And warding off critical voices, she added:

Though I am not blind to the faults of my own book, and have always received just criticism thankfully, and adopted it uniformly, yet when "*Coelebs*" is accused of a design to *overthrow the church*, I cannot but smile; and I own I felt the sale of ten large impressions in the first six months (twelve are now gone) as a full consolation for the barbed arrows of Mr. S --- and Mr. C.... (qtd. in Roberts II, 168)

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<sup>41</sup> See Jones, p. 190.



According to present standard, it is difficult to comprehend how the novel about an incurable egoist and bore in the guise of a 'bel esprit' as main character could raise such enthusiasm. The novel was a plea for a pious family life as the basis of a happy Christian life. It also claimed typical female duties, proper female conduct and attributes as precondition for being the ideal English lady, and Victorian gentlewoman: modest, pious, and charitable. But it was the care for the poor that Hannah More saw as the calling of a lady; and in the shape of benevolence this calling became a fashion if not a rage at that time. *Coelebs* is rather tiresome to read because of its absence of incident and its rather poorly concealed intention, namely the moral reform of the readers, with endless discussions about religion, and exemplifications and parables included. The awe for *Coelebs*, however, was not universal. Sydney Smith<sup>42</sup>, co-editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, for instance, despite his regard for More's seriousness and effort, denied that *Coelebs* was a work of literature. He made fun of her plea for female modesty in dress:

Oh! If women in general knew what was their real interest! if they could guess with what a charm even the *appearance* of modesty invests its possessor, they would dress decorously from mere self-love, if not from principle. The designing would assume modesty as an artifice, the coquet would adopt it as an allurements, the pure as her appropriate attraction, and the voluptuous as the most infallible art of seduction. (*Coelebs*, 123)

Sydney Smith commented: "If there is any truth in this passage, nudity becomes a virtue; and no decent woman, for the future, can be seen in garments." Also, the *Christian Observer*, the organ of the Evangelicals, not realizing who the author of *Coelebs* was, gave the book a partly negative review.

In view of the fact that *Coelebs* was initiating the religious novel, and is thus an interesting "vehicle for defining the relationship of art to morality in fiction"<sup>43</sup>, it certainly deserves special attention as a valuable specimen in the development of the genre novel. *Coelebs* remained Hannah More's first and last endeavour in the field of the novel. She must have felt what she had probably also felt for her plays years back, namely that the essay was

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<sup>42</sup> Hannah More in her letter to Sir Pepys in 1809 probably referred with 'Mr. S---' to Sydney Smith and his unfavourable review in the *Edinburgh Review*.

the genre she felt best at home with, because she turned to it again. What followed were reworkings of old themes she had treated in the last decade of the eighteenth century, dealing again with questions of religion and morals: the three essays were *Practical Piety*, 1811; *Christian Morals*, 1812; and *The Character and Practical Writings of St. Paul*, 1815. *Practical Piety* was well received by readers of all ages and exceeded even the sales of *Coelebs*. It aimed at persuading the readers to lead a Christian life for the sake of happiness. *Christian Morals*, like *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great*, offered moral instructions in religious conduct, trying to stress the duty of the affluent for charity. The control of Providence in the affairs of man played a dominant role in this essay. The last of Hannah More's major writings treated St. Paul and his works as a model for Christian imitation. It is a complex study for which her learning of classical antiquity seemed deficient, and was thus her least successful work.

All of Hannah More's writings were means to an end, namely to illustrate her approach to religious and moral education. Her *Strictures* of the end of the eighteenth century had given way to *Persuasives*, M. G. Jones writes in her biography.<sup>44</sup> Eventually, owing to much criticism from competent clergy, she must have realized that she had not the capability of being a theologian. Adjusting her later writings to this perception, she made them feeling and sympathetic and no longer documentary. "By her strictly commonplace writing, she calmed the religious apprehensions of a huge public, whose hearts were stronger than their heads."<sup>45</sup> Taking this turn, Hannah More most successfully popularized and strengthened the influence of Evangelicalism among the higher ranks.

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<sup>43</sup> Prior, Karen Swallow Prof. *Coelebs*. Preface by G. R. Levine.

<sup>44</sup> See Jones, p. 201.

<sup>45</sup> Lady Chatterton *Memorials*, Preface, qtd. in M.G. Jones, p. 201.

## After the Great War

In 1817, when the war with France had come to an end after twenty years, the labouring classes had to face enormous economic hardship resulting in bread-riots and hunger-marching. The political parties failed to see the causes of this misery and to alleviate them by demanding reform. Instead, repressive measures were taken by the Government by suspending the Habeas Corpus Act, by restricting the freedom of the press, and by declaring revolutionary propaganda as blasphemous. Blasphemy was, in an age of growing piety, declared as “the sin of the sins”.<sup>46</sup> The mobilization against William Cobbett’s dissemination of his *Twopenny Trash* in 1816<sup>47</sup> called for an antidote. Since Hannah More’s successful antirevolutionary *Village Politics* against Paine’s writings and the following tracts of former times were still well remembered, she was asked once more to ward off upheavals and the spread of poisonous literature. As a patriot she reacted on the spot and made her contribution to the anti-Cobbett campaign in 1817. Some of these tracts were those of the nineties in new outfits. William Cobbett fled England on the twenty-seventh of March, 1817 after the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act.<sup>48</sup> It is a date which also marked Hannah More’s new series of tracts, tracts which compared rather poorly with their literary ancestors because of their want of drive. Maybe this occurred not quite unsurprisingly because Hannah More had already turned seventy-two and was dubbed “the old bishop in petticoats” by William Cobbett.<sup>49</sup> In her antidotes, both those of the nineties and the eighteen-seventies, she revealed the preoccupation of her mind with religion, social order and her conviction that Providence was a controlling factor in events and circumstances. Consequently, all social misery could be seen as part of God’s will and his resentment with the ungodliness of the times, the irreverence to government and broken holy laws. She was unable to discriminate between reform and revolution,

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<sup>46</sup> E. Halévy, *History of the English People*, 1815-30, 30-2, qtd. in Jones, p. 202.

<sup>47</sup> A cheap copy of his *Weekly Political Register*.

<sup>48</sup> In his "Letter to all true-hearted Englishmen" in the *Weekly Political Register*, 25 February 1817, Cobbett made it clear that the suspension of “that Act of *no force*” enabled “the Ministers to imprison, and to keep in prison, any body that they shall think proper.” (John M. Cobbett and James P. Cobbett. *Selections from Cobbett’s Political Works*, Vol. V, p. 153).

<sup>49</sup> *Weekly Political Register*, 20 April 1822, qtd. in Jones, p. 204.

an attitude she shared with her Evangelical and Tory friends. Men with reform ideas were regarded by her as irreligious, and a danger for the established order. What More's tracts made obvious is that, although she was feeling for the poor, she did not have any social programme to meet the problems of poverty, and she was no believer in any positive effects of parliamentary reform. If there was any programme she had to offer at all, it was charity on the side of the rich, and acquiescence on the side of the poor.<sup>50</sup> That generosity should meet with acquiescence is an idea too obsolete and alien to the modern mind, unless its theological viewpoint of God-ordained order of all things is understood and accepted.

### **The Pious and Philanthropic Sisterhood**

When the five sisters retired to Barley Wood in 1802, war with France was on the verge of its most grievous phase and their organized charitable efforts even more needed than ever before. It was in the wake of this suffering that the Church Missionary Society and the Foreign Bible Society were founded. More was a member of both of them in order to avoid any feelings of preference. Bible societies were then the fashion of the day, sometimes eyed by some High Church divines with suspicion for being "antipathetic to Church order and discipline" (Jones, 208) and for drawing their religion purely from the Bible. However, with the approval of several Bishops at her back, Hannah More could not care less.

It was not only the war but also the effects of the Industrial Revolution with its moral and spiritual ills which called upon the sisterhood for their engagement. The National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor, although according to the principles of the Established Church, was not to Hannah More's liking because of her disapproval of its educational programme. The 'literary education' of the children of the poor she thought ridiculous. Her idea was opposed to their practice of teaching the 'three R's', namely to read, to write, and arithmetics. She held it to be revolutionary and thus dangerous. Her mode of teaching was the only safe

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<sup>50</sup> For instance by "study[ing] to be quiet!" (See "*Village Politics*", *Works I*, 59).

method of instructing the poor by confining it to reading the Scripture and books connected with it. She wanted to steer an educational middle course. To Sir W. W. Pepys she wrote to this effect on October 15, 1821:

I have exerted my feeble voice to prevail on my few parliamentary friends to steer the middle way between the Scylla of brutal ignorance and the Charybdis of a literary education. The one is cruel, the other preposterous. (qtd. in Roberts II, 340)

In the same letter she also referred to “a book on popular education, written by a man of great talents” without revealing his name, commenting:

Truth compels me to bear my public testimony against his extravagant plan, which is, that there is *nothing* which the poor ought not to be taught; they must not stop short of science. [...] Now the absurdity of the thing is most obvious; supposing they had money to *buy* such books, where would they find time to read them, without the neglect of all business and the violation of all duty? And where is all this to terminate? (qtd. in Roberts II, 339/40)

In another letter on the same subject, dated 1823, and addressed to Mr. Wilberforce, Hannah More expressed her surprise about new educational ideas:

[...] how the tide is turned! Our poor are now to be made scholars and philosophers. I am not the champion of ignorance, but I am alarmed at the violence of the contrast. Even our excellent C--- seems to me to refine too much; but my friend F--- is an ultra of the first magnitude. The poor must not only read English but ancient history, and even the sciences are laid open to them. Now, not to inquire where would they get the money, - I ask, where would a labouring man get the time? [...] I had always a notion that in a mass, suppose of a hundred children, there might be ten who had superior capacities. Where there is talent there is commonly energy, and I calculated that these ten, rising above their fellows, would, somehow or other, pick up a little writing and accounts, of which they might make good use in after-life; and I have even paid for some sharp boy to go to another school on evenings to learn writing, while the other ninety quietly drudged on, perhaps better without it. (qtd. in Roberts II, 359)

Hannah More’s letters demonstrated clearly that her interest in education was still keenly alive even after thirty-six years of teaching. But they made also clear that she was unwilling to accept any changes with regard to education, in particular of the poor. She stuck to the old forms of teaching them, not only, as it seems, because of her unwavering belief in the long-established social and God-given order, but also for utilitarian reasons.

Beside their charity engagements, the More sisters received a plethora of guests of all social levels from all over the world who showed their cordial affection: high ecclesiastics, among them Alexander Knox, who greatly admired Hannah More; but also laymen; highly distinguished guests; friends of earlier days, her Clapham friends and some blue stockings among them, the Macaulays, and Marianne Thornton; and their numerous neighbours.

Because of all this hospitality Hannah More never had the leisure time she had envisaged for her retirement. But she nevertheless took the time to read innumerable books. As to “fashionable reading” with its “immense consumption of *time*”, she had to rely partly upon reviews. In her letter to the Reverend D. Wilson dated the New-year’s Day, 1822, she refused to put Byron and Walter Scott on a level: “[T]he one [Byron]”, she wrote, “is an anti-moralist indeed, but surely I may say the other [Scott] is a non-moralist,” and continued:

His [Scott’s] *poetry*, I read as it came out with that pleasure and admiration which great talents must always excite; but I do not remember in any of it those practical precepts, or that sound instruction, which may be gleaned from some of our older poets. (qtd. in Roberts II, 343)

In another letter of 1822 she returned to reading:

I pass over Byron and his compeers in sin and infamy [...] I pass over the more loose and amatory novels and take my stand on what is said to be safe ground – the novels of that unparalleled genius Walter Scott. (qtd. in Roberts II, 355)

Much as she marvelled at his “fecundity” and “invention”, she could not do otherwise than to “rather see the absence of much evil than the presence of much good” in his writings. (qtd. in Roberts II, 356)

### **Last Years of a Long and Purposeful Life**

When Hannah More's sisters died in rather swift succession (Mary in 1813, Elizabeth in 1816, Sally in 1817, and Patty in 1819), it was her lot to take over all the duties they had shared for so many years: a large number of charities and the running of house and estate. In a letter to William Wilberforce dated 1825 she wrote:

As to myself, I think I was never more hurried, more engaged, or more loaded with cares than at present. I do not mean afflictions, but of total want of that article for which I built my house and planted my grove, - I mean retirement; it is a thing I only know by name. (qtd. in Roberts II, 392)

As the stream of visitors was unbroken, she half complained to Wilberforce in the same letter:

I know not how to help it. If my guests are old, I see them out of respect; if young, I hope I may do them a little good; if they come from a distance, I feel as if I ought to see them on that account; if near home, my neighbours would be jealous of my seeing strangers and excluding them. (qtd. in Roberts II, 392-93)

When chronic ill-health kept her to her rooms in the years between 1818 and 1825, she suffered the tragedy of being shamefully deceived and neglected by her staff, as Zachary Macaulay informed her in a letter. In compliance with his plea to leave Barley Wood and to live with friends, she reluctantly moved to reside on Windsor Terrace in Clifton in April of 1828, "driven like Eve out of Paradise, but not like Eve by angels," as she wrote to Wilberforce on October 27, 1828. (Roberts II, 422-23) There she lived five more years until death in 1833 put an end to a life of nearly eighty-nine years.

Hannah More's long life had made her a wanderer between the times. Belonging to a past era of static views, she rebelled against new ideas, unable to see the necessities for reform the Industrial Revolution had brought along. She valued the ancient institutions, and deplored "the growing contempt for things tried and approved." (Roberts II, 435) When Thomas Babington Macaulay, son of her friend Zachary Macaulay, and More's declared favourite, soon after his election to Parliament in 1830 rather accidentally informed her about his intention to have many things reformed, she totally cut him from her will without hesitation. Hannah More

was eighty-five by then, and feeling only safe in the old order of church and state, she seemed to abhor any idea of reform.

William Roberts' following statement sums up More's position as follows:

If Mr. Burke as a philosophical, and Mr. Pitt as a practical statesman successfully resisted in their days the raving theories of revolutionary extravagance, Hannah More, as a moralist, - a Scriptural moralist, standing in the old paths - shared largely with them the glory of this conservative warfare. (Roberts II, 434)

And when he adds that in an age when

George the Third is falling fast into virtual obscurity, it would be difficult to assign Hannah More her proper political place among modern patriots or partisans (Roberts II, 435),

he sounds prophetic in today's ears. Whatever place will be assigned to Hannah More by posterity, the waste of her potential for supporting reforms, with her refined language, her good connections, and her status as moralist, seems deplorable, and makes Hannah More from today's point of view a tragic figure.

England, contrary to Hannah More's ardent hope, was not to be exempted from the fall of the *ancien regime*; the reform process was inevitable. The old God-ordained social order she had so unswervingly served and clung to gave way to a new political society, replacing political theology.



### III. The Religious, Philosophical, and Moral Background

#### Introduction

Ever since “[t]he marriage of Church and State”, James Downey writes, “the Church, where it could, encouraged public acceptance of governmental politics.” (17) Religious and political affairs had become inseparable, and many distinguished political appointments were bestowed on priests. Thus, some clerics were as much politicians as they were priests, and sermons often turned out rather to be political pamphlets. At this time, sermon literature was popular to such an extent “that even a few of the religious-minded laity were encouraged to try their hand at this type of composition” (8). Hannah More was certainly the most appreciated and commonly read among this laity. The profusion of sermons had become not only a popular and lucrative form of literature, many of them even came to be considered as classics. In consequence and unsurprisingly, “sermon piracy was rampant” (5) among a group of parsons with an obvious “spirit of inertia” (M.G. Jones, 80).<sup>51</sup> Two among the most prominent topics sermons repeatedly dealt with were the question of morality and God-ordained power.

The concept of the divinely ordained hierarchy was more or less generally accepted by both the Anglican High Church and the Anglican Low Church.<sup>52</sup> The divinely ordained social hierarchy Hannah More sought to defend was one of the cornerstones of the traditional order. Religion proved to be useful, if not essential, for the maintenance of this hierarchy believed to be determined by providence. Man was expected to accept the

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<sup>51</sup> Hannah More time and again courageously and heavily criticized this state of affairs in her writings.

<sup>52</sup> The two terms describe attitudes, forms, or theologies of worship: “Low Church”, although sometimes used in a pejorative way, a type of worship that does not follow liturgical patterns with developed ritual, ceremony, or worship, minimizing emphasis on priesthood, sacraments, and the ceremonial in worship, often emphasizing evangelical principles. “High Church”, by contrast, tends to stress the priestly, liturgical, ceremonial, traditional, and Catholic elements in worship. (Dennis Bratcher, “Low Church” and “High

station of life he was born into without grumbling and to humbly submit to it, because it was the result of God's ordinance. The necessity of a social hierarchy was beyond questioning, even though an infinitely small group saw it rested in utility rather than being decreed by providence.<sup>53</sup> If some prominent divines, of whom Richard Price was one, sought to break the aristocratic hegemony, levelling was not their intention, for social hierarchy meant also social order.<sup>54</sup> Naturally then, there was an irrefutable interest in the upkeep of the hierarchy consisting of King, Church and aristocracy as the upper class establishment, the rising middling class, and the lower orders of the poor. The reciprocal dependence of the classes was never doubted, but to uphold their undisputed role as the spiritual and economic elite, the higher orders had to act in accordance with the high moral expectations the lower orders placed in them. The Church, realizing the necessity of a moral reform, "seemed to almost become a society for the reformation of manners"; some theologians "saw the function of religion as being to provide support and sanctions for morality" (Downey, 10). The written sermon often took over the function of a moral essay. The Reverend William Jones in a diary entry deplored that in the pulpit "the name of Christ [was] scarce ever heard" and that "[t]he watchword, or *catch-word* ... [was] "Morality"" (qtd. in Downey, 12). The clergy then, for the sake of a more harmonious society, adapted its sermons to its most conspicuous needs.

Especially the Evangelicals gave the topic of "morality" a great portion of attention in their sermons, which were delivered with "passion, persuasiveness, and authority" (Downey, 229). Hannah More, who became a fervent Evangelical after she had more or less turned her back on London life, felt called upon to disseminate the Evangelical moral conceptions and to undertake moral renewal at all social levels. She was convinced that only the good moral example of the higher orders could stabilize society as a whole and guarantee the survival of the hierarchy of Crown, Church, and Aristocracy, as the supporter of a regime which had gradually served its time all over Europe, the *ancient regime*. When

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Church" (2009). *Biblical and Theological Resources for Growing Christians*. 28 January 2010 <<http://www.crivoice.org/lowhighchurch.html>>.

<sup>53</sup> For instance William Paley, referred to by Hole, *Pulpits*, p. 87.

investigating her biographical background it becomes obvious that this drive was not solely her own doing. Rich correspondence and diary entries give evidence of an excellent network of noteworthy personalities both in Church and politics Hannah More diligently set up over the course of years. Her innate vocation for humanitarian activities was eagerly supported by eminent men like William Wilberforce and Bishop Porteus, to name but a few, who, with moral rearmament in mind, encouraged or even inspired many of her doings. Even so, she certainly was not anyone's handy man, as posterity sometimes suspected. On the contrary, she, like her Evangelical brethren, was passionate, persuasive, and authoritative in her writings and performance, and she was purposeful in addition,<sup>55</sup> a female preacher without a pulpit, but equipped with a powerful pen and a keen mind.

Constantly recurring issues of the pulpit in the later part of the eighteenth century but also in "heretical" writings of great men like Paine and Godwin, frantically opposed by Burke, were the question of hereditary rights as God-ordained power, and as a natural consequence the question of the right of rebellion, on the one hand; and the eminent question of the low state of morality and how to overcome this moral degeneracy, on the other hand.

While the question of hereditary rights and God-ordained power and its affiliated question of social order, and the questions around 'disobedience' and 'revolt', a matter of divergent opinions and attitudes, gained importance in the face of disquieting internal and external forces, the question of morals assumed the same level of importance. All this happened before the background of a changing religious pattern as an additional factor of uncertainty, at least to those who fostered the old order, which was particularly manifest in the English High Church, but not exclusively, as for instance the founder of the Methodist Church, John

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<sup>54</sup> See Hole, *Pulpits*, p. 87.

<sup>55</sup> Obviously, when remarking in the preface to her *Works*, Vol. I. (no page) in 1801, that "no book perhaps is perfectly neutral; nor are the effects of any altogether indifferent", More was unintentionally referring to the persuasiveness and purposefulness of her writings.

Wesley and his unwavering attitude towards the Established Church proves.<sup>56</sup>

**“There is NO power but of God”<sup>57</sup> -  
The Dispute of Conservative and Progressive Forces about  
Hereditary Rights, Divine Appointment and God-ordained Power**

During the eighteenth century, the debate about the question of hereditary rights, divine appointment and God-ordained power was one of long standing and tradition. It was a debate in the main but not exclusively conducted through sermons preached from the pulpit, before pamphlets and tracts began to invade the scene by the end of the century; and it made clear how close the relationship between religion and politics, between clergy and government was. The French Revolution in the 1790s provided additional facets to this ongoing debate.

Both conservatives and radicals addressed the crucial question whether government, and in particular royal government, was explicitly ordained by God. Views deviating from the conservative doctrine of divine appointment were dismissed as belonging to “a system of false principles set up by Paine” (Hole, “English sermons”, 23) in his *Rights of Man*. His levelling principles were feared to threaten constitution, church and state, for which the French upheaval served as the perfect repulsive example. Since the French were also imputed to be godless for having “broken each one of the Ten Commandments” (Hole, “English sermons”, 26), repudiation of marriage, sanctioning of divorce and re-marriage included, the belief that the origin of the French Revolution resulted from irreligion was widespread. The High Church patriarchalists George Horne (1730–1792), Bishop of Norwich, and William Jones (1726-1800)<sup>58</sup>, the perpetual curate of Nayland in Suffolk, who both had consistently argued in favour of “the

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<sup>56</sup> To be the founder of a new denomination and to support the Established Church alike seems to be a contradiction in itself. However, John Wesley saw himself and the Methodists in general as members of the Church of England who adhered to her doctrines and attended her services as well as partook of her sacraments. They were, to Wesley's mind, the more pious category within the Church of England, and he never grew tired of assuring his subservience to her. (See his letter to Dr. Pretyman Tomline, Bishop of Lincoln, 1790. Qtd. in Alan Smith, *The Established Church*, p. 95).

<sup>57</sup> John Wesley, *Works*, Vol. VI., 274.

kingly government being of divine appointment [...] were among the first clergy in Britain publicly to denounce the Revolution” (Hole, “English sermons”, 19), even at a time when the majority was still welcoming the Revolution and the High Church clergy was inclined to confide their at that time unpopular opinions to diaries and letters. In general, for the clergy to openly side with the opinion that the French Revolution was the punishment by divine providence for moral failures was not opportune, especially in view of the ongoing debate about the sensitive question of the divine appointment of Kings, a question which proved to be a very complex one in the Anglican Church at a time when their followers lived in uncertain times and in fear of the possibility that their social position might suffer in the long run. Also, it was widespread practise that once the French Revolution turned into a bloody massacre, the former enthusiasts or sympathizers became frantic critics. Prior to the Revolution it was “religion which conferred on government political legitimacy” (Hole, “English sermons”, 31). This prerogative was the result of medieval concepts of kingship and the interpretation of Reformation, Civil War and the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Apostolic epistles largely served as arguments for governments being ordained by God and for the need of Christians to be faithful and obedient subjects. Generally accepted by Christians over a long span of time, these principles and the doctrine of non-resistance, were “exploded theories” (Hole, “English sermons”, 31) by the 1780s. The crucial issue which came up was the right of rebellion. How could such a right be justified within the general concept of a God-ordained government? The way out was to accept the government as the ordinance of God as a general concept, and “the particular form of government in any one country ... [as] the ordinance of man”, a doctrine which was open at least to some degree of constitutional reform “in extreme circumstances” (Hole, “English sermons”, 31). But what constituted such extreme circumstances?

It was in the light of this constitutional reform longed for by progressive forces and regarded as inevitable in the light of unrest and industrialization that a fierce and continuous debate between conservatives and radicals

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<sup>58</sup> As Bishop Horne’s health broke down, Jones was appointed as Bishop’s Chaplain. Their opinions on France remained in total agreement.

ensued. The authority of government, as understood by conservative circles and the existing social hierarchy, rested on a religious base and was at stake. “The establishment of the Church of England enshrined the union between church and state at the very heart of the constitution” (Hole, *Hannah More*, XXI), it should thus not surprise that the establishment of the Church of England was called upon to argue in favour of her established rights. Bishop George Horne, for instance, said with a glance at the goings-on in France and possibly also hinting at the American War of Independence (1775 – 1783):

We have a church and we have a king; and we must pray for the prosperity of the last, if we wish to retain the first. The levelling principle of the age extends throughout. A republic, the darling idol of many among us, would probably, as the taste now inclines, come attended by a religion without bishop, priest, or deacon; without service or sacraments; without a Saviour to justify or a Spirit to sanctify; in short, a classical religion without adoration.<sup>59</sup>

No wonder that he saw “no temptation to exchange a regular and well constituted monarchy for a REPUBLIC”<sup>60</sup> for he could not visualize that this form of government could emerge without the state first being thrown into political chaos. Horne was an unwavering believer in the divine origin of the established order. In his sermon delivered back in 1769 on the “The Origin of Civil Government” he said that “the civil magistrate was called in as an ally to religion” (Horne, *Discourses*, 307) and he made it quite clear

that there [is] an intimate connexion between religion and government; that the latter originally flowed from the same divine source with the former, and was, at the beginning, the ordinance of the most High; that the state of nature was a state of subordination, not one of equality and independence, in which mankind never did, nor ever can exist; that the civil magistrate is “minister of God to us for good;” and that to the gracious author of every other valuable gift we are indebted for all the comforts and conveniences of society. (Horne, *Discourses*, 328-29)

The Rev. William Jones, Minister of Nayland, in his sermon entitled “Honour the King” delivered in June 1778<sup>61</sup>, preached that “kings and

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<sup>59</sup> G. Horne. “The Duty of Praying for Governors”, 25 October 1788, *Works II*, p. 571. Qtd. in Hole, *Hannah More* XXI.

<sup>60</sup> G. Horne. Sermon on “The Origin of Civil Government”, delivered on 2 March 1769. *Discourses*. Discourse XII, p. 319.

<sup>61</sup> W. Jones. “Honour the King. The benefits of civil obedience”. *Sermons*. Sermon XIII, pp. 138-147.

rulers have their authority from God, and that upon this account they have to receive honour from men” (W. Jones, 138). It was clear from the Scriptures that, Jones reasoned, government was the ordinance of God and rulers thus the ministers of God, whose laws had to be supported. Supporting the laws of God, thus, clearly excluded the right of rebellion, which was an offence against God Himself.<sup>62</sup> Those who were, contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures, which said that there was only the power of God, of the opinion that there was only the power of the people, were wrong, Jones argued.<sup>63</sup> His conclusion was that

we live in a country, where the fear of God, and the honour of the king, are inculcated by the laws of the state, and all the forms and doctrines of the church. (W. Jones, 145)

In adhering to this formula, the Rev. Jones saw the whole system in “safety”, which “[was] all the liberty good men ... [would] ever expect in a world so full of mischief and dangers” (Jones, 146), leaving no room for “visionary notions of liberty” (Jones, 147) to disaffect and debauch the minds.<sup>64</sup>

It is characteristic of the time that political authority was compared to and linked with domestic authority in the family. Genesis was interpreted as constituting the patriarchal rule of men over women and children, and kings were regarded as “fathers” of the nation, endowed by God with the same rights as the father of the family. So the divine right of kings was upheld in two different ways: by the belief that the social hierarchy was constituted by divine providence, and the metaphor of the king as patriarch of the national family. These arguments are obvious in the following quotations.

Bishop Horne’s first cousin, William Stevens (1732-1807), a churchman of relatively low status compared with Horne and Jones, felt free to be more profound as far as the question of divine right was concerned and made his point perfectly clear when tracing

[some] foundation for civil authority in the sentence passed on Eve.  
*Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.*

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<sup>62</sup> See W. Jones, p. 139.

<sup>63</sup> See W. Jones, p. 140.

<sup>64</sup> William Jones, a passionate royalist and lover of controversy, wrote a set of pamphlets in the winter of 1792-93 under the pseudonym of *John Bull*.

From that time, at least, the natural equality and independence of individuals was at an end, and Adam became (Oh dreadful sound to republican ears!) universal monarch by divine right.<sup>65</sup>

William Stevens offered a rather down-to-earth stance when defending his idea of governments being of divine institution. First he claimed that St. Paul inferred

the superiority of the man over the woman, from the woman being of the man, and not the man of the woman; he suffered not a woman to usurp authority over the man, but to learn in silence with all subjection. ... *For Adam was first formed, then Eve.*  
(*Strictures on Dr. Watson's Sermon*, 7)

Then he maintained that priority implied superiority, as was the case with Cain and Abel, and as was the case with parents and their children. But the original charter was made to Adam, which was the foundation of all civil government and was the ground of Noah's right of dominion over his family.<sup>66</sup> William Stevens asked, "can it then be really imagined, that government was not originally of divine institution?" It was only the "veil of Whiggism" which made Watson, whose opinions will be discussed below, see things the way he did. (Stevens, *Strictures*, 5) W. Steven's biting and crude comment on Richard Watson's liberal deliberations on men's equality was that "*all power is of God* ... [anything else] is the baseless fabric of a vision, a sick man's dream." (Stevens, *Strictures*, 9)

The purpose of the aforementioned sermons, which were exemplary for a whole range of similar ones, was also to ward off any 'infidel' ideas as they began to crop up by the end of the eighteenth century. Since atheism was linked with anarchy and religion with government, any deviation from the pious line was seen as also directed against divine rights and the resulting social and hierarchical order of rank and status.<sup>67</sup> As has been shown, such archaic views also had repercussions on the position of women, whose subordination was called for as part of their Christian destiny. Hannah More made herself the spokeswoman of the English clergy when

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<sup>65</sup> William Stevens. *Strictures on Dr. Watson's Sermon*, p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> See p. 9.

<sup>67</sup> For a better understanding of the meaning of 'infidelity' (esp. 'modern infidelity') see Hannah More's "Remarks on the speech of Mr. Dupont", *Works* 1843, Vol. I, pp. 301-311, esp. p.307 and Robert Hall's *Modern Infidelity Considered with respect to its influence on society*. In a sermon, preached at the Baptist Meeting, Cambridge, 1799.



she made this call for female submission one very important bastion of social order.

Richard Watson (1737-1816), Bishop of Llandaff and regius professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge, a gifted liberal writer and theologian, was another clergyman to join in the debate of divine rights. Two of his sermons very typically mirrored the spirit of that time in raising the question of the relationship between Church and Government.<sup>68</sup> In his Accession Day sermon Watson insisted that the form of government was the ordinance of man, but also conceded that once a government was established, any form was ordained by God, and if it was conducted to the benefit of men, they were obliged by God to submit to it.<sup>69</sup> Watson's view that the form of government should be open to human choice evoked more or less general reluctance among the High-Church patriarchalists. Bishop Horne, for example, advocated his own line in his Accession Day sermon delivered in Canterbury Cathedral in 1788, saying that "the different modes by which rulers came to power [...] were indeed an 'ordinance of man'," but insisted unlike Watson on submission as "a religious duty which allowed of no exceptions." (Hole, *Pulpits*, 17) Watson, with his belief in the equality of all men who were equipped with more or less the same natural advantages, could not visualize a God who gave some men power over others.<sup>70</sup> Horne, on the other hand, could not accept general social equality and rejected the necessity of popular consent to government, because political authority, he was convinced, rested not on the sovereignty of the people but upon the will of God. Lastly, despite some agreement, Horne and Watson remained poles apart in their views on political society, because they could not reach agreement as to where the border line between the ordinance of God and the ordinance of man should be drawn.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ed. J. & J. Merrill et al.(1788). Preached before the University of Cambridge: Sermon III, "The Principles of the Revolution vindicated", in May 29, 1776, pp. 59-79; Sermon IV, "The Anniversary of his Majesty's Accession to the Throne", in October 25, 1776, pp. 83-104. Both sermons were answered by William Stevens with 'two distinct works' (referred to in *Memoirs of William Stevens, Esq.* by Sir James Alan Park, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p.112, London 1814) in 1777.

<sup>69</sup> See Watson, Sermon IV, pp. 93-94.

<sup>70</sup> See Watson, Sermon III, pp. 59-79.

<sup>71</sup> See Hole, *Pulpits*, 18.

The conservative view was not only propagated within the Church of England. A prominent dissenter, the Methodist Reverend John Wesley, who was deeply devoted to the monarchy, in a sermon delivered in 1772 on "Thoughts Concerning the Origin of Power" was convinced that the "supposition that the people are the origin of power, was every way indefensible" and concluded that "there is NO power but of God." (*Works*, Vol. VI., p. 274)

John Bowles, the popular loyalist writer on the French Revolution much criticized the fact that although the Scriptures clearly declared that "*all Power is of God*" as clear evidence of the Divine Will, "preposterous and most disorderly doctrines" taught that "*the origin of Power is the will of many*" (Bowles, *Moral State*, 69), thus leaving its further existence to their discretion. Bowles saw in the pulpit a most adequate means to introduce the topic of the Divine Law, even if it was often not seen as "the proper place for politics", and in the failure of enforcing obedience to it "a gross neglect of duty" (*Moral State*, 70). The "disposition" that the origin of Power was the will of many, was "one of the prevailing sins of the age and one of the chief causes of its misfortunes," Bowles argued. (*Moral State*, 69-70) Preaching the necessity of obeying the Divine Law thus was of eminent importance and the pulpit the very place for it. The pulpit was the meeting place of politics with divine authority as much as that of religion with morality, the borderline of which was blurred.

One famous man that raised his voice against these notions of ordained rights by "denying a positive, active role for God in instituting government" (Hole, *Pulpits*, 29) was the Reverend Dr. Richard Price (1723-1791), who was also of the unshakable opinion that "Mankind" was created with a God-given right to "equality or independence".<sup>72</sup> Like Joseph Priestly, he was a Unitarian Dissenting preacher,<sup>73</sup> and a popular moral and political philosopher and parliamentary reform-advocate, who had gained fame as

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<sup>72</sup> Qtd. in Clark, *English Society*, p. 331.

<sup>73</sup> English Dissenters opposed State interference in religious matters and founded their own communities over the 16th to 18th century period. Having hoped for a better and more pure Reformation in the Church of England, many individuals were disappointed by the political decisions made by the Kings in order to control the established Church. (From Wikipedia)

a supporter of both the American<sup>74</sup> and French revolutions. On November 4, 1789, he preached a sermon praising the French Revolution in the presence of the "Society for the Commemoration of the Revolution of Great Britain"<sup>75</sup>, which was founded to commemorate the 101st anniversary of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, when the English had succeeded in curbing the power of the monarchy. Price's celebrated sermon was the starting point for the revival of the most crucial ideological debate ever carried on in English. His *Discourse* blazed the trail for several ensuing political writings of differing ideological outlook, and it was this fateful sermon around which Edmund Burke was to build up his famous prophetic counter-revolutionary manifesto *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in 1790. The love of one's country, Price preached, "is certainly a noble passion, but [...] it requires regulation and direction" (Price, "Discourse", 178) to ward off the danger of being misled. Price was quite obviously pointing at the goings-on in France. He believed the chief blessings of human nature to be truth, virtue, and liberty, the attainment of which the citizens must strive for in order to distinguish their beloved country from a country of slaves. Ignorance as the precondition of bigotry, intolerance, persecution and slavery ought to give way to enlightenment by way of instruction to exclude these evils. And virtue ought to follow knowledge so as to prevent "enthusiasts", and knowledge without virtue the creation of "devils". Liberty, inseparable from knowledge and virtue, so Price, ought to be the "object of patriotic zeal" ("Discourse", 184). To him a country was only free when enlightened and virtuous, not suffering the invasion of its rights, and unbent by tyrants; and only enlightened citizens given "just ideas of civil government" ("Discourse", 181) would shrink from submitting to governments who infringe on the rights of men. Civil governors ought to be the servants of the public and a King only "the first servant of ... [it]" ("Discourse", 185). Dr. Price ingeniously referred to the principles of the Glorious Revolution and Bill of Rights lest they should be forgotten as:

First, the right to liberty of conscience in religious matters.  
Secondly, the right to resist power when abused. And,

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<sup>74</sup> Price's *The Importance of the American Revolution* appeared in 1784.

<sup>75</sup> Protestant Dissenters under the title of Revolution Society.

Thirdly, the right to chuse [sic] our own governors, to cashier them for misconduct; and to frame a government for ourselves. (“Discourse”, 189 -190),

On these three principles, and particularly on the last one, according to Price, the Revolution of 1688 was founded.<sup>76</sup> Liberty of conscience, he argued, was a sacred right and abuse of power justified resistance. But did this include the right of rebellion? And if yes, under what preconditions and circumstances was it justifiable? It was clear from the beginning that a sermon raising questions of such fundamental importance must have been dynamite for the conservative camp and the Anglican High Church. Much as Price glorified the Revolution of 1688, he much deplored its excellence to be one in form and theory only, the reality still being one of “inequality of our representation” (“Discourse”, 191-192). To his mind it was an extremely partial representation which only bore resemblance to liberty, a liberty which could be a mere “nuisance” (“Discourse”, 192). Dr. Price deplored this state of affairs to be England’s fundamental grievance. Revolution seemed to be the “grateful way” out of it, as long as the principles to justify it were kept in mind. To Price his country was in a state of concern and anxiety, in want of “the grand security of public liberty” (“Discourse”, 194). He appealed to the patriotism of the people to remove the threatening dangers assailing the country in the shape of diminishing public liberty, and he

[saw] the ardour for liberty catching and spreading; a general amendment beginning in human affairs; the dominion of kings changed for the dominion of laws, and the dominion of priests giving way to the dominion of reason and conscience. (“Discourse”, 195)

Price encouraged friends and writers to defend these high-flying principles by making it clear that the times were auspicious and that justice must be claimed from their oppressors:

Behold, the light you have struck out, after setting America free, reflected to France, and there kindled into a blaze that lays despotism in ashes, and warms and illuminates Europe! (“Discourse”, 196)

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<sup>76</sup> See Price, “Discourse“, 190.

Price closed his passionate sermon with a final appeal to his audience: "Restore to mankind their rights and consent to the correction of abuses, before they and you are destroyed together." ("Discourse", 196)

Richard Price remained a true libertarian throughout his life. His egalitarian liberalism never ceased to strive for intellectual, political and spiritual freedom for all people. He was an intellectual of high moral standards and noble sentiment.<sup>77</sup>

Edmund Burke (1728-1797) published his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in 1790 as a manifesto of counter-revolution. They were written at a time when the atrocities of the French Revolution, which were to appal the world later on, had not yet happened. His was an apocalyptic and prophetic foresight of happenings he was anticipating in France in the wake and as a consequence of a revolution Burke was zealous to keep out of England on all accounts. Dr. Price's sermon inviting and welcoming revolution as it was known then only in its early stages in France, with its overthrow of Popery, and Burke's specific political resentments and even hostile feelings against Dissenters based on quarrels over party politics, set into motion Burke's eloquence, "emotional[ly] charge[d] ...[with] pathos and fury ... [in] the *Reflections*" (Burke, Introduction, 25). An additional aspect in Burke's passionate counter-revolutionary effusions was, despite his being a Protestant and a Whig, his suspected sympathizing with the rehabilitation of the Catholics<sup>78</sup>. The *Reflections* belonged to the first phase of Burke's counter-revolutionary activity, and were fighting the influence of the Dissenters. The *Reflections* may, thus, not only be regarded as counter-revolutionary propaganda, but also, in a way, as pro Catholic.<sup>79</sup> In a speech delivered early in 1790, Edmund Burke for the first time publicly

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<sup>77</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft was to become one of his most fervent followers, who rested all her hopes in him when she got more deeply involved in the woman's cause with her *Vindications of the Rights of Woman*. She fiercely defended Dr. Richard Price when Edmund Burke's furious answer to the former's sermon *On the Love of our Country* was published in 1790 under the title *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

<sup>78</sup> Born in Dublin, Burke's father belonged to the Established Church, his mother was a Catholic; he was (a child of 'mixed marriage') very likely brought up as a Catholic.

<sup>79</sup> In the *Reflections* Burke writes in the manner of a Protestant, without, however, condemning Catholicism: 'I have no doubt that some miserable bigots will be found here as well as elsewhere, who hate sects and parties different from their own, more than they love the substance of religion.' (p. 257) The ensuing 'Catholic Relief Act of 1793' seems to underline his pro Catholic attitude.

stood up against Richard Price's principles of the Revolution<sup>80</sup>. In this speech he made it clear that these principles held the danger of the Revolution spreading from France to England. He argued against the "French spirit of reform ... a spirit well calculated to overturn states, but perfectly unfit to amend them."<sup>81</sup>

The *Reflections on the Revolution in France* then served to develop, defend and illustrate Burke's famous argument sanctifying the principle of inheritance by assimilating it to the natural order<sup>82</sup>; of the defence of inequality in property<sup>83</sup>; and of the theory of continuity and of partnership – "a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead and those who are to be born." (Burke, 194-95) Pertaining to the three fundamental rights as defined by the principles of the Revolution, namely "to choose our own *governors*; to cashier them for misconduct; and to *form* a government for *ourselves*" (qtd. in Burke, *Reflections*, p. 100). Burke denied that such rights existed in the nation, either in general or in part, maintaining that

[t]he body of the people of England have no share in it ... [and] utterly disclaim ... [t]his new, and hitherto unheard-of bill of rights. They will resist the practical assertion of it with their lives and fortunes. (Burke, 99)<sup>84</sup>

Increasingly, the debate was thus carried by moral philosophers and political thinkers, not only by divines. In general, it can be said that recognition of God's authority in human affairs was a pre-requisite to the legitimacy of the polity. Interestingly, Burke, a Whig, expressly repudiated the notion that the authority of monarchs was divinely instituted or that the people had no right to depose an oppressive government. But he was convinced of the virtues and principles of the one-hundred-year-old constitution of 1688, called the *Declaration of Rights*<sup>85</sup>, as "inheritance from our forefathers", for the preservation of which great care had been

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<sup>80</sup> See Price, *Sermon*, p.13.

<sup>81</sup> Reference is made to Burke's speech on the Army Estimates, 1790. *Works III*. pp. 209-81. See Burke, Introduction, pp.17-18.

<sup>82</sup> See Burke, pp. 119-20.

<sup>83</sup> See Burke, p. 140.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Paine found it "paradoxical" in his rebuttal *The Rights of Man* (see "Rights", p.202) that men should take up arms for having *no* rights instead of fighting *for* their rights.

<sup>85</sup> The Declaration of Rights had pre-conditioned the acceptance of the Bill of Rights.

taken "not to inoculate any cyon alien to the nature of the original plant ... of Magna Charta, "that *antient* constitution of government, which is our only security for law and liberty." (Burke,117) The *Reflections* can be seen as a "purposeful persuasion" rather than a historical analysis of the given political situation of Burke's time, because they argue for gradual, constitutional reform over revolutionary upheaval by rendering an "economy of truth" (editor's introduction,70). Burke's sticking to inherited rights was certainly reactionary and deeply conservative in the eye of many of his progressive contemporaries, but rather popular in the property-owning circles by the time the French Revolution had taken on the form Burke's prophetic sense had foreboded. When enthusiasm had given way to dismay, Burke's 'propaganda' pro the *ancient regime* had not only helped to avoid a revolution from outside but had also helped to miss the chance of renewal of the civil rights, including those for women. The Tories, closely connected with the Anglican Church and the land-owning gentry, were staunch believers in both strong royal authority, the right of hereditary succession and the divine right of kings, and therefore the most loyal defenders of the 'ancient regime':

Standing for the two great Tory principles, national unity and a religious sanction for the established order, the Church of England was the central institution of Toryism – the state in its religious aspect, and the divine principle in monarchical government.<sup>86</sup>

As mentioned above, one of the most popular themes preached during the period 1775-1783 was "obedience and submission to those in authority" (J. E. Bradley, 364), giving the pulpit political and social significance, and reason to fear a concentration of power of the clergy behind the Crown, their "natural head" (J. E. Bradley, 365). That Burke's fiery tirade should soon find an adequate, eloquent and well-founded reply was a matter of no surprise. It was to come from Thomas Paine, an ingenious polemicist.

Thomas Paine (1737-1809), quite contrary to Edmund Burke, was a fervent denier of the hereditary principle. Thus, Burke's *Reflections* came into the line of his rhetorical fire. "Paine's every reflex was egalitarian bent on undermining what he considered as the 'quixotic age of chivalric

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<sup>86</sup> G.H. Guttridge, *English Whiggism and the American Revolution* (Berkeley, 1963), p. 2, qtd. in James E. Bradley, p. 361.

nonsense’.” (“Rights”, editors' introd., 19) He fully stood behind Price’s<sup>87</sup> principles of Revolution in his *The Rights of Man* (1791), which was a point by point rebuttal of Burke’s *Reflections*. Paine’s vision of liberalism, however, went far beyond that of Price. His political theory was based on vintage liberalism<sup>88</sup>, “intimately linked to an egalitarian vision of society”<sup>89</sup>. Thomas Paine’s *The Rights of Man* has been called ‘the foundation text of the English working-class movement’.<sup>90</sup> Paine, turning to Dr. Price’s above mentioned principles of revolution, claiming three fundamental rights for the people, namely those of choosing their own governors; to cashier them for misconduct; and to frame a government for themselves, argued that Mr. Burke’s method of proving that the people of England had no such rights “either in whole or in part, or anywhere at all, is ... monstrous.” (“Rights”, 202) Making reference to Burke’s dogmatic clinging to the English Parliament of 1688 and the Bill of Rights of 1689, Paine argued that the granted right was a two-fold right, one “by delegation”, to which he agreed, and one “by assumption”, binding and controlling posterity to the “*end of time*” (“Rights”, 203). He said that

there never did, there never will, and there never can exist a parliament ... in any country, [which] possessed of the right or the power of binding and controlling posterity to the ‘*end of time*’ (Paine, “Rights”, 203),

and that “the vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave, is the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies.” (“Rights”, 204) Paine utterly disclaimed the right of inheritance Burke so fanatically rested his arguments of the *Reflections* on. Burke’s only service done to the people of his country, Paine argued, was the fact that the clauses of the Bill of Right were brought to their attention, and at the same time it was brought to light how misunderstood they were, so that Burke could declare the supposedly infallible parliament of 1688 a divine authority, a power certainly more than human and, therefore, unchangeable by human power to “the end of time” (Paine, “Rights”, 205). With a view to Burke’s

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<sup>87</sup> Paine saw in Price “one of the best-hearted men that lived”. (Paine, “Rights”, p. 202).

<sup>88</sup> Vintage liberalism assumes the absence of cooperation and fellowship in the political arena. See Isaac Kramnick’s essay “*Tome Paine, Bourgeois Radical Democrat.*” *Democracy* 1 (January 1981): 127-138.

<sup>89</sup> See “Rights”, editors' introd., p. 22.

<sup>90</sup> E.P. Thompson 1968: 99, cited in Archer, 63.



thundering attack on the French Revolution, Paine made the point that Burke was leaving out no abuse, dripping with “rancour, prejudice and ignorance” (Paine, “Rights”, 201), against the French Nation and the National Assembly. In comparison with revolutions having taken place in other European countries, where personal hatred had been the driving force, the French Revolution was “generated in the rational contemplation of the rights of man ... distinguishing from the beginning between persons and principles” (“Rights”, 210) and directed against hereditary despotism of the established government. Paine named “Reason and Ignorance” as preconditions for the running of governments, because “Reason obeys itself, and Ignorance submits”. The former would encourage a government by election and representation, the republic, the latter a government by hereditary succession, the monarchy and aristocracy. Since the talents required to exercise government cannot be hereditary, it followed that “hereditary succession required a belief from man, to which reason could not subscribe, and which could only be established upon ignorance.” (“Rights”, 257) And it followed also “that the more ignorant a country was the better it fitted for this species of government.” (“Rights”, 257) In defence of *The Rights of Man*, which were criticized as a levelling system, Paine countered, saying that levelling was only and truly applicable to the hereditary monarchical system. To his mind it was a “system of *mental levelling*” (“Rights”, 274), because any species of character was admitted to this authority. “Hereditary succession is a burlesque upon monarchy”, Paine claimed, “because any child or idiot may fill ... [this office]” (“Rights”, 275). Warding off reproaches that the principles upon which *The Rights of Man* were based were “a new fangled doctrine”, Paine clearly said that all that mattered was whether principles were “right or wrong” and not whether they were “new or old” (“Rights”, 363). Thomas Paine not only suggested but also offered solutions to the question of public education for *all*. The poor ought to receive support to make education feasible (in anticipation of modern social security), but not by way of Christian philanthropy as charity but by way of a right.<sup>91</sup> Thomas Paine was the only

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<sup>91</sup> See *The Thomas Paine Reader*, editors: introd., p. 21). A year later, Mary Wollstonecraft, who greatly admired Paine raised a similar claim for a ‘National Education’ in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

one who, even though only in a few lines, referred to the subjection and inferior state of women:

Even in countries where they may be esteemed the most happy [women are] constrained in their desires in the disposal of their goods; robbed of freedom and will by the laws; *slaves of opinion* [emphasis added] which rules them with absolute sway and construes the slightest appearances into guilt: surrounded on all sides by judges who are at once tyrants and their seducers ... for even with changes in attitudes and laws, deeply engrained and oppressing social prejudices remain which confront women minute by minute, day by day.<sup>92</sup>

However limited in length this statement may appear, it was yet a manifesto in itself. Making reference to double morality and a double standard between the sexes, it was driving home the opinion of a man who may be regarded as the greatest English writer for freedom in the 1790s.<sup>93</sup>

In the summer of 1791, when the debate on the French Revolution, sparked off by Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), was at its height, William Godwin (1756-1836) began writing his *Enquiry concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (1793), epitomizing the optimism as to events in France at the time. He wrote other philosophical works, *The Enquirer* (1798) and *Thoughts on Man* (1831), but Godwin's philosophical importance rested principally on his *Political Justice*. It was an immediate success and remained the founding work of philosophical anarchism. *Political Justice* was strongly influenced by Godwin's Dissenting education and his involvement in Dissenting circles, which once again illustrates the close

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<sup>92</sup> Written 1775 in the American colonies on the legal and social discrimination of women. Qtd. in Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, part 2, chapt. 10 ('The British Enlightenment'), p. 135.

<sup>93</sup> Despite his merits, in *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, Vol. XI, The Period of the French Revolution, pp. 22-23, Thomas Paine is characterized as 'coarse-grained', 'shrewd', 'dogmatic' and 'narrow-minded', as 'not a man to be troubled by doubts', as a 'narrow doctrinaire', and as 'a prince of pamphleteers' with 'the simplest' and 'the shallowest' ideas. However, it is conceded that 'his immense ignorance of history and literature was by no means ill compensated by an intimate knowledge of actual affairs; and his shrewdness made him a formidable critic even of Burke'.

Although mentioning his crusade to aid the poor, old and those in need of public education, Isaac Kramnick characterized Paine as having a revealingly limited world view, whose "radical egalitarianism" was bound up with the interests of bourgeois liberalism, the principal doctrine behind the assault on the old regime's aristocratic privileges. ("Tom Paine: Radical Democrat." *Democracy* 1 (January 1981): 127-138).

connection between politics and religion also in the case of men who gave up religious belief.

Godwin's *Political Justice* was also a product of the enthusiasm connected with the French Revolution. By the end of the decade, in a new and intolerant climate, Godwin himself and his *Political Justice* were violently denounced by loyalists. His enthusiasm had made him visualize that his principles of politics would be placed on a firm basis. In this, however, he was badly mistaken. From this point on, for much of the rest of his life, 'Godwinism' became a term of opprobrium. The work began as an attempt to review recent developments in political and moral philosophy, but it quickly became more ambitious in scope.<sup>94</sup> Godwin began by defending the importance of political inquiry, because, he argued, the type of government under which people lived had an overwhelming impact upon their experience: a bad government produced wretched men and women. The basic principles of human society were equality, rights, justice, and private judgment. The basic moral principle was that of justice.<sup>95</sup> This principle was filled out by two further principles: the first, equality, was used to establish that we are beings of the same nature, susceptible to the same pleasures and pains, and equally endowed with the capacity for reason. It endorsed the principle that birth and rank must not affect the way people are treated. The second principle to which he appealed was the doctrine of private judgment as the logical complement to the principle of justice. Nothing beyond the perception of truth was required to motivate our compliance with moral principles. "It is this which justifies the description of Godwin's position as 'rationalist', and it is on this point – the motivating power of reason – that later editions show a degree of retraction."<sup>96</sup> Later in this work, Godwin applied the principles of justice, equality and private judgment in a critical examination of the institutions of government, issues of toleration and freedom of speech. Whichever amendments Godwin made in the second edition of *Political Justice* to the account of moral motivation and judgment, his central principles remained

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<sup>94</sup> See *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*.

27 February 2009 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/godwin/>>, p. 9.

<sup>95</sup> In the introductory chapter of Vol. I Godwin lists a "Summary of Principles" his *Enquiry* heavily draws on.

<sup>96</sup> *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*.

10 April 2012 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/godwin/>>, p. 10.

intact. Even if a utilitarian reading of Godwin was accepted in Godwin's later writings, it remained the case that "the doctrine is strictly a precept of individual moral judgment".<sup>97</sup> *Political Justice* condemned all government interference with individual judgment, as Paine condemned governmental interference with the laws of society. Godwin claimed that

over time history has seen gradual progress, as knowledge has developed and has spread, and as men and women have liberated themselves from their political chains and their subordination to the fraud and imposture of monarchical and aristocratic government and established religion.<sup>98</sup>

Godwin referred to Burke's *Reflections* several times, so, for instance, when he questioned the sovereignty and hereditary right of kings:

... if kings were exhibited simply as they are in themselves to the inspection of mankind, the "salutary prejudice", as it has been called, which teaches us to venerate them, would speedily be extinct: it has therefore been found necessary to surround them with luxury and expense. (Godwin, *Political Justice II*, 52)

Godwin found it ridiculous that with hereditary descent it was possible that a man was given the throne half a century before he began to exist at all.<sup>99</sup> He made reference to Paine's *The Rights of Man* when he remarked that the son of a poet was not automatically a poet, hence there was no such thing as an office of "poet laureat hereditary" (*Political Justice II*, 87). And he went on, asking "... what sort of sovereignty is that, which is partly hereditary, and partly elective?" (*Political Justice II*, 548) Godwin was in perfect line with Paine when he referred to the latter's critical statement on Burke and his *Reflections* as follows:

At a time when neither the people of France nor the national assembly were troubling themselves about the affairs of England or the English Parliament, Mr. Burke's conduct was unpardonable in commencing an unprovoked attack upon them.<sup>100</sup>

Godwin's idea of the connection between liberty and equality was exemplarily brought forth in his statement that

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<sup>97</sup> *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*.

10 April 2012 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/godwin/>>, p. 11.

<sup>98</sup> *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*.

6 June 2009 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/godwin/>>, p. 15.

<sup>99</sup> See Godwin, *Political Justice II*, p. 66.

<sup>100</sup> See Godwin, *Political Justice I*, pp. 164-195, is reverting to Paine, "The Rights of Man", *The Thomas Paine Reader*, pp. 201-364, here p. 201.

if an equalisation of conditions be to take place, not by law [...] but only through the privation conviction of individuals, men [must] go on to improve in discernment. (Godwin, *Political Justice II*, 548)

To Godwin's mind, Republicans of all ranks would welcome the removal of ill-constructed and progress-retarding governments.<sup>101</sup>

It was this political climate of fierce debate between conservative adherents of the traditional hierarchy and revolutionary thinkers in which Hannah More raised her voice and against which her social and political doctrines must be understood.

**“Religion and morals will stand or fall together” –  
Raising the Moral State<sup>102</sup>**

In addition to the political debate of her time, More must also be located within the moral debate of the late eighteenth century. There were several indisputable men of moral authority who deplored the morals of their time. One of them was John Wesley (1703-1791), preacher, theologian and founder of the Methodist Church, who described the moral state of society as follows:

The general irreligion of the nation; the extraordinary variety and extent of false swearing made necessary by the laws; the smuggling, sabbath-breaking, indifference to religious discipline, and political corruption, which was winked at by the sworn defenders of the laws; the incessant drunkenness, the careless luxury of the higher orders, the gambling and cheating in every trade, the injury done by cunning lawyers under the name of justice, the squandering of public charities, the general disregard of truth; the profligacy of the army, the servility and carelessness of the clergy, and the utter indifference to the duties of their high calling; the immorality prevalent amongst the dissenters, in spite of their claims to a stricter observance of duty; the worldliness of the Quakers, in spite of their affected simplicity – all these are described in the language of keen indignation; though they lead to a triumphant estimate of the reformation that has been worked out by the Methodists.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>101</sup> See Godwin, *Political Justice II*, p. 548.

<sup>102</sup> Hannah More, *Strictures I*, p. 40.

<sup>103</sup> Qtd. in Leslie Stephen, *English Thought*, Vol. 2, p. 421. Stephen's *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* is excellently reviewed in the *Oxford Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 7 (Jul., 1877), pp. 352-366.

William Wilberforce was another man of very high moral standards, who strongly felt that an earnest effort ought to be made “to rouse the country from the religious apathy and scepticism which led to a generally low standard of morals in all classes,” and “inculcated – that religion [...] [was] indispensable to truest morals, just as it is destroyed by moral laxity.” (Travers Buxton, 133-134)

Adam Smith (1723 –1790), a Scottish moral philosopher and a pioneer of political economics, wrote about the moral system in general that any society with established social ranks developed two different moral systems: one with a narrow and austere moral outlook, the other liberal and loose. The former is generally admired and venerated by the lower orders, the latter tends to be appreciated and accepted by the higher ranks.<sup>104</sup> Who could have delivered a more appropriate description of the moral state in England in the second half of the eighteenth century, which served as one of the basic materials for Hannah More’s moralizing work? A society split up not only by rank, but by moral orientation, was fit for reformation – from top to bottom. At stake were the divinely ordained social hierarchy and concrete privileges granted by the Crown. As the influence of the French Revolution spread to England, Hannah More felt firmly called upon to ward off this “assault on English morality, religion and government” (Hole, *Hannah More*, XXXIII). As we will see, not only in More’s thinking the survival of the *ancient regime* was inextricably linked to a successful moral reform.

Whether or not the Englishmen of the eighteenth century were really better or worse than those of the seventeenth or nineteenth centuries is a matter difficult to decide. However, the “exertions of Wesley and their success” may serve as an indicator that the “state of society really [was] more degraded than that which existed before or since”. (Stephen, 421)

John Bowles stated in his introduction to *A View of The Moral State of Society at the Close of the Eighteenth Century: Much Enlarged and Continued to the Commencement of the Year 1804*<sup>105</sup>:

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<sup>104</sup> See Durant. *Am Vorabend der Französischen Revolution*, p. 285.

<sup>105</sup> The edition of 1804 is the revised one of 1801 and concentrates on the moral state rather than on the political. (See Preface, p. V)

The present are no times for flattery. The nation stands in urgent need of all the aid, which can be afforded by Religion and Virtue – by good example and good morals. (XIII)

Towards the end of the eighteenth century the social order certainly was at the centre of moral thought. Indeed, Bowles saw the “ancient scale of rights and duties” endangered by the “enemies of social order”, who were personified in the freedom-seeking and, thus, morally ‘infidel’ population of revolutionary France. Political radicalism and religious unorthodoxy were thus interpreted as moral lapses. He feared that all social claims would be regulated “but by a cold and vague calculation of individual merit.” (Bowles, 44) Richard A. Soloway maintains in his essay on English moral thought that quite obviously “the moral crusade [was used] as a means to an end,” mentioning John Bowles as an example who “played upon popular concern with immorality and the fear of France to muster support for government policies during the 1790s” (Soloway, 115).<sup>106</sup> We come to appreciate Soloway’s statement when we are acquainted with Bowles’ biography and his political background.<sup>107</sup> Soloway, obviously, allows the interpretation that Bowles’ staunch belief in “*all power is of God*” and, thus, “Divine Will” (Soloway, 69), seen in connection with his fervent upholding a social hierarchy, which became slowly but inevitably infiltrated by libertine ideas, gives rise to the suspicion that Bowles was an emphatic religious and moral crusader in the name of God for a very secular purpose. And it makes it somewhat difficult to see Hannah More, who wrote in perfect agreement with John Bowles, embarking on the same topics, in the same persuasive, compelling and purposeful vein, as fundamentally different from him.

Joanna Innes locates an increasing concern of Bowles’ with public morality. He seemingly suspected that the moral state during the period of the war with France in the 1790s was a repeat and even step up of the

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<sup>106</sup> Richard A Soloway. “Reform or Ruin: English Moral Thought during the First French Republic”. *The Review of Politics*, p. 115.

<sup>107</sup> John Bowles (1751-1819) was one of the most loyalist writers of the French Revolutionary war period. By profession a barrister, he soon became acquainted with the art of political polemicism. In 1792 he became a paid Treasury writer and leading loyalist pamphleteer. He was on excellent terms with Edmund Burke and even superseded his loyalty and patriotism. (See Emma Vincent, “The Real Grounds”, pp. 393-394)

moral state spreading during the American war of 1776 – 1783.<sup>108</sup> He was upset that “[w]ithin a very short period”, society had changed lamentably in the face of the spreading of new revolutionary principles and their presumed intention to “overthrow every Government”. (Bowles, *Moral State*, XIV) The “New Philosophy”, Bowles reasoned, “tends to confound all distinction between virtue and vice, and to supersede all rules”. (Bowles, *Moral State*, 33) With the moral sense “decayed” and the conscience “enfeebled”, Bowles felt a “laxity of principle” was prevalent and conscience wanted to be freed from all rules. (Bowles, *Moral State*, 35) “The *modern* Candour, Liberality and Moderation, consist in a sacrifice of all principle,” he wrote. (Bowles, *Moral State*, 36) With the moral sense, feeling and acting decayed, too. This decay was most obvious in the want of “*cardinal*” virtues, the “great land marks of Morality”, which Bowles characterized as “PRUDENCE” – the regulator of our feelings and desires according to the dictates of reason; “TEMPERANCE”- to prevent irregular desires from obtaining the mastery; “FORTITUDE” – which is prompted by a sense of duty and a concern for the public good; and “JUSTICE” – the grand tie which connects each individual with his fellow creatures, and which thereby preserves the order of society. Only this sense of the “rights of others” could preserve us from selfishness. (Bowles, *Moral State*, 41-43)

Obviously, Bowles’ ideas of ‘justice’ were very remote from those of Thomas Paine and William Godwin. Of course, Bowles was right in his belief that justice ties each individual to his fellow creatures. But if justice mainly rests on submission and obedience of the inferior ranks, it means that they can be made responsible for a failure of the existing social system of hierarchical order by ‘selfishly’ not adhering to its principles, and that the “rights of others” meant nothing but living up to the precepts of divine Providence. From today’s point-of-view, Bowles’ statement seems a mere instrument of keeping the lower orders in submission. When also taking into account Bowles’ interpretation of ‘prudence’ as a kind of helpmate of reason, this contrasts markedly with Godwin’s exalted opinion

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<sup>108</sup> See Joanna Innes, “Politics and Morals: The Reformation of Manners Movement in Later Eighteenth-century England”. Qtd. in Emma Vincent, “The Real Grounds”, *History* 1993, p. 408.



of reason, and Thomas Paine's defence of it. Two conflicting world views existed side by side in this period.

Since moral integrity on the part of those in power was considered a prerequisite to the survival of the old order, even the Head of State felt called upon to intervene. The bad example given by the rich to the poor led George III to write his "Proclamation against Vice and Immorality", and inspired William Wilberforce to the subsequent foundation of the Proclamation Society to help to enforce it.<sup>109</sup> The reform of the moral state at the end of the eighteenth century not only entailed the foundation of the "Proclamation Society" (1787-1805) but also the "Society for the Suppression of Vice" (1802-1812).<sup>110</sup> In "times of moral panic", when "laissez-faire had become the legal norm",<sup>111</sup> the two societies existed for several years side by side with very much the same aims.<sup>112</sup> It is this very fact which made the Bishop of Llandaff, Dr. Richard Watson, in 1805, write a letter addressed to *both* societies in which he deplored the widely spread practice of duelling among the highest ranks, a bad habit which was an issue where the "conflicting ideals of masculine leadership came to a head"<sup>113</sup> and which was "the best index to, and proof of, the survival and power of the aristocratic ideal"<sup>114</sup>. This is of some interest in as much as it added further facets to the many moral deficiencies the people of the time were accused of.<sup>115</sup> The moral aspects aside, the "essential guilt" was that duelling interfered with God's Creation as the participants risked directly "rushing into the presence of our Maker" (Wilberforce, *A Practical View*, 230). John Bowles was a prominent member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. He and his followers were convinced that the French Revolution had been brought about "by tolerance of social insubordination,

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<sup>109</sup> See M.J.D.Roberts. "The Society for the Suppression of Vice and its Early Critics, 1802-1812", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1983), p.160.

<sup>110</sup> Predecessors of these societies were the Societies for the Reformation of Manners. They were concerned about the moral state of the metropolis in the 1690s.

<sup>111</sup> Faramerz Dabhoiwala. "Sex and Societies for Moral Reform, 1688-1800". *Journal of British Studies* 46 (April 2007), pp. 318-19.

<sup>112</sup> The Proclamation Society ceased operations in 1805 when its president, Bishop Porteus of London, became too frail to oversee its remaining business.(M.J.D.Roberts, p.162).

<sup>113</sup> Davidoff and Hall, 21.

<sup>114</sup> J.C.D. Clark, 109.

<sup>115</sup> See for instance Dr. Richard Watson, *A Letter to the Members of the Proclamation Society and The Society for the Suppression of Vice*, 1805.

religious infidelity and sexual laxity” (M.J.D. Roberts, 166). Vice then was defined “primarily in terms of social indiscipline” (M.J.D. Roberts, 175).

The High-Church clergy, certainly, was not really deaf to their charge of alleged indifference towards the prevailing moral situation. A particularly popular charge was the one the Bishop of London, Beilby Porteus, addressed to his Clergy in 1794, impressing strongly on them “the necessity of greater zeal and activity in their sacred calling”. The following revealing account stems from the pen of his biographer:

The Bishop felt himself called upon to counteract, as far as in him lay, the licentious principles which were then afloat, and to check, if possible, the progress they had too evidently made in the various ranks of society. The best mode, as he conceived, of doing this, was to rouse the attention of the clergy to what was passing around them; and nothing surely was ever better calculated to produce that effect, than the charge which he addressed to them in 1794. The gloomy aspect of the times; the alarming and perilous situation of this country; the astonishing success, which every where attended its enemies abroad; the indefatigable industry of other enemies, still more formidable, at home, in diffusing disloyalty and infidelity and wickedness amongst the lower orders of the people; the unabated dissipation of the upper ranks; their extreme prodigality, luxury and voluptuousness; the marked indifference, which was every day more visible in their conduct, to all moral and religious obligations; a train of circumstances such as these called loudly, he thought, on the serious and reflecting part of the community, to make some vigorous struggle, and to stand boldly forward in the maintenance of good order and of public morals.<sup>116</sup>

Porteus, in further charges to the clergy of his diocese delivered in the years of 1798 and 1799, tried to counteract the alleged general situation of vice and infidelity in the kingdom. This endeavour of encouraging his clergy to counteract the steadily growing number of infidel writings, which were greatly imbued by the immoral spirit swapping over from the continent in general and France in particular, was motivated by his apprehension that they would subversively threaten government and social order by causing failing morality and religion. Beilby Porteus expected from his clergy to aim at the “most fruitful source of infidelity, [...] the corruption of the human heart” (20), and to support this effort with their good examples; he suggested “excellent books or tracts which have been

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<sup>116</sup> Rev. Robert Hodgson, *The Life of Dr. Beilby Porteus*, Late Bishop of London. New York, 1811, pp. 90, 97-99.

written in defence of revelation" (17). For this purpose he warmly recommended the pious writings of Wilberforce, Bowdler, King, and Hannah More.<sup>117</sup>

John Bowles wrote in his *View of the Moral State of Society at the Close of the Eighteenth Century*, that "[t]he most unerring test of the morals of society, at any given period, is the degree of respect, which is paid to the nuptial engagement." (Bowles, *Moral State*, 29) When Bowles turned to this topic, he had in mind not only the morals of the *new philosophers*<sup>118</sup>, but quite clearly also the conduct of the highest ranks in general and that of the future heir to the English throne in particular. The son of George III, the later King George IV, had married Caroline of Brunswick in 1795. As a marriage of mere convenience, it soon turned out to be extremely unhappy and became a case in point for the exemplary misconduct of kings and queens. In fact their sexual adventures and infidelities culminated in the so-called 'Queen Caroline affair' years later.<sup>119</sup> John Bowles, who placed the nuptial tie "next to [the] Religious principle ... [as] the main bond of society", feared the effect of the conduct of George and Caroline on public morals, a public "ever gazing upon ... [the future King as] a pattern of filial duty, of conjugal fidelity, of paternal care, of domestic virtue, of personal regularity, temperance and self-command." (Bowles, *Moral State*, X) Bowles covertly alluded to King George III's *Proclamation for the Encouragement of Piety and Virtue and for the Prevention and Punishing of Vice, Profaneness and Immorality* in 1787, the first law in England forbidding the dissemination of pornographic publications. The prince as "Heir Apparent" (Bowles, *Moral State*, IX) had more than anyone else to adhere to this manifesto, for "*he ha[d] most solemn obligations imposed*

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<sup>117</sup> Beilby Porteus' overwhelming praise of More's *Strictures*, which had just been published, then triggered Peter Pindar's *Nil Admirari; or, a Smile at a Bishop* (1799) and John Black's *A Poetical Review of Miss Hannah More's Strictures on Female Education: In a Series of Anapestic Epistles* (1800).

<sup>118</sup> In a footnote Bowles quite obviously referred to Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, saying that "[o]ne of these *Philosophers* in this Country felt it due to his principles to apologize for having entered into the marriage state, which he had before termed an "odious monopoly!" (Bowles, *Moral State*, p. 29) In fact, Godwin saw himself "guilty of the most odious of all monopolies" ('On Property'. *Political Justice*, edit. H.S. Salt. London, 1800, p. 103.), whereas Wollstonecraft had argued "that marriage was the ultimate expression of society's tendency to teach women only to please men". (qtd. in Amelia A. Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, by John Benjamin Pierce edit., (OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS), Oxford University Press, 1999, p. IX).

on him by his birth; - and [...] in these unhappy times, [when] the world examine[d] the conduct of Princes with a jealous, a scrutinizing, and a malignant eye.” (Bowles, *Moral State*, XII)

Even though, from a later point of view, sexual misdemeanour of Kings and Queens as in the Queen Caroline Affair did not really constitute a dangerous political propaganda in Britain, it had very much done so in France. In England the monarch enjoyed “minimal censorship” (Laqueur, *Caroline Affair*, 465) and, in the case of the prince regent, who bought up most of the satires on both his private and public life, it became conspicuous that a distinct division was drawn between the King as a private man, “harshly” but nevertheless “harmlessly satirized”, and the King “as a pillar of the constitution”.<sup>120</sup> This affair came to teach also the lesson, as Tamara L. Hunt suggests, that before the background of political changes on the one hand, and the fuss made over the Queen Caroline Affair on the other hand, “many people had ceased to look to the Crown for political initiative [...] but expected its sovereign to exercise a different type of power: moral leadership.” In this respect the affair was “an important episode in the cultural history of England [...] a symbolic reassurance that the familiar world, with its old ties and conceptions of morality, still possessed a strong moral force.”<sup>121</sup>

Again, the likeness in the choice of topics between Hannah More and John Bowles is noticeable. Both writers not only heavily criticized the present state of morals even in the highest social ranks, they also did not hesitate to give ‘hints’ unasked to presumptuous heirs to the English throne. In the form of a conduct book, the proper code of behaviour was outlined with the warning not to jeopardize their future divine appointment.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> In *Family Fortunes*, pp.150-55, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall render a detailed version of the Queen Caroline affair.

<sup>120</sup> Thomas W. Laqueur. “The Queen Caroline Affair: Politics as Art in the Reign of George IV”. *The Journal of Modern History*. Vol. 54, No. 3, pp. 417-466, here p. 465.

<sup>121</sup> Tamara L. Hunt. “Morality and Monarchy in the Queen Caroline Affair”. *Albion: A Quarterly Journal with British Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Winter 1991), pp. 697-722, here pp. 718, 721-22.

<sup>122</sup> Hannah More in 1805 published *Hints towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess*, addressed to Princess Charlotte, who, however, died in 1817 after having given birth to a still-born son.

## **The Changing Face of the Religious Scene – The Evangelical Spirituality of the Heart**

Evangelical religion is [...] a wine that has  
been poured into many bottles.<sup>123</sup>

To understand More's religiosity in the context of her time it is necessary to give a survey of the rise and development of Evangelicalism in Britain. In the 1730s in continental Europe, North America and Britain began a series of religious revivals independent from each other which carried in themselves important common features and objectives: they all aspired to the renewal of the parent church from inside by purging it of anything which obscured God's word. Although schisms were not the end in view, in the final consequence, however, they often proved inevitable, but as the result of expulsion rather than that of dissent.

In the British Isles, too, spearheaded by Wales, an evangelical Protestant Christian movement within the Anglican Church began to take on shape in the 1730s, the roots of which are to be found in the churches arising from the Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and reached an extent unknown before and thereafter. In 1735 Howel Harris and Daniel Rowland converted to this new spirit of forgiveness and travelled round South Wales, successfully preaching the message of salvation through 'faith alone'. In the same year, George Whitefield, an Oxford undergraduate, converted in England, and began to fascinate his hearers by eloquently spreading the new purity of the Gospel. Charles Wesley, Whitefield's religious mentor at Oxford, converted in 1738, and shortly after his brother John Wesley, who, a year later, began his career of open-air preaching. After his return from travelling around New England and supporting Jonathan Edwards in his endeavour to spread his religious revival in Northampton, George Whitefield most successfully triggered a revival in Scotland in 1741 as well.

In Northampton, Massachusetts, it was Jonathan Edwards (1703 – 1758) who in 1734 preached on the importance of repentance and the immediate

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<sup>123</sup> Bebbington, p. 1.

dangers of sin. This dramatic sermon initiated a series of corroborated conversions which developed into a religious revival. When George Whitefield, who had already gained great popularity as a preacher in England, toured New England and paid a visit to Northampton, this so far modest revival was turned into 'The Great Awakening' which drew an enormous publicity, and soon assumed a "trans-continental form" (Ditchfield, 23) by triggering the interest of other evangelicals. This Great Awakening in New England, however, found an early end by 1744, when Edwards' "controversial preaching" was severely criticised for being a "strictly orthodox Calvinism" (Ditchfield, 23), and ended up in Edwards being removed from his Northampton pastorate in 1749. The question whether salvation was open to *all* or confined to the *divinely-chosen few* became highly controversial and divided the revival in some areas into Calvinists, in others into Arminians. On December 12, 1743, Jonathan Edwards published his enthusiastic reminiscences about The Great Awakening.<sup>124</sup> They not only give an idea about how a range of conversions took place but also render his perception about how the "degree of grace"<sup>125</sup> a person had gained could be determined. This, according to him, "is by no means to be judged [...] by the degree of joy, or the degree of zeal." These were criteria unfit for determining "who are gracious and who are not", because it is "not the degree of religious affections but the nature of them that is chiefly to be looked at". ("On the Great Awakening", 6) In analogy, Edwards maintained that "the goodness of persons' state is not chiefly to be judged by any [...] method of experiences in what is supposed to be the first conversion." He rather gave the advice to "judge more by the spirit that breathes the effect wrought on the temper of the soul". ("On the Great Awakening", 6) In this early phase of religious revivals Jonathan Edwards put his stress on the awakening spirituality of the heart, the importance of which was going to be central to Anglican evangelical thinking half a century later.

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<sup>124</sup> "Jonathan Edwards: On the Great Awakening" (Dec.12, 1743). *Who We Are. The Story of America's Constitution*. National Humanities Institute, 1998. 11<sup>th</sup> February 2012  
<<http://www.nhinet.org/ccs/docs/awaken.htm>>

<sup>125</sup> Sufficient grace is the degree of grace imparting ability sufficient to enable every man to make a possible salvation actually his own. See 11<sup>th</sup> February 2012  
<<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/irresistible.html>>

It was this intent search for deep-rooted religious experiences and the heightened involvement of the heart which made such an impression on professed and many mere nominal Christians alike. Gerald Birney Smith quotes Mr. Jonathan Edwards' wife as having written in 1740 about the preaching of Whitefield: "He makes less of the doctrines than our American preachers generally do, and aims more at affecting the heart."<sup>126</sup> Much as Evangelicalism became a religion of the heart, its history became as much a history of doctrines as it became "a history of ideas" (Ditchfield, 6-7). When Bebbington writes that "the evangelical religion is [...] a wine that has been poured into many bottles" (Bebbington, 1), he obviously understands it as a Christian cross-denominational phenomenon which left no Protestant sect or denomination unaffected. But before "the new wine spilled over the rim of the old bottles," as Grayson Carter also metaphorically puts it (Carter, 7), it had come of age in the structures of the Church of England. When these structures proved too weak a vessel for the "forces of renewal" (Carter, 8) some groupings that adhered to the new evangelical spirit felt inwardly compelled and later forced from outside to follow new paths apt to comply with their religious conscience which eventually and irretrievably led into dissent. Those of the evangelical clergy who remained within the Church of England became to be termed as "Gospel clergy" (Carter, 7).<sup>127</sup> Ian Bradley agrees with Carter's estimation that *all* followers of the new 'vital religion' (I. Bradley, 12) remained within the Church of England, until well before the end of the eighteenth century a small group broke away and assumed the name Methodists, whereas the other group became the so-called Evangelicals within the Church of England.

In their endeavour to regain the lost spirit of Jesus by strictly adhering to the purity 'of the Gospel' ('evangelical'), many Christians now strove to change their inner life by way of a profound religious experience, the experience of 'conversion'. It made the evangelical spiritually fit for disseminating God's word, the message of hope for salvation for *all* who believed in him and for whom Christ had died the death of atonement.

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<sup>126</sup> Gerald Birney Smith. "The Spirit of Evangelical Christianity". *The Journal of Religion*. Vol. 2, No. 6 (Nov. 1922) pp. 624-634, p. 629.

Spreading this message of salvation became a persuasive mission, carried by the new motto “Win the world to Christ” and replacing the old one “Conquer the world in the name of Christ” (G. B. Smith, 631). The weapons used in the past for defending religion were exchanged for a “revolutionary upheaval of the soul” (G. B. Smith, 632).

Within the next fifty years from the birth of the Protestant revival in the fourth decade of the eighteenth century, the meanwhile multi-faceted evangelical movement underwent a development into three main strands. They were the Arminian Methodists of John Wesley; the Calvinistic Methodists of George Whitefield and the Countess of Huntington; and the Evangelicals within the Church of England, who, as Kenneth Hylson-Smith states, “interacted and influenced each other, and at times in certain places [...] were indistinguishable” (Hylson-Smith,10).<sup>128</sup> Although he hastens to remark that the Evangelicals within the Church of England were “largely separate in origin, in character and in outcome” (Hylson-Smith,10), this is still a question not satisfactorily answered by modern researchers.

Elisabeth Jay, for instance, criticises F. K. Brown for his concealed contention in *The Fathers of the Victorians* who implies that “Evangelicalism had nothing in common with Methodism”, seeing the Methodists “as a disarmingly naïve movement beside the supreme worldliness of Anglican Evangelicalism”.<sup>129</sup> On the other hand, she warns to go by the unpublished thesis by Dr. J. D. Walsh, who maintains that “Anglican Evangelicalism was an offshoot from the work of the Methodist leaders, Wesley and Whitefield”.<sup>130</sup> Bebbington in turn, refers to Jay’s misleading “alternative usage of applying ‘Evangelical’ to the Anglican party and ‘evangelical’ to others of like mind outside the Church of England”<sup>131</sup> in *The Religion of the Heart*.<sup>132</sup> Mark A. Noll describes

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<sup>127</sup> Grayson Carter’s theory of the evolution of Methodism and Anglican Evangelicalism is striking in its simplicity, clearness, and logic and is adopted as fundamental in this thesis.

<sup>128</sup> This fact becomes obvious when for instance Sydney Smith and John Foster regard them as birds of the same feather. See below in this thesis.

<sup>129</sup> See Jay, p. 17, footnote 4. In fact, Brown played down Wesley’s reformatory efforts as “blunder” for being “designed to appeal to the wrong people” (Brown, 45), namely predominantly to the poor, in his conviction that one soul was as good as another.

<sup>130</sup> Qtd. by Jay, 17.

<sup>131</sup> See Bebbington, p. 278, footnote 7, referring to Jay, pp. 16-17.

<sup>132</sup> Jay has not remained alone with this method of distinction. No matter which faction copied whom, Jay’s distinction has proved rather useful. This thesis follows the same pattern.



Methodism as “an especially interesting variety of evangelicalism”. (*The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism*, 146) When Karen Swallow Prior maintains that Methodism was “evangelicalism’s beginnings”<sup>133</sup> she is possibly taking a wrong turn, because it seems rather that at the beginning the new evangelical spirit was a uniting catalyst for all those who meant to adjust their life to God’s true religion, one that was “agreeable to [the] gospel; consonant to the Christian law [as] revealed in the holy gospel”.<sup>134</sup> These are but a few examples of diverging opinions about the genesis of Evangelicalism, which could be followed by many others. In the course of time, the various religious groups which had emerged as the result of the revival took on shape, gathering around Wesley, Whitefield, and Huntingdon or remaining cradled in the Church of England. Both groups, just like other dissenters, were eyed with suspicion. Especially the Methodists were often viewed with contempt, for the term ‘Methodist’ was frequently used in a pejorative sense of being “a religious fanatic of unstable mind” (Ditchfield, 57), to say the least. To be lumped together with the Methodists was thus strongly rejected by the Evangelicals in the Church of England even in view of the fact that the Evangelicals often must have felt closer to the dissenting evangelicals than to their Anglican brethren.

It must not only be admitted but even insisted on that the early Anglican Evangelicals had much sympathy with the methods and aims of the Methodists, but eventually began to accept the “blanket title” Methodist “with increasing reluctance” (Jay, 17). A perfect and illustrative example is a letter to the editor of the *Christian Observer* in which the writer complains of being denounced as a Methodist, but thinks himself lucky at the same time for being termed “only ‘a Methodist’” and not “Monster” or “Cogger” or “Foister” instead.<sup>135</sup> At the time when Hannah More and William Wilberforce, two very notable Evangelicals, had begun to issue their moralizing appeals to the higher ranks in the last decades of the eighteenth century, it seemed no longer advantageous to be linked with Methodism. In fact, Martha More’s *Mendip Annals* contain several

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<sup>133</sup> See Prior, p. 53.

<sup>134</sup> Dr. Samuel Johnson’s definition of ‘evangelical’ in his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), qtd. in Ditchfield, p. 25.

instances when the Methodists are referred to in a humiliating way. So, for instance, when Martha speaks of “the stupid and ruinous idea of Methodism” (*Annals*, 41) which had taken hold of the minds of many and was therefore interfering with her and her sister’s work in the Mendips. Therefore, Martha More’s diary entry in 1792 is curious and ambivalent: “[o]ur prosperity at present has sometimes gained us the appellation of Methodists”. (*Annals*, 60) On the one hand, the Methodists were jealous of Hannah More’s institutions, because since her presence in the Mendip area the persons attending the church had increased more than fourfold,<sup>136</sup> on the other hand, the sisters were, in the words of Martha, abused “as a pack of Methodists” (*Annals*, 224), at least on one occasion.

Good sense thus dictated to keep on distance to the Methodists also in view of the fact that the Evangelicals and Methodists were often seen as birds of the same feather, especially by the uneducated, who often had only a faint idea that there existed two religious groups side by side. In a letter of Hannah More’s to William Wilberforce in 1799, this fact is presented in a rather humorous manner: some farmers, curious as to whether or not the newly erected schools in the Mendips were methodistical, went to a fortune-teller to find out. When the oracle, at a loss to tell right away, wanted some more information, they got to the bottom of their suspicion, which was grounded on the circumstance that the tunes that were sung in the schools were methodistical, “[b]ecause they were not in Farmer Clap’s book.” (qtd. in Roberts II, p. 56)

To keep the Methodists at arm’s length was the more the order of the day since the Established Church, the instrument of the government as of old, pulled closer together in the face of Jacobine and atheistic threats from inside and outside the country. What may have played an additional role in this growing distance to the Methodists were the deaths of the two great men and a great woman of the Methodist movement. Since it was linked with the lives of great individuals who had played an important role in the Protestant revival, as the many biographies in books and magazines offer ample proof of, the succeeding deaths of George Whitefield (1770), John

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<sup>135</sup> *Christian Observer* 1809, Vol. VIII, Nr. 10 (Oct), p. 564.

<sup>136</sup> See *Annals*, p. 188.

Wesley (1791), and the Countess of Huntington (1791), the “patriarchess of the Methodists” (Ditchfield, 6), a decline was apprehended, last but not least because of the movement’s strong lay status, an assumption which proved wrong, however.

There were, of course, differing as well as concurring features between Evangelicals inside the Church of England and evangelical Dissenters arising in the course of time. What united all evangelicals, for example, was their absolute adherence to the Bible focusing on the significance of the New Testament. John Wesley’s perception of the “essence of evangelism” (Ditchfield, 25) rested on ‘original sin’, ‘justification by faith’, and ‘holiness of heart’.<sup>137</sup> In view of man’s incapability to rid himself of his sinfulness in order to gain salvation, Christ’s voluntary death on the cross ensured it and became central to evangelical teaching in the ‘doctrine of the atonement’, which contained the forgiveness of sin, redemption and ultimate salvation. It was this unshaken belief that forgiveness of sins led to salvation through Christ’s atoning death on the cross which made up the doctrine of ‘justification by faith’, leading up to the doctrine of ‘holiness in heart’, meaning to follow the path pre-given by justification through ‘faith *alone*’. Among the Methodists the question whether the atoning death meant redemption to *all* who believed in this salvation, as was done by the Arminian Methodists of John Wesley, or whether *only to a chosen group*, as the Calvinist Methodists of Whitefield and the Countess of Huntington believed, became a matter of much discussion between the two groups, as had already been the case with Jonathan Edwards in New England decades before.

What united all Christians of ‘evangelical sentiment’ doctrinally for understandable reasons was also their strong aversion to Socinianism<sup>138</sup>, because the belief in Christ’s atoning death on the cross was one of their

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<sup>137</sup> Wesley in a circular letter of 1764. *Journals* 21, 456 qtd. in Ditchfield pp. 25-26. See also Hylson, p. 35 and Bebbington, p. 3.

<sup>138</sup> Socinianism is a more extreme form of Arianism (which originated in the fourth century AD and was critical of the doctrine of the Trinity and regarded Christ as subordinate to God the Father, to whom alone worship should be offered), whereby the divinity of Christ is denied and he is regarded as a divinely-inspired human being. Socinians denied that the death of Christ was the atonement for human sins. In the eighteenth century the term Unitarian was generally applied to the holders of this belief. (See Alan Smith, pp.118 and 120)

principal features. In 1793 the *Evangelical Magazine*<sup>139</sup> published in its supplement a story under the title “The Conversion of a Socinian”, hinting at Dr. John Foster, who was rather critical of anything evangelical, and who was, although a Baptist by creed, suspected of exerting a bad influence with his “Socinian scheme”. In 1799 Hannah More in a letter to William Wilberforce reports of a clergyman in the vicinity of one of her and her sister Martha’s flourishing schools who had turned Socinian and was now causing much damage to *their* doctrinal teaching and schemes. Most interestingly, Hannah More made the negative influence of the *Anti-Jacobin Magazine* responsible for this incident. It was its “malice”, she maintained, which was “spreading more mischief over the land than almost any other book [...] under the mask of loyalty [...] representing all serious men as hostile to government.” This spreading poison that loyal and well-meaning citizens like herself and Wilberforce should have in mind “to hurt the establishment” had to be stopped, More protested. (qtd. in Roberts II, 56).<sup>140</sup>

Methodists had grown used to being treated with more or less concealed contempt. Even in the face of proliferating undenominational activities commencing in the last decade of the eighteenth century, “a new hardening of denominational divisions” (Rosman, 15) together with growing denominational consciousness and divergence between Anglicans and dissenting evangelicals became evident. But it was James Bean’s *Zeal Without Innovation* (1808) which exceeded anything on the road in reviving religious animosity, believed to have subsided to some extent. Bean spoke of a “Dissenting System” (Bean, 14), which had in mind “the annihilation of the Established Church as a national institution”, threatening even the existence of the monarchy by promoting democracy.

As all these imputations meant a misuse of the Act of Toleration of 1689, the counter in the *Evangelical Magazine*<sup>141</sup> followed swiftly. Not only was Bean stigmatizing the “Reformation of the Eighteenth Century with the

<sup>139</sup> *Evangelical Magazine* 1793, Vol. I, pp. 293-94.

<sup>140</sup> Hannah More's surprising animosity towards the *Anti-Jacobin-Magazine* can be explained by the ongoing 'Blagdon Controversy' (1799-1803), in which More was accused of infidel trends in her schools, and in the course of which the magazine took a hostile stand to More.

<sup>141</sup> *Evangelical Magazine* 1809, Vol. xvii, pp. 73-76.

“vague appellation of ‘*Methodism*!’”, so the writer, he was also “grossly misrepresenting the political and religious tenets of Dissenters” (*EM*, 73) and keeping out of sight the predominantly good in the evangelical Christians. The *Evangelical Magazine* suspected an intense lack of toleration in this charge of imputed debasement of the Christian ministry through lay-preaching. The questioning of the Dissenters’ loyalty, however, evoked the utmost indignation and the writer refuted Bean’s assertions as “intolerant”, “partial”, and “prejudiced” views of a so-called “enlightened [...] Protestant clergyman” (*EM*, 75). If the Established Church suffered from separatism, so the tenor of this counter, it was the Church’s own doings. It is of no little interest that James Bean’s rather offensive book, in particular Chapter I, Section II (Bean, pp. 14-25), should stem from a clergyman who was “warmly attached to the Established Church”<sup>142</sup>. It appears as a perfect indicator for growing efforts of Anglicans to clearly differentiate themselves from the Methodists. *Zeal Without Innovation* can be regarded as a key document in this respect.

The *Eclectic Review*<sup>143</sup> took a less harsh stance as the *Evangelical Magazine* towards the alleged “fanaticism” (I, 499) of separatists. Far from sharing Bean’s opinion on this point, the writer of the *Eclectic Review* concludes that the growing number of dissenting chapels as well as the steady increase in Dissenters “can *only* arise from their superior piety and zeal” (I, 502). To connect worldly political consequences with the state of the Church, however, is to the mind of the reviewer “the indication of a bad cause and of a worse heart” (I, 507). The allegation that the Toleration Act was perverted to “*making* Dissenters”, as Bean imputed, the writer of the review was at a loss to conceive, and suspected that these accusations were but “narrow prejudices” (I, 507). No doubt Bean, an orthodox clergyman in the Church of England, was trying hard to make Dissenters the scapegoat for the failures of the Established Church.

The *Christian Observer*’s<sup>144</sup> reaction to *Zeal Without Innovation* was a cautious one. With regard to dissent, it reasoned in its review that the rise of Methodism took place at a period when both the doctrinal religion and

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<sup>142</sup> *Evangelical Magazine* 1809, Vol. XVii, p. 73.

<sup>143</sup> *Eclectic Review* of 1809, Vol. 5, Part I and II.

the standard of its practice were “at a low ebb in the church” and that “the Evangelical clergy of the church”, with their new religious zeal and perfect adherence to the orthodox doctrines, which had been “neglected” by her ministers for a long period, inspired the “venerable church” anew.<sup>145</sup> These opinions reflect, although in a rather concealed manner, and maybe even unintentionally, that there was a connection between dissent from and negligence of the Established Church. In fact, Hannah More never grew tired of hinting at the ‘drowsy clergy’ in her moralizing writings and letters. It was the Bishop of London, Beilby Porteus, who was in line with Mrs. More in this respect and censured his clergy in one of his annual ‘charges’ accordingly. The clergy, however, so the *Christian Observer*, was deaf to the dissenters’ accusations, which were that “the doctrines of the church were neglected by her ministers themselves; that her articles were true, but that her sons were not true to those articles” (CO 1808, VII, 738). Although the *Christian Observer* admitted that James Bean was correct in many of his observations, the magazine took pains in showing a neutral, in places a moderate stance, so for instance, with regard to Bean's apprehension about the diminishing influence of the Established Church as separatism increased. The *Christian Observer*, however, could not really follow the allegation that “[t]he Church was in danger” (CO 1808, VII, 782), (even though there was ample proof that a great many dissenters were educated “within the pale of the Church” (CO 1808, VII, 781)), and thus urged the author of *Zeal Without Innovation* to be more careful with such interpretations. Such moderately critical views could only stem from a religious movement within the Anglican Church which had become very self-confident and whose followers were no longer inclined to keep their views to themselves. The Evangelicals in the Church of England, with their ‘vital religion’, were about to enter a new phase.

The fact that James Bean had sincerely congratulated Hannah More on her *Strictures*,<sup>146</sup> and that she had also come to use “*zeal without innovation*” as a “phrase”<sup>147</sup>, which certainly speaks for the popularity of Bean's book, may allow to infer a certain familiarity of More with Bean.

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<sup>144</sup> The *Christian Observer* was the official organ of the Evangelicals since 1802.

<sup>145</sup> *Christian Observer* 1808, Vol. VII, Nr. 22 (Nov.), pp. 734, 736, 737, 738.

<sup>146</sup> Letter dated May 1799, qtd. in Roberts II, pp. 50-51.

Nevertheless, Hannah More must have perceived the implicit danger that Bean's wholesale criticism of anything 'evangelical', thus including the Methodists (without, however, mentioning them), might also "obliquely impeach [...] the character of the Evangelical ministers of his [Bean's] own church", as the *Evangelical Magazine*<sup>148</sup> maintained. More counteracted by creating in her novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, which appeared only a year after Bean's *Zeal Without Innovation*, the figure of Dr. Barlow, a parson of impeccable character, enlightened piety and sincere disposition, which was free from errors in religious matters: the idealized personification of 'zeal without innovation', endowed with an "enlightened earnestness" and a "zeal *with* knowledge", set off against the evangelicals' "eccentric earnestness" and their "zeal *without* knowledge". (*Coelebs*, 127) Methodist Dissent's strong cross-denominational co-operation certainly helped to ward off Bean's disparagement.

*The Evangelical Magazine*, founded in 1793, with editorial contributors from various denominations, was one of those periodicals which catered for members of *all* denominations that set their heart on spreading the Gospel. In all its succeeding issues, it stressed that the profits arising from the sale of the magazine were to be applied to "charitable purposes" or to alleviate the distress of the widows of Gospel ministers of "different denominations". The *Evangelical Magazine*'s first issue had good reasons to proudly report that

In the beginning of this century there were few persons of evangelical principles in the kingdom; but now, it is supposed, there are more than three hundred thousand Calvinists, and many others, savingly converted to God, who trust in the merits of Christ alone for salvation. (*Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* 1793, Vol. I, Preface 2)

Another example of cross-denominational efforts is given in the *Evangelical Magazine* for 1795, when "*Christian Ministers, and all other Friends of Christianity*" were addressed "*on the Subject of Missions to the Heathen*". It appealed to its audience

[t]hat something may be done *with effect*, it is hoped that not only Evangelical *Dissenters* and *Methodists* will be found generally

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<sup>147</sup> Hannah More to Lady Olivia Sparrow on Dec. 27, 1813, qtd. in Roberts II, p. 217.

<sup>148</sup> *Evangelical Magazine* 1809, Vol. XVII, p. 73.

disposed to unite in instituting a *Society* for this express purpose, but that many *members of the established Church*, of evangelical sentiments, and of lively zeal for the cause of Christ, will also favour us with their kind co-operation. (*Evang. Mag.* 1795, Vol. 3, pp.11-12)

And the cover page of the *Evangelical Magazine* 1803, Vol. 11, invited cooperation with the following quotation: “In one Spirit, with one Mind, striving together for the Faith of the Gospel.” (Phil. I. 27)

There certainly was much the same tenor in the evangelical world as a whole. The absolute belief in strict class distinction as being of Divine Providence was but one of the criteria *all* evangelicals shared. The essay in the *Evangelical Magazine* “On Female Dress”<sup>149</sup> may serve as an illustrative example. Its author maintained that

[t]he Providence of God has made an evident distinction of rank and subordination in civil life. There is a long tradition from the highest state of those whom we call the rich, to the lowest state of the honest and industrious poor.<sup>150</sup>

This grading logically afforded different conditions as regards dressing accordingly. “Through the dissipation and extravagance of the times, [however],” the author carries on, “the proper distinction is almost lost, and it is often not easy to distinguish [...] between a countess and a milliner.” (*Evangelical Magazine*, 147-148) These lines could stem from any Evangelical of the Church of England just as well; and the ensuing apologetic remark, that it was difficult to determine, particularly with regard to clothes against the cold, “what is necessary and what is superfluous,” could have been voiced by utilitarian Hannah More. This example may appear insignificant at first sight, but it makes clear that class distinction enjoyed priority on both sides of the denominational borderline, and that lower-class women in particular had to be aware of their humble status. This may astonish the more in view of the fact that the Methodists had, compared to the Evangelicals in the Church of England, a remarkably active number of lay women in their movement.

Loyalty towards Church and Government certainly played a dominant role among evangelicals. John Wesley, with his High Church background a

<sup>149</sup> This topic is reverted to again in Chapter IV. 'Schools for the Poor', in another context.

<sup>150</sup> *Evangelical Magazine* Vol. 3, 1795, pp. 146-150.



long way back, was known for his absolute loyalty to the Established Church. His watchword “fear God and honour the King” (qtd. in Ditchfield, 8) circumscribes best his devotion to both Church and Government and their institutional establishment. This loyalty certainly entailed many a practical advantage given to Wesley from the side of the Anglicans. So, for instance, as a rule Wesley was welcome to preach in Anglican churches in the early days of the Methodist movement. By the time, however, when the Methodists had become a “promising movement, which struck genuine roots among the common people” (Alan Smith, 5), lastly also because of being a movement foremost (but not exclusively) *of and for the poor*, as opposed to the Evangelicals in the Church of England, who had “struck no popular roots” (Alan Smith, 5) in the life of the masses, probably because of having remained elitist as a movement *for the poor*,<sup>151</sup> they were more or less driven out of the Established Church by being compelled to register their meeting places as dissenting chapels.<sup>152</sup> In a letter to the Bishop of Lincoln, Dr. Pretyman Tomline, in 1790, John Wesley complained bitterly about this hardship:

The Methodists in general, my Lord, are members of the Church of England. They hold all her doctrines, attend her service, and partake of her sacraments. They do not willingly do harm, but do what good they can to all. [...] ‘For what reasonable end,’ would your Lordship drive these people out of the Church? [...] in the most cruel manner [...] They desire a licence to worship God after their own conscience. Your Lordship refuses them it, and then punishes them for not having a licence! So your Lordship leaves them only this alternative, ‘Leave the Church or starve.’ And is it a Christian, yea a Protestant bishop that so persecutes his own flock?<sup>153</sup>

Wesley’s deep loyalty to the Established Church was possibly also backed by the practical deliberation that her parochial structure could be of great help in changing the nation’s spiritual state. An unfulfilled dream must have harassed Wesley a life long, namely that of an official co-operation or even the union of his movement with the Established Church. His respective endeavour by means of a circular letter to the Evangelical

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<sup>151</sup> See also E. Halévy. *A History of the English People in 1815*. Book iii, *Religion and Culture*, 1925; Benn paperback 1961, qtd. in Alan Smith, p. 5.

<sup>152</sup> By the early 1780s the congregation of the Countess of Huntington had been forced out of the Church of England and its meeting houses had to be registered as Dissenting chapels under the Toleration Act. (Ditchfield, p. 79)

<sup>153</sup> Wesley J. *Selected Letters*, ed. F. C. Gill, Epworth Press, 1956. Qtd. in Alan Smith, p. 95.

clergy in 1766, offering his co-operation since they all agreed to his three “essentials”, namely the “doctrines of original sin”, “justification by faith”, and “holiness of heart and life”<sup>154</sup>, however, found no resonance even worth mentioning. From today’s point of view, we may well speculate whether this refusal can be regarded as a missed “historic opportunity to avoid a major separation from the Church of England” (Hylson, 36).

Despite all arising difficulties, separatist ideas were far from Wesley’s thinking. Yet, the impulse of secession from the Established Church was no longer completely out of the way among the more radical Methodists, the “Methodist Dissenters”, who were in favour of a break as “an acceptable price for the maintenance of their accepted practices”, as opposed to the “Church Methodists” (Ditchfield, 84), whose loyalty towards the Anglican Church was unbroken. What Wesley, against better knowledge and intention, could not prevent in the long run, however, was contributing his share to paving the way of secession with a series of actions that had become absolutely necessary for organizing the smooth running of his movement both in Britain itself and Overseas. When the Methodists were in possession of ample places of worship and an increased number of lay preachers, they no longer depended on the Church of England for facilities and other assets. What they still fell short of was their inability of spending the sacraments. Wesley, by ordaining a clergyman as ‘superintendent’ in New England, and shortly afterwards three ministers for Scotland in 1785, and, to top it off, by ordaining a minister in England, set the sails for separation from the Anglican Church. In the *Arminian Magazine* for 1786 Wesley stressed in the ‘Minutes of a Conference’ how far from any intended separation from the Church these steps were; they were “not of Choice but Necessity”, and he stressed also that “[i]f any one is pleased to call this *separating from the Church*, he may. But the law of England does not call it so.”<sup>155</sup> As to the legal basis of Wesley’s decision, Ditchfield remarks that “[r]ather than defying the law, Methodists had exploited it for their own advantage, stressing their legal privileges as members of the established church.” (Ditchfield, 80) In another statement, Wesley emphasized:

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<sup>154</sup> See Bebbington, p. 3 and Ditchfield, pp. 25-26.

<sup>155</sup> *Arminian Magazine* for 1786, Vol. IX, p. 677.

[T]his is not a Separation from the Church at all. Not from the Church of *Scotland*: nor from the Church of *England*. [...] Whatever step is done either in *America* or *Scotland*, is no Separation from the Church of *England*.<sup>156</sup>

Yet, the tendency towards separation was clearly underway henceforth.

### **The Evangelical Revival - The Result of the Shortcomings of the Church of England?**

If the “chief origins of the Evangelical Revival are to be found in the Church of England,” as Grayson Carter maintains (Carter, 7), the question whether it can be attributed to failures of the Church of England, or her possible shortcomings either in matters doctrinal, pastoral or charitable should be raised. Was the Church too intertwined with politics and too dependent on the Establishment, so that instead of focusing on her true vocation, namely the caring for the souls of her flock, rich and poor alike, she rather took to keeping up the country’s social hierarchical order? Fact is that clergymen often socialized and even hunted with the gentry, which is to say that “many aspired to the life-style of a gentleman” (Spaeth, 134). Was this nearness to the Establishment the price for the governmental protection of privileges granted to the Church? If this was the case, it certainly applied to those of the higher ranks in the Church, which were to a large measure aristocratic and thus, in fact, part of the Establishment anyway, rather than to the underprivileged curates of the very poor parishes, where “pastoral neglect” (Ditchfield, 42) was often caused by poverty, with the bad effects of non-residence and spiritual laxness.<sup>157</sup> The overall situation could be described, in short, as the Anglican Church having been “too little of an ‘alma mater’ to many of her children” (Alan Smith, 19). Such was the position of the Anglican Church and Methodist dissent that the former was only on the winning side because it was already established and, so Wilberforce’s biographer Thomas Price, “had the plea of antiquity and prescription in its favor [sic]” (*Memoir of*

<sup>156</sup> *Arminian Magazine* for 1786, Vol. IX, p. 678.

<sup>157</sup> Hannah More’s recurring critical remarks about the “drowsy clergy”, as much as Bishop Beilby Porteus’ ‘charges’ to the clergy, most likely often hit the wrong target.

*Wilberforce*, 66). Alluding to the alleged “general decay of piety”, the *Eclectic Review*, with a view to pastoral neglect, took the stance that the half empty churches were only the result of the “absence of that sort of instruction which naturally engages the attention and fixes the heart”.<sup>158</sup>

Bishop Burnet, so Donald Spaeth, was one of those who warned against the ill effects of pluralism the very poor clergy was more or less compelled to resort to in order to make a living.<sup>159</sup> Even if pluralism and non-residence did not necessarily mean pastoral neglect, though it was very often the case, it triggered “the contempt for the clergy” (Spaeth, 127). The drowsiness of the lower rank clergy, however, was not omnipresent, as modern studies about various dioceses clearly show, so that much of the known Episcopal criticism about shortcomings as a possible additional effect to trigger a religious revival should be met with reserve.<sup>160</sup>

In agreement with eighteenth century thinking, however, the question whether the revival was God’s doing and thus of Divine Providence must have preoccupied such minds as Hannah More, William Wilberforce and other members of the Anglican Evangelical elite, because early in the eighteenth century the Bishop of Salisbury, Gilbert Burnet, had described the new religious reawakening in the form of a number of religious societies as “having sprung up [...] by an immediate Hand of Heaven.”<sup>161</sup> (qtd. by Spaeth, 134) Burnet was one of a small group of those church men who perceived an urgent necessity of departure from persisting ideological debates<sup>162</sup> and internal disagreements. Such disagreements pertained also to such matters as the improvement of the theological training of ordinands to the priesthood, whose knowledge even of the

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<sup>158</sup> *Eclectic Review* of 1809, Vol. 5, Part II, p. 617. For a debate in the 1790s that the neglected liturgy may have played a crucial part in this matter, see the chapter on *Estimate*.

<sup>159</sup> This state of poverty persisted over a long period, for the Bishop of London, Beilby Porteus, years later, so Hannah More in a letter dated June 3, 1805 to Mr. Knox, was “at present engaged in carrying a bill through parliament for improving the incomes of curates, which will draw on him the blessings of the inferior clergy. (qtd. in Roberts II, p.122). The destitution of the clergy was so great that Hannah More felt compelled to present to many young curates, whose finances would not permit it, books of divinity with a generous hand. (See Roberts II, p. 220)

<sup>160</sup> See for instance J. Gregory and H. S. Chamberlain, eds. *The National Church in Local Perspective. The Church of England and the Regions, 1660-1800*, pp. 1-52 and Viviane Barrie, pp. 53-71.

<sup>161</sup> There is still disagreement as to where this new evangelical spirituality, which came from and was targeted to the hearts of serious Christians, found its true starting-point.

Scriptures was very poor and proved a handicap in view of the Dissenters' bible-knowledge, which left nothing to desire. In addition and above all, the reform of the Church of England from within towards an institution carried by "a true Sense of Religion" (qtd. by Spaeth, 128), and which was free from political implications, seemed to be part of the reformatory efforts of the Bishop of Salisbury. However, his remonstrance remained unheard since open criticism of the clergy and the Church was interpreted as infidelity, as was any criticism of the "disciplinary machinery against dissenters" which, so Burnet felt, was no effective means to bring dissenters<sup>163</sup> back to the Church, and therefore argued for "gentleness" (Spaeth, 129) instead. Decades later, in a lengthy and profound argument, William Law had a Methodist question an Anglican Churchman as follows:

Let me before we part, only ask you these two questions. Would you be glad to see Christianity continued in its present, poor, blind, and apostate state from the truth and life of the gospel? Or can you show me, how it can return to its first purity and perfection of godliness, unless preachers go forth in such a spirit of zeal, calling the world to Christ, as ours do?<sup>164</sup>

The Methodist is pointing at the, to his mind, in many respects low state of the Church of England, as well as the Methodists' customary field-preaching. This style of preaching intensely irritated the Anglicans, because it was perceived as "easily evaporate[ing] into enthusiasm, or degenerate[ing] into enthusiasm, or [...] into absurdity and extravagance".<sup>165</sup> And it irritated also, because it was foremost addressed to the middling and lower orders, while the higher ranks and the gentry followed the Established Church. This may serve as one more indicator that the Anglican Evangelicals were rather elitist.

The charge of 'enthusiasm' which was mainly directed towards the Methodists can be regarded as a marker and a "fault" the entire "evangelical world" (inside and outside the Anglican Church) (*Christian*

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<sup>162</sup> See the previous chapter "There is NO power but of God" in this thesis.

<sup>163</sup> In Britain dissent had a long tradition. The Act of Toleration (1689) alleviated its position, but it kept being eyed with suspicion.

<sup>164</sup> William Law. *A Dialogue Between a Methodist and a Churchman*, 22 (1760).

20 March, 2012 <<http://www.ccel.org/l/law/justific/just01.htm>>. This English cleric, divine and theological writer (1686-1761) deeply influenced the chief actors in the great Evangelical revival, but also Samuel Johnson (see James Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, Ch. 1) with *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728).

<sup>165</sup> *Christian Observer* 1808, Vol. VII, Nr. 12 (Dec), p. 783.

*Observer* 1809, VIII, Nr. 2, 101) was much liable to. The code of behaviour of the upper classes forbade such frenzy; the preaching of the Methodists thus raised the spectre of a frenzied lower class trying to teach their betters and hence, in the last consequence, the spectre of a social revolution - whatever loyalty to Church and state the leaders may have professed.

As a whole, however, it seems as if the spiritual differences between the Evangelicals and the Methodists were of no great significance, at least in the early phase of the revival. In fact, over a long period 'evangelical' was not really denominational. However, as Rosman asserts, from the 1790s on beyond the first decade of the nineteenth century, in the face of threat from outside and spreading unrest inside Britain, a "growth of denominational consciousness" (Rosman, 15) was unavoidable, together with a "growing divergence between Anglican Evangelicals and dissenting evangelicals." (Rosman, 16)<sup>166</sup> So for instance, extempore and itinerary preaching ceased to be practised by the Anglican Evangelicals, whereas it rather increased with the Methodists. The question of the avoidance of open-air preaching or, as the Baptist Divine Robert Hall termed it, "village preaching"<sup>167</sup>, was given painstaking attention. Commenting on the question of toleration and enthusiasm, he also with much verve freed dissenters and Methodists from the Anglican accusations of being fanatic and hostile towards the Established Church and schismatic in their aims. If dissenters offended this way at all, their number was extremely rare, in which case, Robert Hall argued, "the established clergy [...] [was] guilty of it ten times". (Hall, *Works II*, 178-179)

On the other end of this thinking was, for instance, Bishop Shute Barrington, who saw in the Methodists "those persons who profess the most rigid piety; who propagate their wild conceits with much eagerness; . . . who themselves vent the most extravagant notions . . .". (qtd. by Spaeth 142) In Barrington's understanding the Methodists were dangerous

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<sup>166</sup> James Bean's *Zeal Without Innovation* (1808) dedicates much room to the issue of increasing separatism, and was intensively reviewed by the *Christian Observer*, the *Evangelical Magazine* and the *Eclectic Review*.

<sup>167</sup> In defence of village preaching Robert Hall went in for "[t]he principles of toleration". With view to fanaticism which the Methodists were forever accused of, Hall meant that it

because they defied ecclesiastic authority and violated the canon, from which can be surmised that if the Methodists were defying Church authority, there always lurked the implicit, unspoken danger they might also instigate a revolution. Quite obviously, there was an insurmountable divide between liberal and illiberal forces in religious matters.

As, quite apparently, there was no making of new doctrines, but rather the revitalization of the existing ones, it must have been the way they practiced their religion which made the Methodists stand out against their Evangelical brethren: Methodism increasingly became a “lay movement with lay preachers as its chief agents” (Hylson,11), a trend averse to Wesley’s intention, but which he was unable to stop. Wesley had a “particular regard for the primitive church” (Hylson,12) in the sense of primitive practice. Apart from the Evangelicals’ rejection of certain theological aspects and the Methodists’ “over-reliance on the emotions” (Hylson,12), what counted most, however, was the problem of “church order”, in which Hylson-Smith sees “the root cause of the divergence between the two movements” (Hylson,12): the Evangelicals strictly adhered to the ordinances and existing ecclesiastical structures of the Church of England.<sup>168</sup> The Methodists’ practice of itinerant preaching by their lay preachers, for instance, was entirely in contrast to the Evangelicals’ practice and perceived as a “threat”, probably for their imputed wilful liberty and reluctance to submit to hierarchical structures. At this point, however, it is to be remembered that the Church of England herself provoked this situation by licensing the places of worship of the Methodists.

One of the most conspicuous likenesses between these revivalist movements was their condemnation of novels. “Novels”, the August edition of the *Evangelical Magazine* of 1793<sup>169</sup> said,

generally speaking, are instruments of abominations and ruin. A fond attachment to them is an irrefragable evidence of a mind

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was “an evil of short duration” and that it was “an evil much less to be dreaded than superstition”. (Hall, *Works II*, pp. 184-186)

<sup>168</sup> For the importance of the ‘church order’ respectively the liturgy, see the chapter on *Estimate*.

<sup>169</sup> “Essay on Reading”, *Evangelical Magazine* of 1793 pp. 78–80, p. 79.

contaminated, and totally unfitted for the serious pursuits of study of the delightful exercises and enjoyments of religion.”

It was a “common charge” that “evangelical faith was antagonistic to intellectual activity” (Rosman, 2). In his essay “On some of the causes by which evangelical religion has been rendered less acceptable to persons of cultivated taste”, John Foster missed in everything ‘evangelical’, as he termed anything slightly deviating from the Established Church,<sup>170</sup> “intellectual refinement” for men of taste (*Essay IV*, Letter II, 278), for which a commentary in the interdenominational *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*<sup>171</sup> could serve as an explanation:

If the literary character of the Evangelical Magazine has been somewhat below the standard of certain other contemporary publications, it is not because its active friends have had any distaste for the sanctified literature of the day, but because they have been deeply and growingly convinced, that a religious periodical, which circulates among thousands and tens of thousands of the poor and unlettered, must treat of *ordinary* subjects, in a style at once simple and unadorned ..... (*Evang. Magazine*, Preface, p. III)

That the discord between the Methodists and the Church of England then glossed over a fundamental social conflict is evinced by the attitude towards art.

If one bears in mind that most of those who were of ‘evangelical sentiment’<sup>172</sup> were urged to adhere to close studies of the Scriptures, and to consider that their time was limited and life short, time became a very precious factor and was thus to be used economically and primarily for the preparation of their souls for the life to come. Intellectual activities, thus, were more or less reserved for the well-to-do, such as Hannah More, a devoted Evangelical within the Church of England.<sup>173</sup> Sydney Smith in his

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<sup>170</sup> Rosman's footnote no. 5, p. 2, is to remind the reader to differentiate between the terms 'evangelical'/evangelicalism' (generic terms), as against Evangelical'/Evangelicalism' (Anglican branch of the movement), because, as J. Foster and S. Smith clearly prove, these terms were often used indiscriminately.

<sup>171</sup> *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* Vol. IV, New Series, 1826.

<sup>172</sup> Of 'evangelical sentiment' were *all* those who embraced the new 'vital religion'.

<sup>173</sup> At this point and for the sake of avoiding any confusion of 'evangelical' ('evangelicalism') with 'Evangelical' ('Evangelicalism'): the former are generic terms (frequently used to denote the Methodists); and the latter terms are pertaining to the Anglican branch of the movement. Therefore when John Foster missed "intellectual refinement" in anything 'evangelical' in his *Essays*; and when Sydney Smith spoke of the "evangelical faction" and "trumpery faction" and of "trash and folly of Methodism" in his



review of More's only novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* argued in the same vein that an "impossible purity" was recommended to those who were compelled "to scramble" for their existence, who had to "dig, beg, read, think, move, pay, receive, praise, scold, command, and obey" (Sydney Smith, *Works*, 145). John Foster even spoke of "intellectual Littleness" (*Essays*, p. xvii) in the persons entertaining and disseminating evangelical thought and their deficiency and dislike of all strictly intellectual "Exercise on Religion" as well as their reducing the whole of Religion to one or two favourite notions, and continually dwelling on them, all of which made it very difficult for "persons of cultivated taste" to render Evangelicalism more "acceptable".<sup>174</sup> The Establishment thus was at pains to set themselves off from the lack of sophistication of the lower orders, and thereby stressed the educated elite's claim to leadership.

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review (*Works*) of Hannah More's religious novel *Coelebs*, it seems clear that 'evangelical' and 'Evangelical' were often, even by intellectuals, not differentiated.

<sup>174</sup> See John Foster, *Essays*, pp. 247-446.

## The Evangelicals in the Church of England

But fruitless will be all attempts to sustain, much more to revive, the fainting cause of morals, unless you can in some degree restore the prevalence of Evangelical Christianity.<sup>175</sup>

Nothing could have better described the persuasive mission the Evangelicals felt themselves called upon.

The Evangelical party in the Church of England was another distinct strand evolving from the Evangelical Revival. It was, making use of Bebbington's metaphor, sharing "a wine that ha[d] been poured into many bottles" (Bebbington, 1). As a logical result, the Evangelicals, although a group in its own right, were directly and indirectly influenced by Whitefield and Wesley, who preached what the Anglican clergy failed to preach, namely the absolute truth of the Gospel. This fact together with the thirty-nine articles, which defined the doctrine of the Church of England, but which were covered with irremovable dust, made "[t]he rise of an Evangelical Party within the Church of England [...] inevitable" (Simon, 278). The Evangelicals began to lift her "above the dead level of the formalism and worldliness that afflicted the Church of England in the eighteenth century." (Simon, 279) In the second half of the eighteenth century, and particularly towards the end of it, the Evangelicals in the Church of England, one of the three strands arisen from the religious revival, gradually grew into the body of which in retrospect it can be claimed that it represented the Evangelicals' glorious phase.

Like the Methodists, the Anglican Evangelicals also had their founding fathers, for instance Samuel Walker, William Grisham, and William Romaine, followed by names like John Newton, Henry Venn, and the Saints of the Clapham Sect<sup>176</sup>. Even though the first stirrings of the religious revival occurred already before Wesley entered upon preaching, the rise of this movement seems to have been much less dramatic than that of the Methodists. Conversions, the most significant of all evangelical

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<sup>175</sup> William Wilberforce, *A Practical View*, p. 429.

<sup>176</sup> See Hylson, pp.17-32.

events, were much more spectacular in the Methodist scene than in the Evangelical one.

The Anglican Evangelicals had “to struggle for a foothold in the church” (Hylson 33). Their clergy was often prevented from celebrating mass or from preaching with often unorthodox means. These obstacles aside, the Evangelicals, which were an elitist group at the outset, by means of conversions and implementing the converted, which were largely lay people, as converter in turn, soon grew in number and importance, arriving at a point when they could no longer be ignored, neither by the clergy of the Established Church nor by the population. They were now able to comply with the Evangelical calling to save the souls of as many Christians as possible.

When Jonathan Edwards’s wife once maintained that Whitefield was “making less of the doctrines than our American preachers generally do, and aims more at affecting the heart,”<sup>177</sup> this can, of course, also be applied to the Evangelicals in the Church of England to a great extent: they were “wholeheartedly and unashamedly” (Ian Bradley, 25) appealing to the emotions. What the Evangelicals aimed at was the purity of the heart and a Christian belief which was not based on mere morality and ethics, but which embraced the entire being, asking for a spirituality that grew out of morality.<sup>178</sup> But it must not be overlooked that besides this emphasis on a heightened feeling, the doctrinal part got more than its fair share just as well. Given the doctrine of the total depravity of man and the corruption of human nature, the question was how it was possible to escape the deserved eternal damnation. The doctrine of conversion served as a logical answer, which meant repenting one’s sins and “fully accepting Christ’s death as atonement for them” (Ian Bradley, 17). Only then was the path paved for drawing as near to God as possible.

Even if these doctrines seem burdening enough, it was the way the Evangelicals arranged their life which gives us the impression that it was totally regulated by purposefulness, usefulness and ceaseless activity. No

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<sup>177</sup> See above in this chapter.

<sup>178</sup> Hannah More and her sister Martha with their teaching in the Mendips hoped not only to raise their pupils’ morals but also that their improved morality would eventually grow into spirituality. (See chapter IV. of this thesis.)

wonder if their life-style, dedicated to incessant work and performance of duty, became, as Bradley puts it, a “call to seriousness”<sup>179</sup>. Life’s ultimate purpose was, according to the Evangelicals, to use this transitory life to the best of their power in preparation for the eternal life to come. Therefore, there was no wasting of time in any way: not by pastime pleasures like singing or dancing, not by reading novels or playing cards. The Evangelicals accounted for their activities by conscientiously keeping diaries, a widely-spread habit which took on the form of a ritual.<sup>180</sup> If most pleasures in themselves were eyed with suspicion, they were quite unthinkable to be pursued on a Sabbath, the day declared as ‘sacrosanct’, the observance of which was one of the indicators for being a true Christian. Both Hannah More and William Wilberforce contributed largely to the Evangelicals’ heightening of the importance of the Sabbath to an extent which occasionally bordered on the ridiculous.

When the Evangelicals entered into their “triumphant phase”<sup>181</sup>, their difficult position eventually became alleviated, because towards the end of the eighteenth century it was clear to most that they strictly adhered to the hierarchy of Church, Government and King, at a time when “[I]oyalty, conservatism [and] Christianity, became identical” (Kiernan, 45). Since hierarchy is inevitably static to some extent and, consequently, slow in yielding to innovations or changes for the better, Hannah More and her Evangelical brethren with their views gave vent to a fresh breeze in this religious and social environment, but saw in the rise of new social trends the demolishing of the good old order rather than the benefit arising out of them. It thus seems difficult to take a clear position as to whether the Evangelicals in general were guardedly progressive or simply ultra-conservative. Unsurprisingly therefore, Hannah More’s conservative disposition made her largely focus on the past, which she glorified whenever it seemed opportune. But she also had a liberal side to her, when, for instance, she courageously tried to alleviate the desolate position of the Catholic clergy, who had fled from France in the course of

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<sup>179</sup> See Ian Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness* (1976), 2006.

<sup>180</sup> Hannah More’s diary, which was in parts included in William Roberts’ *Memoirs of Hannah More*, is a perfect example and typical of other diaries among the Evangelicals of that time.

the French Revolution. And yet, Hannah More unknowingly contributed *her* share to an insurmountable social standstill by regarding this life as a mere transitory stage in which everyone had his place given by Divine Providence, and by accepting the existing boundaries between the social ranks not only as natural but even as absolutely necessary.

Disseminating the Gospel was a main segment of the Evangelicals' 'activism'. Preaching, catechizing, teaching, philanthropy were all part of it and subordinated to this one great goal: the saving of souls. If small-scale 'bribery' was an end which justifies the means, Hannah More and her sister certainly made use of it. The donations of Bibles for regularly partaking in the school hours, or the gifts of self-knitted stockings to brides for their presumed chastity were some of the little tricks which worked very well in the Mendip schools.

Another variety of 'activism' concentrated on the publication of works to raise the morals of all social ranks. That this could only be effected by the "prevalence of Evangelical Christianity" (Wilberforce, *A Practical View*, 429) was part of the message. As some of these works, in particular those of Wilberforce and More, appeared almost simultaneously, holding the same messages, it is only due to the known integrity of these authors that the inevitable déjà-vues can be dismissed as the products of mere coincidence.

The Evangelicals were trying to set an example by the way they lived. Living up to the high standards they preached was a goal they pursued: theory and practice should not deviate; their preaching should be backed by a display of exemplary impeccability. It seemed easier to reach this goal by huddling more closely together, which they did when many of the high-brow Evangelicals moved to Clapham and formed what later erroneously came to be termed the 'Clapham Sect' and their protagonists the 'Saints'.<sup>182</sup> Prominent members were, for instance, W. Wilberforce, Zachary Macaulay, Hannah More, the Thorntons and the Venns.<sup>183</sup> Many

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<sup>181</sup> See Arthur Pollard. "The Evangelical Revival: The Triumphant Phase 1790-1830". *Churchman* 107/3, 1993.

<sup>182</sup> For the genesis of these terms see Tomkins, p.11.

<sup>183</sup> For a complete list of the members of the Clapham Sect in a rough order of importance see Stephen Tomkins, *The Clapham Sect*, p. 12.

others were part of the Clapham story, which, however, did not mean that they were also part of the Clapham Sect itself. The actual members of the Clapham Sect managed their life in the manner of a family business. From today's point of view, their closeness as a group, the way they privately dealt with each other, marrying each others' brothers and sisters, and their remoteness from the world, all make for a somewhat ambivalent picture, because besides the high-flying religious and moral motives, which propelled their benevolence and which also resulted in the achievement of many projects of general interest as well as of philanthropy,<sup>184</sup> there existed side by side with the new mood of seriousness also a good deal of gaiety and high spirits. But there was possibly also another facet to the Clapham Sect, which may be worthwhile mentioning: the Evangelicals had a tendency to steer free from the temptations of the world and to avoid the risk of getting tainted by it. Being cradled in the Clapham Sect certainly smoothed the path of realizing such aims, and at the same time reinforced the religious and social efforts of its members. Still, the way these people lived and behaved often impressed and even shamed others heavily. Charles Grenville's diary entry, for instance, was probably not a rare example illustrating the impact the 'Saints' had on others. He wrote that

a certain uneasy feeling, a conscience-stricken sensation, comes across my mind ... I see men who filled with glory their respective stations either in active or contemplative life; and then I ask myself the question how I have filled mine ... an [sic] humble station indeed, but one which might have been both useful and respectable if it had been filled as it ought. (qtd. in Ian Bradley, 172)

The Clapham Sect was also the motor of the Evangelicals' drive to snatch the heathens in the British colonies from their moral and spiritual darkness by endeavouring to convert them to real Christianity, in accordance with the Evangelicals' calling to possibly rescue the whole world, or at least, to save as many mortal souls as possible from eternal damnation. Whether the Evangelicals really believed in any equality of the black man, or whether their policies of philanthropy, forever imbued with a great portion of paternalisms, were only part of their Evangelical activism is difficult to

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<sup>184</sup> Wilberforce, for instance, stopped the Slave Trade in Britain; Hannah More set her heart on the setting up of schools in the Mendips; and the foremost rich members of the Clapham Sect gave considerable sums of money to the poor and for the benefit of social projects.

decide. Fact is, the Clapham Sect became particularly engaged in the colony of Sierra Leone, which had been set up in 1791. Under the governorship of Zachary Macaulay it was soon not only the perfect example of Evangelical missionary activity, with “300 black children in a good train of education, behaving orderly and singing their hymns quite delightfully”<sup>185</sup>, but had also become a “refuge for freed slaves” (I. Bradley, 75). Abhorring imperialistic tendencies both in the way the natives in the colonies were treated and the huge greed of profit maximizing, on the one hand, and their vision that liberating the inhabitants of the colonies from moral and spiritual darkness was only possible by establishing and extending direct British rule over these areas,<sup>186</sup> on the other hand, the Evangelicals must have felt unjustly treated by the world for being suspected of imperialistic sentiments despite all their ‘good works’.

“[T]o benefit the lower orders without letting them take control of their own lives” (Tomkins, 63) was an attitude typical of the members of the Clapham sect and one of their modes of practising benevolence and philanthropy towards the destitute and morally depraved. Hannah More herself set a concrete example when making the talented albeit poor ‘milkmaid poet’ Ann Yearsley her protégé. The proceeds from the poems, the publication of which Hannah More organized, were put into a trust fund in order to prevent the money being indiscriminately squandered by Yearsley. Hannah More herself spent the accrued interest on Yearsley and her children. It was a bitter story, with Yearsley accusing Hannah More of defrauding her of her rights. Of course, knowing the circumstances Yearsley lived in, this accusation seems ridiculous at first sight, but taking into account that Hannah More perceived Yearsley as being ungrateful and insubordinate gives the story an ambiguous turn. As so many times in More’s life, the conviction crops up that her philanthropic efforts had a strong paternalistic facet. In fact, one is reminded of the More sisters’ attitude towards the poor of the Mendip villages when in the course of their annual ‘charges’ they distributed praise or reproof for either good or bad behaviour, for expected obedience and due submission. Hannah

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<sup>185</sup> Hannah More reporting “very pleasant accounts from Sierra Leone” to a correspondent in 1793. (qtd. in I. Bradley, 75).

<sup>186</sup> See I. Bradley, p. 87.

and Martha More gave the impression of always being graciously benevolent, but fact is that they never failed to trigger the poor creatures' gratefulness by reminding them of their inferior social status. It can be supposed that their attitude was that of the Evangelicals in general and permits the conclusion that the natives of Sierra Leone, though in another continent, experienced the same paternalistic philanthropy as the poor of the Mendip villages and were exposed to the same scheme of being rescued by those who spread 'true Christianity'. The analogy between the Mendip villages and Sierra Leone seems the more justified, since even Martha More wrote in her diary that "we could not help thinking [...] [the Mendips] would become our little Sierra Leone" (qtd. in *Annals*, 43). Even if the Evangelicals' missionary campaigns "were driven by two irreducibly separate religious motives: one, to promote true religion and save souls; the other, to make life better for people and to make the world a better place," (Tomkins, 12) the question whether any motive was only the means to the other, must be denied in view of the fact that both motives were important, because the Evangelicals saw in any of their undertakings 'the work of God'.

The question of the abolition of the slave trade forced itself quite naturally on the Clapham sect. As one of their major concerns, the solution of which paved the way for a world-wide echo, it was probably the noblest deed of the Evangelicals and "the greatest example of Evangelical humanitarianism" (Bebbington, 71). It was a joint engagement with other abolitionists, of which Bristol with its sugar-refining industries and the workforce it needed was the centre. William Wilberforce brought the question of the Slave-Trade, which then was carried out by reputable persons and which was an "integral part of the West Indian trade monopoly" (M. G. Jones, 83), before Parliament, in the name of the *Committee for die Abolition of the Slave Trade*. Hannah More hastened to complete her famous poem *Slavery* for this particular event in 1788. However, what had begun with so much zeal was to become a twenty years' struggle during which many a supporter fell by the wayside, worn out by their ceaseless and tiresome struggle. Together, Hannah More and William Wilberforce kept the anti-Slave-Trade movement going. Their common awareness of the overt immorality of the age, of which the slave



trade was an integral part, and the ensuing eagerness for moral reform based on Christian standards welded them together. Wilberforce's funds and More's organizational gifts made of them a truly congenial pair, by whom the Sunday school scheme in the Mendip area was also to profit immensely.

The Sunday-school movement, which could already look back to some grass-root tradition in Britain by then, was eagerly picked up by the More sisters Hannah and Patty. With their downtroddenness and moral depravity, the Mendips were *the* place where they could put into practice their missionary visions, because there they could comply with the demands made to those Christians who were prone to become devoted Evangelicals: the centrality of the Bible as the means of spreading their faith with the end of converting those commended to them meant lastly to "form a quadrilateral of priorities" (Bebbington, 3) which constituted the basis of Evangelicalism: conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism.

## Conclusion

The preaching tradition in the eighteenth century was closely connected with the question of God-ordained rights of the Monarch, the affiliated question of the right of rebellion, as well as the hierarchical social order destined by providence. When new 'infidel' ideas of individual liberty by the *new philosophers*, inspired by the French Revolution, arose and began to creep into the minds of the lower ranks, both clergy and laity got increasingly involved in this dispute, which had actually already been going on over a long period of time, and eventually began to bear heavily upon church, monarchy and aristocracy. It was feared by the conservative intellectuals that the existing social order, which gave the higher ranks 'rightful' advantage over the lower, was in danger and that only a general moral reform, at best beginning from above, could avert it. The high orders in More's opinion had to give good examples and make themselves worthy of their providential calling. Religion as a social function and morality as a pillar of society became a leading concern of the Evangelical movement. "Religion and morals will stand or fall together," Hannah More said in her *Strictures* (I, 40), implying that only morality based on religion could avoid the end of the old order, because to More "political authority, social hierarchy and Christian church [...] were indivisible" (Hole, *Hannah More*, XXIV).

Hannah More, as an enthusiastic Anglican Evangelical, unwaveringly believed in the "doctrine of the original sin" and in the "idea of fundamental corruption" in all human beings (Hole, *Hannah More*, XXV). But, as a Christian, she was also strongly absorbed by the idea of "humility"; in fact it may be seen as one of the crucial aspects of her religious outlook. It was the issue of morality which triggered Hanna More's potential for a national rearmament in moral behaviour. It was a twofold effort for twofold interests on her end: one, to save the souls of Christians for a life thereafter and two, to maintain a social order the righteousness of which she was perfectly convinced of. From a present point of view it is difficult to decide which of the two prevailed. But it seems certain that both of them were the basis of her religious, social and literary activities; and they initiated a new

era in the life of Hannah More, from the one of the celebrated writer to a dedicated and most popular defender of morality.

How deeply rooted the principle of the 'Divine right' was in Hannah More's and her sister's minds is shown by an entry in the *Mendip Annals*, when Patty remarked that "on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October 1789, we opened our school [at Cheddar] with one hundred and forty children. [...] The clergyman, being advertised of our intention, was so very judicious as to give us a twelve minutes' discourse upon good Tory principles, upon the laws of the land and the Divine right of kings; but the Divine right of the King of kings seemed to be a law above his comprehension." (qtd. in *Annals*, 23) This entry seems to show two things: either the priest was clever enough to keep the rich farmers and landed gentry in a good mood for the purpose of the new school, or else, the laity, especially when it came from the Evangelical corner, in that case the More sisters, was stricter in its reverence for God than the somewhat drowsy clergy, who loved to side with the higher ranks as a principle.

## IV. Moralizing the British Nation

### Introduction

When Hannah More began her moralizing crusade, or, as Henry Thompson put it, her new “career of usefulness” (Thompson, 123), her targets were all social ranks: the high-born members of society; the poor in general and the working classes in particular; women as a group of their own; and, lastly, the Church of England. She felt that the high orders had a particular responsibility towards the poor, and that therefore the moral reform had to commence with the reform of the manners of the rich and great. The poor received special attention. She praised their poverty as a blessing if it was accepted as their station in life pre-ordained by providence. Provisions had to be made to an extent which permitted them to lead a God-fearing life preparatory for the life to come. For women she developed new concepts of female virtue. She termed ‘charity’ as the calling of a lady. By strengthening the Evangelical movement, she made efforts of re-vitalizing the Church of England, which showed signs of severe decline.

More’s moralizing didactic work was purposeful and often even manipulative. It must be understood before the background of fear of revolution and war, and fear of liberal tendencies enhanced by the European Enlightenment determined to end the ‘ancient regimes’. It is also to be understood as her share in conservative counter-revolutionary efforts made to ward off the French Revolution from spreading to England. Last, but most important, these efforts were part of her effort to support hierarchy as an instrument for keeping up the existing social order and social peace. She shared the belief of Dr. Samuel Johnson, whose intimate friend she was, who said to this effect:

Were all distinctions abolished, the strongest would not long acquiesce, but would endeavour to obtain a superiority by their bodily strength. [...] [Thus] subordination is very necessary for society, and contentions for superiority very dangerous, mankind, that is to say, all civilized nations, have settled it upon a plain invariable principle. A man is born to hereditary rank; or his being appointed to certain offices, gives him a certain rank. Subordination

tends greatly to human happiness. Were we all upon an equality, we should have no other enjoyment than mere animal pleasure.<sup>187</sup>

A close study of More's moralizing writings towards the end of the eighteenth and at the beginning of the nineteenth century clearly shows that Hannah More was beginning to be immersed with the doctrines of the beginning of the Evangelical revival within the Anglican Established Church. One of these doctrines was the "Evangelical willingness to speak on unpopular causes"<sup>188</sup>. Hannah More certainly did not withhold herself from complying with it. What she had begun in *Thoughts*, was intensified in *Estimate* by driving home her views on the shortcomings of the society of the fashionables, and finalized with *Strictures* by means of which she hoped to fortify what she believed to be the last moral bastion of her time, the women of *ton*.

When More had published *Thoughts* and *Estimate* as "farewell messages to the high society she was leaving", as Hess puts it (78); and as "a sort of public pledge of [her] principles", as her biographer Roberts put it (Roberts I, 281), these efforts must also be seen as the irreversible step in shifting her focal point from the very rich to the very poor, and as a public demonstration of her growing Evangelical view. This shift found its expression in the setting up of schools in the impoverished and spiritually totally neglected Mendips. Even if from today's standpoint her efforts there had no lasting effects, the alleviations Hannah More brought to this area and the rays of hope she implanted in the hearts of the demoralized inhabitants by insisting on their souls being saved by a loving God, they are worthy to be remembered.

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<sup>187</sup> James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, p. 134.

<sup>188</sup> See George P. Landow. "The Doctrines of the Evangelical Protestantism". *The Victorian Web*. 10 March 2011 <<http://www.victorianweb.org/religion/evangel2.html>>.

## **1. *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society.* (1788)**

### **Introduction**

Edmund Burke outlined his view on the importance of manners as follows:

Manners are of more importance than laws. Upon them in a great measure the laws depend. The law touches us but here and there and now and then. Manners are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform and insensible operation, like that of the air we breathe in.<sup>189</sup>

“Hell is paved with good intention” (qtd. in Roberts I, 276), Hannah More wrote to the Reverend John Newton in 1787. She seemed to grow weary and afraid that her life was passing away before reform had even begun. Restlessness seemed to preoccupy her, change was in the air. All the splendour which had surrounded her in her London time had not blinded her sight for the indifference to religion and the disregard of its principles in the higher ranks of society. But, instead of lamenting, she courageously resolved to “raise her voice against it” (Roberts I, 280). With her *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great* Hannah More was going to reprove those who had flattered and admired her.

Although “this publication was not the product of a censorious temper, but of a heart and understanding nobly engaged in the cause of God and the soul” (Roberts I, 280), she must have been well aware that this step might exclude her from the circles which had sung her song indiscriminately. She began to stride along, from a worldly point of view, the uncertain path of a Christian moralist. The “clandestine birth” (qtd. in Roberts I, 281) of *Thoughts*, Hannah More wrote to her sister in 1788, was going to be the first milestone.

Hannah More was encouraged to write *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great* by Dr. George Horne, Dean of Canterbury, as well as Bishop Beilby Porteus of London. Dr. Horne wrote to her in 1786: “You will make me extremely happy by a sight of any production of yours calculated for the benefit of the great and the gay,” for he felt that it was

“providence” which had brought Hannah More in such close contact with the high-born circles. And he was also convinced that she would avail herself of a language which was inoffensive for “critique in the common acceptation of the word” (qtd. in Roberts I, 249) In a letter of later date he then wrote to her that she possessed “the art to make [...] [the people] desirous of performing [...] [their duty] as their greatest pleasure and amusement” (qtd. in Roberts I, 250).<sup>190</sup>

Since it was perceived as quite extraordinary that someone should have the courage to tell the nobility how to behave in a morally correct and exemplary way, it seemed worthwhile to give the contemporary reception of *Thoughts* close attention.

### Contemporary Reception

In 1788, Hannah More anonymously published her first endeavour to raise the morals of the British nation, *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great*. It was verbose, repetitive, rather unorganized and parabolic, but it made a big stir, as can be inferred from various letters addressed to the author.<sup>191</sup> Bishop Porteus, for instance, spoke of the *Thoughts* as a blessing by which he was “charmed and edified”, when he wrote to Hannah More in 1787. He “was impatient to see it in the hands of every man and woman of condition in London and Westminster,” and expressed his opinion that “[t]he errata are not certainly numerous or important enough to delay the publication a moment. They may be easily corrected in all the copies with the pen.” He found that as a whole it was “a most delicious morsel” which was going to be “an excellent precursor to our society and do half its business beforehand” (qtd. in Roberts I, 273).

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<sup>189</sup> “Letters on a Regicide Peace”. *Works*, London 1803, VIII, 172. Qtd. in Quinlan, p. 69.

<sup>190</sup> Such correspondence makes it clear that *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great* was being shaped over the span of several years, although “she constructed her first methodical battery on vice and error” (Thompson, p. 79) during the summer of 1787 which she almost wholly spent at Cowslip Green.

<sup>191</sup> William Roberts' collection of Hannah More's correspondence in his *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, published 1834, are a mine of information in this respect.

Porteus was convinced that Hannah More, with Soame Jenyns<sup>192</sup> gone, was the only person who could make the “fashionable world’ read books of morality and religion, and find improvement when they [were] only looking for amusement.”<sup>193</sup> Bishop Porteus was eager to have *Thoughts* published, and apparently the only one, her family excepted, who was informed, whereas the rest of the world was puzzled as to the identity of the author.

When the Reverend John Newton wrote to Hannah More about the same time, he spoke of “a little book, addressed to the great”. As to the author he “was for a time in suspense”, but in the meantime “the prevalence of public reports” made it clear that it was from her pen. The little book was still making its round among his friends so that he could only “read it hastily over”. Still, it sufficed to enable him to congratulate More on her “consecrated pen”. The ambivalence he feels in the company of the “good sort of people”, within the “circle of politeness, elegance, and taste”, she so well describes, puts him often involuntarily off guard, he conceded. (qtd. in Roberts I, 274)

From London, Hannah More wrote to her sister in 1788: “My book is now before the public, with its sounding title, ‘Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society’.” She was to a certain extent afraid lest her own view and that of those with whom she lived a good deal of her time would sound too much alike, for she felt that in this little book she had “not gone deep”, knowing that

all we can do in a promiscuous society is not so much to start religious topics as to extract from common subjects some useful and awful truth, and to counteract the mischief of a popular sentiment by one drawn from religion; and if I do any little good, it is in this way; and this they will in a degree endure. (qtd. in Roberts I, 280)

She knew from experience that “[f]ine people are ready enough [...] reprobating vice; for they are not *all* vicious” (qtd. in Roberts I, 280). But

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<sup>192</sup> Soame Jenyns (1704–1787) was an eighteenth-century wit and politician who produced a series of poems, essays, philosophical tracts and political pamphlets. He was part of the Whig oligarchy that governed Britain from the fall of Walpole until the introduction of Edmund Burke’s Reform Bill in 1780. (Source: *The Literary Encyclopedia*. 24th May 2011 <<http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=2360>>.)

<sup>193</sup> Bishop Porteus in a letter to Hannah More, 1787, qtd. in Roberts I, p. 273.



she knew also that she had to avoid raising her critical voice to a crescendo lest her audience should shrink from her, should the authorship become known after all. She took also pains to avail herself of a balanced language. If she was critical and even reproachful in places, she was spreading rays of hopes in some others. So, for instance, she wrote:

A good spirit seems to be at work. A catholic temper is diffusing itself among all sects and parties: an enlightened candour, and a liberal toleration, were never more prevalent; good men combat each others opinions with less rancour, and better manners;<sup>194</sup> they hate each other less for those points in which they disagree, and love each other more for those points in which they join issue than they formerly did. We have many public encouragements; we have a pious king; a wise and virtuous minister; very many respectable, and not a few serious clergy. Their number I am willing to hope is daily increasing. (*Works I*, 274)

If she should succeed with her little book, however, she wrote to her sister, she would “another time [...] attack more strongly the *principle*” (qtd. in Roberts I, 280) she had put forward now; and Henry Thompson remarked to this effect that the “*Thoughts on the Manners of the Great*” were only intended to be part of a complete work, and, by the removal of bad practices, to clear the ground for the insertion of good principles.” (Thompson, 124)

In another letter of Hannah More’s to her sister, she mentioned the Bishop of Salisbury, who upon a visit termed her and Mrs. Trimmer “two very singular women, one who undertook to reform all the *poor*, and the other all the *great*,” some proof that “[t]he *secret* book seem[ed] [already] to make its way very much in the great world.” In other words, the “demon of suspicion” was awakened and “not to be lulled to sleep” (qtd. in Roberts I, 283). Hannah More imparted to her sister that she had received “the other day” an “anonymous epigram”, which ran as follows:

Of sense and religion in this little book  
All agree there’s a wonderful store;  
But while round this world for an *author* they look,  
I only am wishing for More.<sup>195</sup>

<sup>194</sup> “\*This was written before the French revolution!!” (More’s footnote).

<sup>195</sup> Qtd. in Roberts I, p. 284. “\*It was Mrs. Walsingham’s”, as Roberts’ footnote tells us.

The guess somewhat frightened Hannah More, for, as she wrote to her sister, “[w]hen the author is discovered, I shall expect to find almost every door shut against me: - *mais n’importe*, I shall only be sent to my darling retirements.”<sup>196</sup> She apparently feared the reactions of her aristocratic readers more in connection with the *Manners* than with her poem *Slave Trade*, which was published at about the same time under her name. It was beyond doubt one thing to pass strictures upon greedy slave traders, but quite another to publicly heap criticism on her gentile friends; and Hannah More perfectly knew that her hard-acquired social position was seriously at stake.

Cadell was pressing her for a fourth edition because the third “was sold off in four hours on Saturday” (qtd. in Roberts I, 288), she wrote to her sister. Cadell also told her that all the bishops were convinced that the *Thoughts* stemmed from her, but she still refused to admit her authorship, thus involuntarily triggering the awkward situation of an ‘open secret’. Shortly afterwards the fifth edition went into print. Hannah More was “astonished at the unexpected and undeserved popularity of “the Manners:” it is in the houses of all the great,” she informed her sister. Good-humouredly she added that a certain Mr. Smelt had walked up to her, saying “the ladies will give up every thing but the Sunday hair-dresser.” (qtd. in Roberts I, 289) Hannah More must have been stupefied that her concern about keeping the Sabbath had apparently made so little impression upon the fashionable ladies, but she chose to merely state that she “looked very wise”. (qtd. in Roberts I, 289)

In her effort to keep *Thoughts* anonymous, she even left her closest friends uninformed. Mrs. Boscawen obviously reproached her for not having been in the secret, for Hannah More in September 1788 answered to the former’s letter in a most apologetic way, practically enumerating the reasons for secrecy in their entirety. “This is my full and true confession,” she wrote:

I wished sincerely to try if it were not possible for me to escape detection – I therefore resolved not to name my design, nor show

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<sup>196</sup> Qtd. in Roberts I, p. 284. Hannah More was probably alluding to her beautiful garden and her love for the flowers she raised there. In a letter to Reverend John Newton of July 23, 1788 she even imparted to him that “the world [was] not half so formidable a rival to heaven in [her] heart as [her] garden.” (qtd. in Roberts I, 290)

the MS. to any one, and but one human being knew of it. Another reason for not communicating it even to such a confidential, and wise, and tried friend as yourself, my dear madam, was to save you the necessity of either confessing what would have betrayed, or denying what you knew to be true – a sacrifice of your principles which I no more dared require than you would have been willing to make : so, in full confidence of never being found out, I stole abroad. I had many reasons for wishing to be unknown, not *all* so base as the prevailing one of fear : I was conscious that I did not live up to my song, in the first place; in the second, I was seriously persuaded that my insignificant name could not add weight or strength to the book, but might *diminish* it ; and I thought the chances were, that while the author remained a secret, the “Manners of the Great” might be supposed to be the work of some wise and better person than a discovery would prove it to be. With all these sage thoughts in my head, judge of my confusion the first three days, to receive above half a dozen letters of kind congratulations from my detectors. I have never answered any of them, for what could I say ? I am, however, really sorry for it. I thought it a master-stroke of policy not to send either Mrs. Garrick or you a copy, as it would, I fancied be conceived impossible that, had it been mine, that could have been omitted.

My dear madam, I truly think that you must be among the very few to whom thus bold little book will not give offence. Pray write to me *sans management* what they (I mean those to whom it is addressed) say of it, for I know nothing here [in Cowslip Green], only Cadell sends me word another new edition is wanted.  
(qtd. in Roberts I, 301)

Quite obviously, Hannah More was anticipating “severe judgement” from those under her critique, but hoped that the “flutter of the book” (qtd. in Roberts I, 302) would soon be over, which apparently was the case. If we can trust her biographer, the uproar died down after a while, and on January 6, 1789 she informed her sister about the seventh edition of *Thoughts*, which she was asked by Cadell to correct. “Instead of being thankful as I ought,” she wrote, “I was rather provoked at such a disagreeable job. All the private accounts of the king are still better than the public ones” (qtd. in Roberts I, 303). Hannah More had quite obviously already begun to proceed from the particular to the general, already envisaging new concepts to be realized. For she answered Mrs. Carter, who had seemingly drawn Hannah More’s attention to a pamphlet printed of the size of the “Manners of the Great”, probably ascribed to More’s authorship, that she “[knew] nothing of the pamphlet advertised [...] except that [she] did not write it.” Encouraged by her friends, she would not even

take public notice of it, because she was convinced that “if it does the slightest good, it is no matter who wrote it, or how it was written.”<sup>197</sup> (qtd. in Roberts I, 322)

Many years later, Hannah More defended her original anonymity in the case of the *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society* and her *Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*, which appeared in 1790, in a preface as follows:

There is, however, one decided advantage which belongs to the anonymous writer. He is not restrained from the strongest reprehension, and most pointed censure, of existing errors, by the conscious apprehension that his own faults may be brought forward. He is under no fear that his negligences will be opposed to his reproofs. He is not deterred from expatiating on the deficiencies of others, by the fear that the reader may confront his life with his arguments.<sup>198</sup>

It was truly one of her apprehensions that the readers she found fault with would draw comparisons between the principles she extolled and demanded them to heed in *Thoughts* and the example she was able to render herself in living up to them. More had written *Thoughts* during a time of transition from her public life in London to a time of seclusion in her country house. She was much overcome by doubts in the worthiness of her own person, and the failure to feel the presence of God, which rather toned down her self-confidence, as diary entries show.

Henry Thompson did not speculate in depth “on the maxims which prevailed among the great of the period and formed the foundation of their practise” and which were the result of habits grown over a long period and “remote causes” (Thompson, 124), but referred to Bishop Heber<sup>199</sup> instead, who thought “worldly amusements” as “allowable and blameless” provided they did “not exceed the limits of moderation”. (*The Life of Reginald Heber*, 398-99) However, he strictly excepted from this

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<sup>197</sup> Hannah More’s abhorrence of being involved in public notice in order to defend herself was again evident when she refused to take legal steps against her calumniators during the Blagdon Controversy.

<sup>198</sup> Hannah More. *The Works of Hannah More*. London: Cadell and Davies, 1818, Vol. 6, p. iv. (Qtd. in Christine L. Krueger. *The Reader’s Repentance. Women Preachers, Women Writers, and Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse*. Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 105)

<sup>199</sup> Reginald Heber (1783 –1826) was the Church of England’s Bishop of Calcutta (a bishopric now part of the Church of North India) who is now remembered chiefly as a hymn-writer. (Source: *Wikipedia*)

concession “Sunday evening parties, to which [...] [he had] a very serious objection.” On the other hand “[h]e thought that the strictness which made no distinction between things blameable only in their abuse, and practices which were really immoral, was prejudicial to the interests of true religion.” (*The Life of Reginald Heber*, 398-99) Maybe the Reverend Thompson felt the same way as Bishop Heber, and suspected that Hannah More unnecessarily crossed the border lines between these two aspects at times.

Bishop Heber was but one of those who felt ambivalent about *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great*. In her diary Fanny Burney in 1795 commented on the work as follows:

The design is very laudable, and speaks a mind earnest to promote religion and its duties; but it sometimes points out imperfections almost unavoidable, with amendments almost impracticable.  
(qtd. in Joyce Hemlow)<sup>200</sup>

More, however, also met with severe contemporary disapproval. It was Horace Walpole who took Hannah More harshly “to task [...] for having exhibited such monstrously severe doctrines,” and defended

the fourth commandment [...] [as] the most amiable and merciful law that ever was promulgated, as it entirely consider[ed] the ease and comfort of the hard-labouring poor, and beasts of burden; but that it was never intended for persons of fashions who have no occasion for rest, as they never do any thing on the other days; and indeed at the time the law was made there were no people of fashion.<sup>201</sup>

Horace Walpole fervently disapproved of More's attitude, but failed to impress her, as a letter to her sister proves, in which she expressed her amusement about Walpole's indignation at her having “fallen into the heresy of puritanical strictness” (qtd. in Roberts I, p. 288). What caused this new upsurge of religious zeal is a matter of debate among modern critics. This kind of “new Puritanism”, according to Stott (260), had nothing much in common with religious belief but was a brand of prudery, a new rage among the fashionable, especially women, in the wake of the French Revolution, remotely reminiscent of Rousseau's *retournons à la nature*, when many turned their back on the “allurements of the ball” (Stott, 260)

<sup>200</sup> Joyce Hemlow, “Fanny Burney and the Courtesy Books”, p. 748.

<sup>201</sup> Hanna More in a letter to her sister in 1788 (qtd. in Roberts I, p. 288).

and devoted themselves to philanthropy instead. Maybe, however, this prudery was merely a ‘Victorian prelude’<sup>202</sup>. It is also possible to see a truth in M. D. George’s assertion that it was the reaction of “a society frightened into good behaviour by the French Revolution.”<sup>203</sup> What is certainly true is that the nation in its uncertainty how to cope with the steadily changing economic, social and moral situation, and charged with revolutionary tendencies, was in search of stability and principles which could be relied on. Therefore, it seems adequate to choose a middle-path when assessing the situation towards the end of the eighteenth century between alleged prudery and fear of revolution. Hannah More, endowed with a well-developed sense of utility, certainly did not ask for the motives of the increasing philanthropy for the poor, even if, from the religious point of view, they played a significant role, as More later demonstrated in *Estimate*. If philanthropy, thus, did become a fashion to the affluent, to her it was certainly part of the Evangelical *activism* she adopted with growing zeal.

The *Analytical Review*, which dedicated much room to a review of Hannah More’s *Thoughts*, was not uncritical either. In the tradition of the literary criticism of this period, with long excerpts and discussions, it offered a moral point of view. Although More’s authorship had not yet been unveiled, the *Analytical Review* understood the essay to be ascribed to her. It appreciated *Thoughts* for paying particular attention to the “violation and neglect of the sabbath.” (*Analytical Review*, 468-469)<sup>204</sup> Although it considered *Thoughts* to be of “considerable merit”, and in some reflections as “distinguished for eloquence and wit, extravagance and profligacy,” its language was termed as possibly “too artificial, the sentiments [...] [as] often trite, and the great, as they are called, [...] [as being] treated with a deference, to which, from an author, they are not entitled.” (*Analytical*

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<sup>202</sup> See Maurice James Quinlan. *Victorian Prelude*, 1941.

<sup>203</sup> M. D. George. Review of Maurice J. Quinlan’s “Victorian Prelude”. *The Review of English Studies*, p. 221.

<sup>204</sup> *Analytical Review*, 1 (August, 1788), pp. 468-471. Another review in the same issue of the *Analytical Review*, p. 468, which was titled “A LETTER from a Lady to her Daughter, on the Manner of passing Sunday rationally and agreeably”, is proof that the Sabbath was, then, a subject of some interest to many after all. This monthly magazine even deplored the fact that the reviewed letter on the subject was concluded by its authoress in too much haste.

Review, 469) As a whole, however, the *Analytical Review* rated the book to be “one of Moore’s [sic] best productions.”<sup>205</sup>

Quite contrary to the *Analytical Review*, the Reverend William Shaw [Rev. Sir Archibald Mac Sarcasm, Bart.], a contemporary of Hannah More’s, and one of her most severe critics in the later Blagdon controversy, did not pay *Thoughts* serious attention but for a short and harsh analysis he made years later in his biography *The Life of Hannah More With a Critical Review of her Writings* (1802). He found *Thoughts* difficult to analyse for “its manner being altogether immethodical, desultory and abrupt” (92).<sup>206</sup> Maybe it was for this reason that More’s *Thoughts* only found very few modern interpreters – with the exception of M. G. Jones in *Hannah More* (1952), Ford K. Brown in *Fathers of the Victorians* (1961), Charles Howard Ford in *Hannah More. A Critical Biography* (1996), and Anne Stott in *Hannah More. The First Victorian* (2003), who dealt with it at some length – quite apparently underestimating the fact that this uncoordinated torrent of words in fact constituted the matrix for all her future writings.

### **A "Slight Performance" Against the Negligence of Good Manners**

Hannah More derived the idea of the “present slight performance” (*Works I*, 264-65), as she referred to her *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great*, from King George’s “Royal proclamation against irreligion and immorality”<sup>207</sup>, published on 1 June 1787, and began her epistle saying that it was “written neither for the foolish nor the vicious”. To her the subject was “too serious for ridicule” and its addressees “too respectable for satire”, for they belonged to the “*good kind of people* [...], persons of rank and fortune who live within the restraints of moral obligation, and acknowledge the truth, of the Christian religion.” (*Works I*,

<sup>205</sup> Review of “Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society”. *Analytical Review*, 1 (August, 1788), pp. 468-471.

<sup>206</sup> If it were not for his unnecessarily alluding to Peter Pindar, the most notorious satirist at the time, Shaw’s critical notes would have gained more weight and serious consideration.

<sup>207</sup> William Wilberforce, More’s future ‘comrade-in-arms’ in matters of moral rearmament, similarly, had his idea suggested by a society formed in 1692 for the reformation of manners. See *William Wilberforce. The Story of a Great Crusade* by Travers Buxton, 1933, p.133.

262) They were the “decent class commonly described by the term *good sort of people*, that mixed kind of character in which virtue appears, if it do [sic] not predominate.” (*Works I*, 263) She warned these *good kind of people* of rank and fortune, who, according to More’s appraisal, occupied the “middle region of morality”, against [i]nconsideration, fashion, and the world [...] [as the] three confederates against virtue,” and urged them to beware of a “fair reputation” gained by the “complaisant conformity” and “mere decorum of manners without a strict attention to religious principles.”(*Works I*, 262)<sup>208</sup> More feared that both their spirituality and their hearts were in acute danger owing to “unrestrained indulgence of pleasure” (*Works I*, 263); and critically noted that the good sort of people often considered religion “as a medium to reconcile peace of conscience with a life of pleasure.” (*Works I*, 272) Curiously, she suspected that those who did not yield to temptation were fasting voluptuaries with the mere purpose of “giv[ing] keener relish to the delights of the next repast.” (*Works I*, 268) The thought here is unavoidable that either Hannah More was ridden by an exuberant imagination or else the moral state had really reached a level which was badly in need of reform.

Moral degeneracy was to Hannah More to a large extent the result of an incessant development over years. Since the *good people* indiscriminately crossed the border line between good and evil, the clear distinction became eventually blurred.<sup>209</sup> She therefore warned her readers to “beware of lowering the STANDARD OF THE RIGHT” (*Works I*, 270) in view of this development, namely by allowing sins of omission, when repeated over and over again, to turn into a habit without harm. A great deal of the degeneracy of morals she ascribed to what she called “polite conversation”, when the word “Gallantry” was misused for belittling deeds that were damaging or even destroying “domestic happiness and conjugal

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<sup>208</sup> Mere “outward conformity“, however, was a point Wilberforce, as Evangelical leader, paid attention to in *Practical View* (1797), especially in Chapter IV, passim. With the middle and upper classes, he saw their propensity to rest in their “worldly standards of good behaviour” as a “hollow idol [...] [which] barred further progress.” A “comfortable conflation of worldly manners and morality with Christianity deluded people about the true state of their souls.” (Michael Curtin. “A Question of Manners” *The Journal of Modern History*, p. 407).

<sup>209</sup> See *Works I*, p. 269.



virtue.”<sup>210</sup> Gallantry was a synonym for the failure of distinguishing between right and wrong which named “[t]he most grave offences [...] with cool indifference.” (*Works I*, 269) She then turned, as closely connected with the matter of polite conversation, to the “*good kind of people’s*” growing tendency

to separate what God has joined, belief and practice; the creed and the commandments; action and motives; moral duty and religious obedience, (*Works I*, 272)

for Christian virtues, Hannah More maintained, derive their brightness best from associating these properties.

Nevertheless, she was rather hopeful her “slight hints” (*Works I*, 262) would appeal to the conscience of the rich and titled. For to be rich was not a fault in itself; she declared; but that the rich man trusted in his riches was repugnant, because, with the world’s applause as the motive for his good deeds in mind, “his charity wanted that principle which alone could sanctify it” (*Works I*, 263), and the absence of piety made it without value in the eyes of God.<sup>211</sup>

Particularly disgusting to More’s mind was the way the rich and great systematically corrupted their servants by commanding them to lie, and thus instilling falsehood in them. The spirit of lying was common ground and the sentence “not at home” a standard phrase with the purpose of getting rid of unwelcome visitors. This kind of falsehood created an unnatural and inappropriate conspiracy between master and servant, certainly not apt to keep up a respectful relationship. In the long run, it was disastrously damaging the hierarchical order and badly infringing the social order, which ought to be based on mutual respect, fairness, and regard. Master and servants formed an alliance which the rich could only dissolve at the cost of the servants’ loyalty, triggering their hostility or ill will, even if it did not become too conspicuous. Another way of corrupting the servants was the custom of paying card money, then known as “vail”,

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<sup>210</sup> Singularly, John Bowles remarked that “[t]he most unerring test of the morals of society, at any given period, is the degree of respect which is paid to the nuptial engagement. In proportion as this engagement is viewed with reverence, and observed with fidelity, an age may, with certainty, be denominated virtuous.” (*A View of the Moral State*, p. 29) To him the “respect for the nuptial tie [...] [was] next to [the] Religious principle, [...] the main bond of society.” (*A View*, p. xi)

paid by their masters' guests for such services as serving wine during card assemblies. This habit was a severe stumbling-block to Hannah More, because, in the course of years, card money had become part of the wages paid to them, and it seemed immoral to her how servants had to twist their minds how to get at their money.<sup>212</sup>

Hannah More's focus was much directed at the exploitation of servants on the Sabbath, a matter that made "great oaks from little acorns grow", but she threw also a critical eye

on the holders of card assemblies on Sundays; the frequenters of taverns and gaming houses; the printer of Sunday newspapers; the proprietors of Sunday Stage-coaches; and others who openly insult the laws of the land; laws which will always be held sacred by good subjects, even were not the law of God antecedent to them. (*Works I*, 265)

### **Honour the Sunday! "Great oaks from little acorns grow ....."**

Hannah More's strictures on some of the elite's practices, which were "less obvious offences as are, in general, safe from the bar, the pulpit, and the throne" (*Works I*, 264), and of "no ill intention, but custom and habit" (*Works I*, 265), might be regarded as insignificant at first glance, and therefore give rise to astonishment to the reader of today's secularized society. She was dissatisfied with the habitual negligence of the observation of the Sabbath and remarked:

It is obvious to all pious persons, that that branch of the divine law, against which the better kind of people trespass with the least scruple, is the fourth commandment. Many who would shudder at the violation of the other nine, seem without ceremony to expunge this from the Divine code; but by what authority they do this, has never been explained. The Christian legislator does not seem to have abridged the commandments: and there is no subsequent authority so much as pretended to by Protestants. (*Works I*, 265)

Hannah More, along with "many wise and good men", was convinced "that Christianity [...] [would] stand or fall, as this day is neglected or observed."

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<sup>211</sup> Additional attention is paid to the issue of charity later in this paper.

<sup>212</sup> This custom particularly put off guests from abroad who could not understand that a guest had to pay for the served wine.

(*Works I*, 269) As she advocated in her writings that the British were God's chosen people, it was clear that they had to please Him by adhering to His commandments. This demanded the acquisition of "fixed principles" as "principles of the heart", for an "extempore Christian [...] [was] a ridiculous character" (*Works I*, 273), so More. One of these principles was the observance of the Sabbath. But it was the fourth commandment at which the *better kind of people* "trespassed with the least scruple." (*Works I*, 265)

As the Evangelicals were in nothing more vehement than in their Sabbatarianism, the Sabbath was absolutely sacrosanct to Hannah More. Nor was she alone in this attitude. On the contrary, the strict observance of the 'Sabbath' was an important precept of many zealous Evangelicals. Although this thesis does not go in for a survey of the historical development of the Sabbath, it is important to know that there had been century-long debates before the Sabbath was shaped into the form practiced in Hannah More's time,<sup>213</sup> and that it was only in the course of the eighteenth century that the formal incorporation of the strict observance of the 'Sunday' into the life of the English happened.<sup>214</sup> More, well read in theological literature, must have been familiar with the following entry into *The Two Books of Homilies* (1859)<sup>215</sup>:

God hath given express charge to all men [...] that upon the Sabbath day, which is now our Sunday, they should cease from all weekly and workday labour; to the intent that, like as God himself wrought six days, and rested the seventh, and blessed and sanctified it, and consecrated it to the quietness and rest from labour, even so God's obedient people should use the Sunday holily, and rest from their common and daily business, and also give themselves exercises of God's true religion and service.<sup>216</sup>

Most likely, she was also aware of what Henry Sandes, one of the protagonists of the Dedham conference, insisted upon, namely that

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<sup>213</sup> One of the earliest debates on the Sabbath in sixteenth century England is preserved in the "Dedham Papers", a collection of minutes, correspondence, and notes of the Puritan-Presbyterian conference of pastors which met at Dedham from 1582-1589. (John H. Primus. "The Dedham Sabbath Debate, pp. 87-102.)

<sup>214</sup> See Max Levy. *Der Sabbath in England*, p. 272.

<sup>215</sup> Hannah More must have had access to an earlier edition of the *Homilies*, because the editor of the 1859 edition, J. Griffiths, remarked in his preface that the first *Homilies* stem from 1547, the year of death of Henry VIII and that the following editions remained practically unchanged. So we may take this excerpt for being absolutely authentic.

<sup>216</sup> Qtd. from J. Griffiths, ed. *The Two Books of Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches*, pp. 339, 340.

Sunday worship was not merely instituted and initiated by the church, “but came from heaven and therefore [...] [was] more weighty.”<sup>217</sup> And she probably knew that Puritan preachers in 1607 considered for instance “to play at bowls on Sunday afternoons,” as Calvin was used to, “as great a sin as to kill a man.”<sup>218</sup> Elisabeth Jay wrote about the Evangelical observance of the Sabbath in the nineteenth's century, quoting Thackeray, that at Clapham, the centre of the Evangelicals, the word ‘Sunday’ was “scarcely known”, whereas the term ‘Sabbath’ was “offensive to non-Evangelical ears” (Jay, 183). There must have been some uncertainty about the use of the two terms in general. On the other hand, Jay mentions a letter of George Eliot’s, saying “Our Sunday is really a Sabbath now – a day of thorough peace.”<sup>219</sup> She certainly belonged to those who seemed to have no problem in moving between ‘Sunday’ and ‘Sabbath’, like James Stonehouse who in a letter to Sarah More<sup>220</sup> complained about the music on the terrace on ‘Sundays’ which was “pregnant with evil from Windsor to London” giving a bad example to the youths of Eton. However, he wrote, “a proclamation against vice and profaning the Sabbath [was] ordered to be read quarterly in our churches.”

The Society for the Suppression of Vice, founded in 1802, had the suppression of Sabbath-breaking as one of its major aims. Wilberforce even tried to get an act passed prohibiting the sale of Sunday newspapers, which were just coming on the market, and endeavoured to prevent Sunday travelling on government business.<sup>221</sup> In 1809, in order to lessen the burden of activities of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, Wilberforce founded ‘The Society for the Better Observance of Sunday’. It is a curiosity that as an Evangelical he should have used the term ‘Sunday’, but, as Jay maintains, the term Sabbath was truly offensive to non-Evangelicals. Wilberforce, it must be assumed, once more made a concession to the effect that too much zeal hardly ever finds open ears.

<sup>217</sup> Qtd. in John H. Primus. “The Dadham Sabbath Debate”, p. 93.

<sup>218</sup> See Levin L. Schücking. Review of Max Levy “Der Sabbath in England: Wesen und Entwicklung des Englischen Sonntags.” *The Modern Language Review*, p. 468.

<sup>219</sup> J. W. Cross. *George Eliot’s Life*, iii, p. 233. Qtd. in Jay, p. 183, note 382.

<sup>220</sup> Letter dated Oct 17, 1791. Qtd. in Roberts I, p. 380.

<sup>221</sup> See Jay, pp. 184-185.

Since in the genteel households the salaried servants were depending on their masters' habits, it was entirely in their hands as to how Sundays were spent by the staff. Not only was their good example necessary, which was to be copied by the lower orders, but the rich were also urged to concede to their servants ample free time for saving their souls by getting down to prayers and joining the religious services. These deliberations offered a whole set of reasons in favour of reforming the great in the first place, lest "it [the reform] will never be effectual" (*Works I*, 274), so More. It was certainly her deeply felt conviction that the bad examples of the rich were weakening their authority within the given social hierarchy. Their good example would trickle down to the lower orders and by this ignite a moral revolution from above. Only by doing so, would the privileged orders protect the hierarchy over which they presided. This indicates that More's concern about Sunday observance was not only based on religious motives but also had a political and social background, namely her fear that the status quo, the traditional social hierarchy, might be endangered if the lower classes lost respect for their social "betters" and indulged in what More called vice.

Hannah More's troubling about Sabbatarian habits was grounded in her religious upbringing, her provincial middle class background, and her increasing Evangelical orientation. It was undeniable that any lack of observance of the Lord's Day by the higher ranks had its impact on the lower ones. Such behaviour unveiled "elitism" (Ford, 95) among the rich in as much as they totally ignored the needs of their servants and artisans with respect to their spiritual and recreational welfare. Sunday recreations and leisure activities of the rich involved the lower classes to a large extent, exploiting their capacity for work and their dependency on their masters beyond measure. From this point of view, the enforcing of strict Sabbatarian habits on the part of the Evangelicals cannot merely be classified as reactionary attempts at keeping up the *ancien régime*, but, besides a deeply religious component, also indicates a genuine social concern for the well-being of the less privileged people, who were to be granted some leisure time and rest from labour - even though primarily for the sake of religious devotion on Sundays. More's criticism in this connection was directed to those who by "the goodness of Providence [...]"

[had] neither labour from which to rest, nor business from which to refrain.” Was it then forward to ask for a “little abstinence from pleasure [...] [as] the only valid evidence they have to give of their obedience to the divine precept?” (*Works I*, 267)

One of the “petty domestic evils” (*Works I*, 265) was the employment of hairdressers, for whom “[t]he Sunday shines, [but is] no day of rest to them”, Hannah More wrote and asked whether it was not “cruelty on the souls of men, whose whole lives are employed in embellishing our persons?” (*Works I*, 265) How could it be that to those very people who would not hesitate to “gladly contribute to a mission of Christianity to Japan or Otaheite, [...] it never occurred that the hair-dresser, whom they [...] [were] every Sunday detaining from church has a soul to be saved,” she wondered. It was inconceivable to her that while people were ready to promote Christianity in another hemisphere, their example given at home was food for much negative thought, and that they were doing good at a distance while neglecting their domestic duties at home. Hannah More even went so far as to wish in a ‘revolutionary’ vein for legal means which would forbid such immoral employment by suggesting that “the law of the land [ought to] co-operate with the law of God.” (*Works I*, 265)

William Wilberforce, who was a man of strong religious and moral principles, also deeply deplored the general negligence of the Lord’s Day. He presided over the Society for the Reformation of Manners, which he had founded in 1787 as the ‘Proclamation Society’ in order to put into action King George’s III’s royal proclamation against irreligion and immorality, and endeavoured to make the subject of Sunday observance a legal matter. As he perceived, however, that it was society’s elite which made up the bulk of the trespassers, invoking the law for this particular application seemed unwise. Thus, the Society for the Reformation of Manners took to “influencing public opinion towards securing a graver observance of the [...] [Sabbath]” instead, and Wilberforce, who had a very strong personal feeling about the keeping of the Sabbath, raised his voice in Parliament for this cause. There he criticised the practice of “Sunday drilling of volunteers,” and courageously and uncompromisingly

as always, even “attacked the Speaker as to his Sunday receptions, [...] incur[ing] the charge of inflicting a personal insult by this request.”<sup>222</sup>

The Sunday-concerts the higher ranks were prone to attending were another matter which met with Hannah More’s criticism. In this case, the rich and high-born were not only stealing their servants’ time but were also risking their morals. Loitering in the streets while waiting for their masters to be picked up and brought home again after the concerts exposed them, when left without any supervision, to considerable danger for body and soul. Hannah More anticipated sneers from the readers for being asked to refrain even from such venerated amusements as Sunday-concerts. However, she had not exclusively the averse effects on the servants in mind, but, already foreshadowing her next moral work, *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*, began with her increasing puritanism to dig more deeply into the high-born society’s life and habits.

That in honouring the Sabbath theory and practice were often far apart is shown by the following example. One of More's close friends, Dr. Johnson, knew perfectly well how the Sabbath ought to be spent in a Christian manner, because in a diary entry, he illustrated a "scheme of life, for Sunday" as follows:

- ‘1. To rise early, and in order to it, to go to sleep early on Saturday.
- ‘2. To use some extraordinary devotion in the morning.
- ‘3. To examine the tenor of my life, and particularly the last week; and to mark my advances in religion, or recession from it.
- ‘4. To read the Scripture methodically with such helps as are at hand.
- ‘5. To go to church twice.
- ‘6. To read books of Divinity, either speculative or practical.
- ‘7. To instruct my family.
- ‘8. To wear off by meditation any worldly soil contracted in the week.’

However, even Johnson, who obviously was "not without an habitual reverence for the Sabbath" (qtd. in *Life of Johnson I*, 250), felt that he had not given it the attention, which a Christian's duty required.

These moral and religious guidelines, if put into practice, seem to perfectly fit into Hannah More’s notion of how the Sabbath ought to be spent ideally

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<sup>222</sup> Travers Buxton. *William Wilberforce. The Story of a Great Crusade*, 1933, pp. 134-135.

as a Christian. However, in general, the elite had lost sight of such Christian principles and preferred to see their presumably noxious shortcomings, as if “*there [...] [was] no harm in [...] [them],*” as More ironically noted. (*Works I*, 269)

Hannah More also found fault with the habit of the great to travel on Sundays. While the “sons of industry” (*Works I*, 274) followed the royal proclamation and abstained from travelling to avoid fines, the great made even more frequent use of the now unobstructed roads. It was very typical of the rich not to refrain from offences for which the poor were fined and imprisoned, and thus gave but one more of many examples how the double-standard was practiced.

Strangely enough, More was even averse to frequenting public walks and gardens on that day. Although it was as perfectly harmless a diversion on a Sunday as could be, she feared that “the gayety of the scene” might “indispose the mind for the duty” of reverence for God. (*Works I*, 268) It seems that Hannah More here, as in many other instances, grossly overdid her efforts of regulating sabbatarian behaviour of the upper ranks, because they strikingly contrasted with her rather eager denial that religion was devoid of any worldly pleasures. This therefore gives rise to the question of what were the pleasures she envisaged after all? Her answer was “cheerful, innocent, and instructive conversation”, giving no chance to talking scandal, as well as “retirement, friendship, intellect and beneficence.” (*Works I*, 275) Her Evangelical orientation rejected dancing and balls. She certainly was, as Anne Stott puts it, “at odds with the world of public entertainment” (*The First Victorian*, 260). This fact had not clearly come out in *Thoughts* yet, but became a matter of some importance in her *Strictures*, giving rise to much indignation; and which was certainly one of the signposts on her way to being ironically named ‘the bishop in petticoats’, a woman who had turned away from the world.

It was obvious that she expected from her readers a spirituality many were either not prepared or not able to adhere to. It should also be permitted to speculate whether the great she addressed were not greatly flattered when they were thought of being able to and therefore expected by Hannah More to live up to the highest moral standards, even if their



awareness of good and bad was, as More claimed, blurred. This subversive element of flattery Hannah More allowed to permeate her epistles ingeniously compensated for the many attacks on the *good people's* corroded morals.

However, despite her Evangelical strictness to forbid almost any pleasures on the Sabbath, Hannah More, rather surprisingly, made an effort to take away some of the sternness her readers must have felt with regard to her Sabbath 'prohibitions'. She possibly feared they might get a wrong idea about Evangelical strictness and pleasures in general, and, proving that her theoretical side was often at odds with her practical bent, tried with inconsistent reasoning to make religion more palatable by putting it in the right light as a moral matrix. She tried to lift her "garment of sadness in which people delight[ed] to suppose her dressed" (*Works I*, 271); and to relieve it from the "overcharged picture" given her by her enemies, for she was "not so tyrannizing as appetite, so exacting as the world, nor so despotic as fashion." (*Works I*, 272) For this sake More even permitted some kind of 'liberality' by recommending that her readers follow any model of religion or philosophy "we admire", because "though we may be wrong, we shall not be absurd; we may be erroneous, but we shall not be inconsistent" by "indecision of spirit" and "instability of conduct." (*Works I*, 273) But of course, she hastened to add that in reality, with the Bible in our hands, there was no plausible reason to go on searching in religious matters. Not infrequently, as this example shows, Hannah More was willing to make half-hearted concessions when it served her purpose. In view of her open distaste for popery and Catholicism, however, her supposed 'liberalism' sounds rather incredible. Such inconsistency is not to be found in the kind of liberalism Samuel Johnson was known for. He, in contrast, was tolerant of Roman Catholicism and of the opinion that Christian charity was part of religious tolerance:

Men may differ from each other in many religious opinions, and yet all may retain the essentials of christianity [sic]; men may sometimes eagerly dispute, and yet not differ much from one another: the rigorous persecutors of error [sic] should, therefore, enlighten their zeal with knowledge, and temper their orthodoxy with charity, that charity, without which orthodoxy is vain.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> J.R. Brink, quoting Samuel Johnson in "Johnson and Milton". *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, p. 503.

Johnson, combining his understanding of charity and tolerance, was aware that with “regard to religion little was to be gained by zealous controversy.” (Brink, 503)

Hannah More enumerated a whole catalogue of advantages religion offered, asking:

Does Religion forbid the cheerful enjoyments of life as rigorously as *Avarice* forbids them? Does she require such sacrifices of our ease as *Ambition*, or such renunciation of our quiet as *Pride*? Does she destroy health like *Intemperance*? Does she annihilate Fortune like *Gaming*? Does she embitter Life like *Discord*? ; or abridge it like? Does Religion impose more vigilance than *Suspicion*? or inflict half as many mortifications as *Vanity*? [emphasizes added]  
(*Works I*, 272)

All of the given examples out of many “balance[d] clearly on the side of religion, even in the article of pleasure,” (*Works I*, 272) she assured her readers. Hannah More here deliberately named several vices which compared very unfavourably with her estimate of practiced religion. Some of them had already become an intrinsic part of the behavioural standard of the middle and upper classes, as for instance, the habit of duelling. Seen in retrospective, “duelling [was] the best index to, and proof of, the survival and power of the aristocratic ideal”, but was rejected by Christian moral standards as “a deliberate act of rebellion [against law and religion]”.<sup>224</sup>

### **'Duels of Honour' as Reflection of Social Elitism**

Although duelling is only mentioned once in *Thoughts*, we know that the immoral nature and senselessness of duelling was very much at the heart of Hannah More,<sup>225</sup> and she was not alone in her concern. Towards the end of the eighteenth century it was still a phenomenon frequently made use of. Therefore, it is astonishing that Hannah More should be so restrained in *Thoughts* with regard to the issue of duelling. Clearly abhorring this practice for religious and ethical reasons, she obviously did

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<sup>224</sup> See J.C.D. Clark. *English Society, 1688-1832* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 109. More about duelling see below in this thesis.

not wish to grasp this nettle lest she should jeopardize her moralizing efforts right from the beginning by entering this most sensible field. 'Duels of honour' in the circle of the gentry and nobility, in which Hannah More moved, represented an important means of "reflection of social elitism and aristocratic codes of conduct", as claimed by Shannon Raelene Heath, who associates it with "status and power" (7).<sup>226</sup> But More was not alone in her abhorrence of duels. According to Johnson, duelling could also be a mere defence strategy:

He, then, who fights a duel, does not fight from passion against his antagonist, but from self-defense; to avert the stigma of the world, and to prevent himself from being driven out of society.  
(Boswell, *Johnson*, qtd. in Heath, 1)

Donna T. Andrew, referring to Jeremy Bentham, maintains that

[m]en fight duels [...] because public opinion demands it of them [...] [and because], [b]y being labelled a coward, his public career, as well as his private creditability and integrity are questioned and overturned.<sup>227</sup>

Even if duelling codes had the "formality of a church service", so Kiernan (qtd. in Heath, 9), this certainly did not provide them with religious sanction or give them a spiritual tinge, as Wilberforce made clear in his *A Practical View* (1797). He said that in a religion where purity of heart is required and "thought is action" (231), a duellist is guilty of committing a crime, because he is determined to commit it "when circumstances shall call upon him to do so." (231) The "essential guilt", so Wilberforce, rested in

a deliberate preference of the favour of man, before the favour and approbation of God", in *articulo mortis*, in an instance, where – in our own life, and that of a fellow-creature are at stake, and wherein we run the risk of rushing into the presence of our Maker in the very act of offending him. (*A Practical View*, 230)

He characterized duelling as "a practice which, to the disgrace of a Christian society, has long been suffered to exist with little restraint or opposition" (229), with its overrating worldly credit and its often resting on criminal principles based on "malice and revenge" (230).

Wilberforce's damnation of duelling a decade after the publication of More's *Thoughts*, did induce him to make it an issue in Parliament, as he

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<sup>225</sup> Duelling aside, Hannah More saw the "magnificence in the remnants of chivalry and old grandeur of which modern festivity [...] [gave her] no idea." (Roberts I, p. 354)

<sup>226</sup> Heath is referring to V. G. Kiernan's work *The Duel in European History*.

explains in a footnote, but for his reservations about the practical effect of such a measure, which may also have inspired More's reticence:

The writer [of *A Practical View*] cannot omit this opportunity of declaring, that he should long ago have brought this subject before the notice of Parliament, but for a perfect conviction that he should probably thereby only give encouragement to a system he wishes to see at an end. (*A Practical View*, 232)

In 1792, William Hunter, author of several books on popular themes, wrote a comprehensive essay on duelling. He vehemently denounced the barbarous custom of duelling which, at a time when “the sword, as the arbiter of right and wrong” (Hunter,16) had abdicated long ago, was still kept up for the sake of a distorted modern code of honour and the fear of being regarded a coward in case of declining a duel. Duelling was still much the order of the day, with men acting “against common sense, and against every principle of natural and revealed religion” (Hunter,17), to the disgrace of civilized and enlightened people, because only absolute necessity could justify a penalty by private hand. Hunter wrote very much in the vein of Hannah More when he suggested subordination to the law as “the main spring of every civil association” (Hunter, 22). The blood of a fellow creature must unavoidably trigger the displeasure and even the requital of God. The ‘politeness’ involved in duelling matched very poorly with the ‘courtesy’ which “emanates from true benevolence of heart” (Hunter, 30).

Duelling so much conflicted with the divine precepts of meekness and humility and the ordinances of God, because the duellist is inspired by “infatuated rashness” very much unlike him who joins “religion with morality”, believes in the “goodness of Providence”, (Hunter, 34) and has thus a calm disposition of mind. To restore worldly honour put the winner to the “trouble of resenting injuries”, which was costly to his peace. Therefore, so More in her practical way of often seeing things and solutions, it was “more cheap to forgive even were it not more right.” (*Works I*, 272). Revenge then is taken as the outward sign of small-mindedness; forgiving as a sign of self-control”. In society, however, the “systematic duellist” (Hunter, 38), as Hunter labels one who glories in

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<sup>227</sup> Donna T. Andrew. “The Code of Honour and its Critics”, p. 433.

constantly rendering others miserable, is regarded as a man of honour after having shed innocent blood, whereas, what outrageous injustice, a highwayman for having stolen a small amount of money out of despair, suffers a disgraceful death. Hunter exclaims: "O Justice! how long wilt thou suffer thine institutions to be invaded? How long wilt thou allow vice to reign unmolested?" (Hunter, 40) He advocates taking steps, "to strike at the root" (Hunter, 41), and to eradicate the inhuman custom of duelling as most barbarous revenge by punishing it with a severe penalty. The stain of cowardice must lose its stigmatizing effect. Then "a man's character would depend more on the practice of virtue, than on the defence of vice", so Hunter. (Hunter, 43)

It is of no little interest to see how Hunter's heightened and emotional style agreed with More's both in concern and language, which shows that she was a typical child of her time.

Despite the efforts of zealous moral reformers, the envisaged change in public opinion was still very remote at the turn of the century, which is evinced by the following case in point: In 1798, at a crucial moment in Britain's struggle against Napoleon, the Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger fought a duel with Member of Parliament George Tierney over the matter of war and the introduction of a tax to Britain.<sup>228</sup> Pitt, being criticized by Tierney in the House of Commons for his plans to beef up the Navy to counter the threat of invasion from France, furiously called him a traitor and challenged him to a duel. Pitt had much to lose: both his authority as a statesman and esteem as man of honour.<sup>229</sup> William Wilberforce thought this duel to be a favourable opportunity to propose a motion in the House of Commons on the immorality of duelling, but Pitt wrote to him begging to give up his intention, on the ground that it would appear to be a severe reflection on his own conduct.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> To pay for the wars against France, the British government levied income tax for the very first time in 1799. It was meant to be a desperate wartime expedient, but has remained the standard way that governments raise money. It helped that Britain, where an industrial revolution was taking place, was growing in wealth and so could afford to fund a twenty-years conflict.

<sup>229</sup> See "Top 8 Remarkable Duels".

21<sup>st</sup> June, 2011 <<http://listverse.com/2007/11/08/top-8-remarkable-duels>>

<sup>230</sup> See Travers Buxton. *William Wilberforce*, p. 153.

Hannah More's opinion about the issue of duelling was perfectly clear. On 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1798 she wrote to her sisters:

Were you not all well-nigh out of your wits at Pitt's? We were all in the utmost consternation, especially poor Mr. Wilberforce. It was no small consolation to us all that he had borne his testimony against duelling so strongly in his book previous to this shocking event. What a dreadful thing that a life of such importance should be risked (or indeed any life at all) on the miserable notion of false honour! To complete the horror, too, they chose a Sunday. (qtd. in Meakin, pp. 321-322)<sup>231</sup>

In her diary Hannah More noted down her “[m]uch painful feeling at Pitt’s duel,” begging the

Lord, [to] show these wise men [involved in it] the gospel, that in [...] [His] light they may see light, for without that the wisest sit in darkness.<sup>232</sup>

In Hannah More's letter to her sisters she added that Mr. Wilberforce, who had just come from the House, told her that he had given notice that he would make a motion for some measures to be taken to put a stop to the impious and detestable practice of duelling. “It is a bold step! May God grant its success” (qtd. in Meakin, 322), Hannah More exclaimed.

However, on Pitt’s expressive wish, and for understandable reasons, Wilberforce refrained from taking steps after all.<sup>233</sup> Friendship, although heavily put to trial, loyalty, and practical deliberations won the day over the chance to possibly eliminate duelling as an ungodly practice.<sup>234</sup>

As Hannah More's thinking was much in tune with that of Wilberforce, the reason for her obviously restrained attitude towards duelling may be found here. She most likely reckoned that the risk to deeply anger her high-brow coterie with critical remarks was not proportionate to what could be gained if she kept silent. More had just finished her poem *The Slave Trade* (1788) and was eager that the abolition matter, which was being pushed by

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<sup>231</sup> To choose a Sunday for a duel may be taken as an indicator that the shock among the Evangelicals was even bigger for this fact. See also Brown, p. 100, note 1.

<sup>232</sup> Diary entry of 4<sup>th</sup> June 1798, qtd. in Roberts II, p. 33.

<sup>233</sup> Pitt was endeavouring several Parliamentary reformations at that time which, with his position weakened, would have been endangered.

<sup>234</sup> The year before, he had already feared the futility of such an undertaking, albeit for different reasons. He feared encouragement instead of ending duelling. See above.

Wilberforce and herself, would be treated favourably in Parliament. She was giving the abolition of the slave-trade priority over the duelling matter.

The clash of the religious aspect of duelling with the conventions of etiquette exercised by the nobility and the upper-class was postponed once more in view of the circumstances, and, in Stott's words, the "aristocratic practice of duelling [remained] part of a code that valued personal honour above Christian imperatives of meekness and forgiveness" (Stott, 216). If Donna T. Andrew's says that "[w]hat [lay] at the root of the disappearance of duelling could only have been a massive change in public opinion about its usefulness and propriety" ("The Code of Honour", 433), it was an insight society was quite unwilling to embrace then. But whatever attitude might be taken in retrospect, giving up the matter of abrogating duelling certainly was a moral defeat for the Evangelicals.

### **A Question of Christian Outlook and Patriotism: The Abolition of the African Slave-Trade**

The matter of the African slave-trade, similarly to duelling, found but little attention in *Thoughts*, but if the abolition question was given preference over duelling in it, it was not only on moral and humanitarian grounds, but also a question of Hannah More's patriotism, which had its roots in her Evangelical creed, for, as she says in *Strictures*, "a true patriot cannot help being a Christian, and a true Christian being a patriot", (*Strictures I*, 216).

When *Thoughts* was published anonymously, the abolitionist movement was picking up. William Wilberforce made an appeal in parliament, and Hannah More contributed her famous poem *The Slave Trade*, written for the purpose of augmenting the abolition efforts. The "evangelical left wing of the Church of England" (Kup, 203) as the Clapham Evangelicals or "saints" were often termed (although others regarded them as an orthodox part of the Anglican church together with divines like Thomas Clarkson,

James Ramsay, Beilby Porteus, and William Paley)<sup>235</sup> were certainly blazing the trail of the anti-slavery campaign. In 1788, Anna Maria Falconbridge's<sup>236</sup> husband Alexander, who had first visited Africa in 1780 as a surgeon on a slave ship, and who had turned abolitionist in 1787 - 1788, published a "passionate pamphlet" (Hargreaves, 172) against the slave trade. This pamphlet represented essential material for the ensuing abolitionist campaign of Evangelicals like Wilberforce, Thornton and More.

If later British settlers, as for instance Anna Maria Falconbridge<sup>237</sup> and others, felt that "Freetown was being turned into a fanatical religious regime" (Tomkins, 126), they were most likely referring to the Evangelicals, who regarded the colony as their chief terrain for fighting the slave trade and who, in conformity with their Evangelical doctrines, were spreading *their* 'true religion' in order to save as many souls as possible.<sup>238</sup> This undertaking, however, constituted a real problem, since Freetown was practically surrounded by slaving stations.<sup>239</sup>

To campaign against the inhuman slave trade today would be a matter of course, but when we cast a critical eye on the ending eighteenth century, the question how anti-slavery was motivated is of no little interest. Ford K. Brown, for instance, was rather interested in questions pertaining to religion and liberty. "Miss More", Brown writes,

was hardly what is usually thought of as a lover of liberty. [...] With her, libertarianism was an opprobrious commerce.<sup>240</sup> It seems necessary to realize that the word 'liberty' is a large and ambiguous term, like many others used by the Evangelicals. (Brown, 109)

However, "if her basic grounds for demanding liberty for the Africans were those of Christianity" (Brown, 109), Brown felt that More was at odds with the theological position of the Evangelicals, because, according to her poem *The Slave Trade*, "'men may be saved without either faith, love, or obedience'" (qtd. in Brown, 110). This meant that they were saved without

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<sup>235</sup> Nicholas Hudson, p. 562.

<sup>236</sup> See her narrative on two voyages to the West-African coast in the years 1791-1793 in form of letters 'to a friend', published 1794, in which she paints a rather ambivalent picture of the abolitionist-inspired Sierra Leone Company.

<sup>237</sup> See A. M. Falconbridge's account of her to voyages to Sierra Leone in 1791-1783.

<sup>238</sup> See Tomkins, p. 12, Introduction.

<sup>239</sup> See Tomkins, p. 129.



the Holy Spirit and, worst of all, without God's 'grace'. This collision, which Brown detected between the Evangelical doctrinal position and her Evangelical leanings for philanthropy, can be pragmatically offset by Hannah More's humanitarian feelings for the poor slaves. But since she was a staunch patriot, a possibly even weightier motive for abolishing the slave-trade could be found in her fear for the moral reputation of the British. She insisted that since the slave-trade was substantially infringing on the principles of the Christian creed, it had to be abolished if the British wished to live up to the morals of a 'chosen nation' - of which Hannah More, showing a typical trace of nationalism, was convinced. She was certain that the abolition of the slave-trade would

restore the lustre of the British name, and cut off at a single stroke as large and disgraceful a portion of national guilt as ever impaired the virtue or dishonoured the councils of a Christian country. (*Works I*, 274)

Innate in Hannah More's way of triggering patriotism, however, was also the negative side-effect of her paving for the British people "a way to construct themselves as superior moral agents", as E. Kowaleski Wallace ("White Slavery", 152) points out. It was only a logical consequence that "[p]atriotism and humanity were to go hand in hand, providing a convenient justification for the subsequent expansion of the British empire" (Stott, 94). For all the inherent compassion for the slaves in her poem, then, More's ultimate worry was, not surprisingly, her apprehension that the esteem for the British nation might be lowered in the eyes of the world. In her unflinching confidence in Providence, Hannah More thus must have felt destined to save Britain's moral reputation on a crusade which had only just begun. With revolution in the air, she hoped the nation would stand together in patriotism based on improved morals, and thus be worthy of God's support.

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<sup>240</sup> "From liberty, equality and the rights of man, good Lord, deliver us!", she remarked in a letter to the Earl of Orford (formerly Horace Walpole) in 1793. Qtd. in Roberts I, p. 419.

## Charity - A Question of Motives and Principles

Certainly, *Thoughts* went beyond Sunday observance and its implications for the domestics and artisans, and beyond duelling and the slave-trade. Rather, it focused on a range of other subjects also very much at Hannah More's heart. An example is the question of charity and its motives and principles, for if only "this world's good, and [...] applause, were the motives and the end of [...] action," if piety was amiss, charity was "of no value in the sight of God" (*Works I*, 263)<sup>241</sup>, More was convinced. She drew in a parabolic manner on the biblical story of Ananias and Sapphira<sup>242</sup>, who had established a significant reputation for selling a great portion of their possessions for religious purposes, and who were in the end not recompensed for what they did, but punished for what they had kept back. This meant to show that good deeds which are devoid of "a pure intention" go into the wrong direction; and that it is the "*heart*" the Gospel points at "as the source of good; [for] it is to the poor in *spirit*, to the pure in *heart*, that the divine blessing is annexed." (*Works I*, 263) In no way, therefore, must charity "supplant faith". Hannah More speaks of "mechanical charity" as against "real Christian charity" (*Works I*, 271), by which she understood that charity ought not to be the result of caprice, but must be "a genuine principle of piety". (*Works I*, 270) Piety in conjunction with sacrifice will then constitute charity "God [...] [would be] well pleased [with]." (*Works I*, 270) Hannah More warns to make a good deed stand proxy for another, as "a kind of commutation, [...] allowing [...] so much pleasure in exchange for so much charity." (*Works I*, 272)

Charity became absolutely central to Hannah More's new period of life. The religious principles of charity aside, she turned to it with her innate

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<sup>241</sup> This issue is dealt with more intensely in the chapter *Estimate* and in More's spiritual novel *Coelebs*.

<sup>242</sup> Ananias and Sapphira were members of the early Christian church at Jerusalem whose names have become infamous in Bible History for their *attempted* dishonesty toward God. While other newly-converted Christians were voluntarily donating all that they could to support the founding of the new Christian church, Ananias and Sapphira falsely claimed to be giving all of the proceeds of a property sale to the church, when in fact they were holding back a substantial portion of the money. Regardless of their motives, their sin was not the keeping of their property, which they had every right to do if they so chose, but their deliberate fraud and hypocrisy. Source: "Daily Bible Study". 16th June 2011 <<http://www.keyway.ca/htm2000/20000426.htm>>.

utilitarian disposition, putting her acclaimed principles into practice. In *Thoughts* she claimed that effective charity needed “concerted projects” in order to channel “glowing generosity” and “active goodness” (*Works I*, 270) lest they should be chilled by negative experiences. Her school projects for impoverished villages which were already under way were one particular example for this realization and speak for her excellent talents in organizing. She knew from experience that the rich had a tendency towards jumping to any excuse offering itself which saved them from opening their purses. Charity truly was a matter with more than one side to it. On the one hand, the poor were depending on the benevolence of the rich; on the other hand, the rich felt that the poor had to behave with appropriate subordination and deference. Hannah More must have been painfully aware of the dilemma placed before her: How could the moral *poor* show deference and subordination to the immoral *rich*? It was a vicious circle difficult to escape, and an additional reason for More to endeavour to put the two social strata on a more mutually wholesome footing. *Thoughts* was certainly part of this intention. More hoped and anticipated that by moral betterment the existing social hierarchy, the necessity of which Hannah More absolutely believed in, would be strengthened.

The question which moved Hannah More was not so much social justice, because in a world governed by a God-ordained hierarchical order any interference in altering its status quo would “directly counter God’s plan” (Vicki Ramirez, 65). As a consequence, the bond between social and religious life was to be knotted tightly to ensure the functioning of God’s plan. And charity played a decisive role in this plan.

Today’s understanding of charity shows the limitation of charity as it was practiced by Hannah More. Without denying Hannah More a feeling and compassionate heart, her calculated purposefulness may seem problematic from today’s point of view; for she never seemed to lose sight of both her Evangelical maxims and her social anxieties in all her doing, and always gave those principles serving the God-given hierarchy the utmost priority. However, in her defence it must also be said that her

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“position on social issues [...] [was] entirely representative of her own times” and “reflects much of the spirit of her time.” (Scheuermann,18) To keep the poor subservient was “a dominating motive of the coming philanthropists” (Quinlan,120) as charitable and religious aims became more interwoven and private charity became a modish requisite, if not a rage, as Hannah More demonstrates it in her novel *Coelebs*.

## Conclusion

To Hannah More *Thoughts* was a test case in as much as she wanted to find out how the higher ranks would react when being reminded of their moral shortcomings and godlessness. Even if, as More herself stated in a letter to her sister previously mentioned in this thesis, *Thoughts* did not dig deeply and were merely the preliminary to more onslaughts on the manners of the great, they comprised nearly all subjects she was going to enlarge on in the future.

If we wonder why she should give duelling and the slave-trade relatively little attention in *Thoughts*, she may have done so for good reasons: treating the matter of 'duelling' was liable to infringe on the belief of the rich in the 'code of honour'; and the 'slave-trade' on their belief in property, possibly rousing their annoyance or even enmity by adding further explosive material to her poem *The Slave Trade*. Knowing that these issues were absolutely sacrosanct to many of the nobility and the upper-class, Hannah More's aim probably was to open their eyes for her Evangelical moral concern step-by-step instead, which was to turn mere nominal Christians into true ones.

When Charles Howard Ford expresses his astonishment about Hannah More's "apparent inconsistency" (Ford, 93) to publish *Thoughts* anonymously, but to stand to the authorship of her poem *The Slave Trade*, both published in 1788, he interprets this as fear of losing her "hard-earned social position" (Ford, 93) in the case of *Thoughts*, and as "fearlessness" (Ford, 93) in the case of the abolitionist matter. This view may have contributed to Ford's appraisal of Hannah More as being an

"ambivalent moralist" (Ford, 1). However, even if his attitude appears logical, it means to disregard Hannah More's strategic long-term thinking. If there was any fear in the play on More's part that most of the doors might be shut upon her when the authorship of *Thoughts* became known, as her correspondence suggests, it was certainly not so much fear for her social position as for the schemes which were taking on shape in her mind and for which the support of the rich and important was imperative.

Thus, what seems to be startling at first sight, in fact perfectly fits into the puzzle of Hannah More's Evangelical missionary awareness and sense of priority for the practicability of solutions.

## 2. *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World. By One of the Laity. (1790)*

Of all the principles that can operate upon the human mind, the most powerful is – Religion.<sup>243</sup>

### Introduction

With *Estimate* Hannah More made her second endeavour at holding up the mirror to the polite and fashionable. This time she addressed that group of men who, although they regarded Christianity as “an admirable system of morals”, denied its “divine authority” (*Works I*, 300). She supposedly wrote it in great seclusion while living at Cowslip Green, because in July 1790 she informed Horace Walpole that she was surrounded by “so much quiet and ignorance, that [...] [she] knew no more of what [...] [was] passing among mankind than of what [...] [was] going on in the planet Saturn” (qtd. in Roberts I, 354). And she must have been much assailed by self-doubt because she wrote to the Reverend Newton on December 27, 1790 that she was “fully persuaded that ‘all things work together for good to them that love God’”, but stated at the same time that she was full of fear “that [...] [she did] not love him [God] cordially, effectually, entirely.” (qtd. in Roberts I, 355) The transitory period she was passing through from being a stout member of the Established Church to becoming a fervent Anglican Evangelical, had possibly not come to a complete end yet and the ‘conversion’, which was absolutely necessary for an Evangelical to undergo, was still underway.<sup>244</sup>

When Hannah More published her *Estimate* in 1790 she was encouraged by the success of *Thoughts*, published two years earlier. Except for some negligent critical remarks and the irritation as to the anonymity of the

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<sup>243</sup> John Bowles, *A View on the Moral State of Society*, p. 81.

<sup>244</sup> Hannah More and the Reverend Newton were kindred spirits not only as far as their religious leaning was concerned but they also confided many of their personal troubles to each other. When John Newton lost his wife he wrote an affecting letter to More dated December 30, 1790 in which he rendered also his doctrine about love, saying that “Creature-love is a passion; Divine love is a principle” (qtd. in Roberts I, p. 359).

writer, she got away with it very well. Obviously, with *Thoughts* she had checked the reactions of her readers, careful not to go too far. Of course, it must not be forgotten that the moralizing battle field was beginning to be well recruited at that time, King George III's memorable *Proclamation against Vice and Immorality* (1787) being a most forceful example, a circumstance which certainly facilitated Hannah More's moralizing plan. With the French Revolution at the back of people's minds, there was also a growing general awareness as to the possibility of 'immorality' swapping over from France.

Supported by the rather positive reactions to *Thoughts*, Hannah More ventured on the new project *Estimate*, in parts repeating her previous perceptions in general, but in fact now enlarging on the subject of religious and moral behaviour.

Upon her return from London, Hannah More had got more and more involved with evangelical ideas and dogmas she had already tried to put into practice when she partly lived with the Clapham Sect in such high-brow society as, for instance, William Wilberforce and Henry Thornton. What Hannah More probably really had in mind was to strengthen the Evangelical movement, which had so far led a rather modest existence. More was appalled by the drowsiness of the High-Church clergy she kept criticizing on and off in her writings<sup>245</sup>. Whatever Hannah More took into her hands, she followed it up with enthusiasm and certainly, too, with an end in mind.<sup>246</sup> In *Estimate*, her conviction that morality and religion will stand or fall together, was even more at the centre of her thoughts than before. It is therefore of no little interest to peruse and illustrate some opinions which Hannah More's biographers and other persons concerned with the religious state in Britain attached to *Estimate*.

In *Estimate* Hannah More also continues to regret the decline of manners and conduct of the higher ranks as a natural consequence of the decline of religion, with its effect on the lower orders. Naturally, there are,

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<sup>245</sup> Many examples to this effect are comprised in Hannah More's only novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1805).

<sup>246</sup> In the introduction to her *Works* edition of 1801, she wrote: "No book perhaps is perfectly neutral; nor are the effects of any altogether indifferent. [...] And though [...] the whole may produce no *general* effect [...] some truth may be picked out from among many [truths] that are neglected. (*Works I*, Preface, no p. no.)

according to her, also other obvious causes, religion aside, for the decline of morals at that time, “too literally an age of gold”, which did not conform with the “general state of society”.<sup>247</sup> To ignore the present state of society, More claims, would also mean to ignore the negative influences of “commerce, and conquest, and riches, and arts” (*Works I*, 288). Even if the popular aphorism “[t]o mend the world’s a vast design”<sup>248</sup>, may suggest hopelessness and an “indolent acquiescence” (*Works I*, 288), it was one of the rules of life Hannah More set up that we ought to try to live up to our duties and make the best of the time we happen to live in.

If one compares the state of piety among the great in the past with that of the present time, the decline of piety, so Hannah More, is quite obvious. In fact she feels that there is so little left of Christ in his religion that like the woman at the sepulchre one could say, “[t]hey have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.” (*Works I*, 279) Even those, she says, who practise benevolence, do not hold piety and religious faith in esteem<sup>249</sup>, a circumstance which is leading to the decay of religion, with negative effects on education, domestic contact, manners, habits and conversation, and the danger of all these ills incessantly spreading down to the inferior orders.<sup>250</sup> This fatal “defect of religious principle” may express itself in many ways: “open contempt and defiance of all sacred institutions” or in many a veiled manner. (*Works I*, 278)

Hannah More traces a further class of “fashionable” or “modish” Christians who, although they acknowledge Christianity “as a perfect system of morals”, nevertheless fail to accept divine authority. To them “morality is the whole of religion”, forgetting “that manners and principles act reciprocally on each other and are, by turns, cause and effect” (*Works I*, 278), meaning that declining religious principles entail declining morals in the long run, which will cause particularly negative effects on the

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<sup>247</sup> For More’s critical view on the manners of the higher ranks see the analysis of her treatise *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great* earlier in this thesis.

<sup>248</sup> Letter to Mrs. Kennicott in 1789. Roberts, *Memoirs* Vol. I, p. 342.

<sup>249</sup> In the Evangelical tradition, acceptance by God comes through faith, not works. Only faith could take away the taint all human actions and even good works are afflicted with by way of the original sin.

<sup>250</sup> The negative effects of both bad manners and behaviour are extensively treated in Hannah More’s *Thoughts* earlier in this chapter.



education of the youths, and in turn have its effect on the deterioration of their manner<sup>251</sup> later in their lives.

### **Critical Responses and Appraisals**

In its own time, *Estimate* was, despite its censoring and sermonizing tone, generally warmly received by her contemporaries, as its five editions in five years show. Hester Chapone, for instance, referring to the anonymous publication of the epistle, wrote to Hannah More in 1790 that “[t]he same good gentleman who some time ago gave his excellent thoughts to “the Great” has again made a powerful effort for their reformation.” (qtd. in Roberts I, 252) She had anonymously received a copy of the book and gave Hannah More to understand in a roundabout way that she very well knew who the author was.

The Bishop of London, Beilby Porteus, who too had anonymously received a copy, referring to Sir Thomas More, even exclaimed “[a]ut Morus, aut Angelus [...] before he had read six pages of a certain delicate *little book* that was sent to him a few days ago,” convinced that the “sweet repose and tranquillity of the fashionable world” would be disturbed once more. He had a very high opinion of Hannah More and added that “[t]here are but few persons [...] in Great Britain, that could write such a book – that could convey so much sound evangelical morality, and so much genuine Christianity.” (qtd. in Roberts I, 352/353) In addition, he warmly recommended her writings in a sermon and in a charge to his clergy, even though, not infrequently, she availed herself of a warlike terminology, when for example comparing religious principles with “military exercise” (*Works I*, 281): ever ready to act, never departing from discipline, as she expects a true Christian to behave.

By contrast, Charles J. Abbey and John H., nearly one hundred years later (1896), found that More’s works were “full of somewhat vapid truism, and their style [...] too ornate for the present age. Like so many writers of her

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<sup>251</sup> See Thompson p. 127.

day, she wrote Johnsonese<sup>252</sup> rather than English.”<sup>253</sup> For that reason, the present day reader will most likely find *Estimate*, as the majority of Hannah More’s works, to be more or less typical of her time: repetitive and verbose. And More’s effort to clearly arrange *Estimate* by means of chapters was of little avail: Abbey and Overton regard *Estimate* as hopelessly devoid in places of any system.

The Reverend Newton, still mourning for his wife who had recently passed away, wrote to Hannah More on February 24, 1791, thanking her for anonymously receiving *Estimate*. He feared that “[t]he fashionable world, by their numbers, [would] form a phalanx not easily impressible; and [...] not easily vulnerable.” (qtd. in Roberts I, 361) He was hopeful that *Estimate* would “prove to them ‘as a light shining in a dark place’, for which they will have reason to praise God and to thank the writer.” (qtd. in Roberts I, 362) However, only some months later, he sounded more optimistic when he wrote to Hannah More on July 17, 1791 that “there is a circle by which what you write will be read - and which will hardly read anything of a religious kind that is not written by you.” (qtd. in Roberts I, 370)

Dr. Barrington, the Bishop of Salisbury, who had apparently also paid some attention to the *Estimate*’s structure and strategy, wrote to Hannah More on February 23, 1791, scarcely concealing his doubts as to its possible positive effect on the higher ranks, that

the work [...] [was] admirably calculated, from its topics [...] and the happy interweaving of Scripture language. [...] Whether extensive good will result from the publication, time alone will convince.” (qtd. in Roberts I, 363)

While her friends rallied around her and other readers from the Establishment may have paid little attention to her admonishing, she also challenged downright attacks and met her match in some popular satirical writers of her day. One of these critical voices belonged to William Shaw, rector of Chelvey, Somerset, who in 1802 published *The Life of Hannah*

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<sup>252</sup> Johnsonese was “the literary style of Dr. Samuel Johnson, or one formed in imitation of it; an inflated, stilted, or pompous style, affecting classical words.” See *The Free Dictionary* by Farlex. 10 March 2011 <<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Literary+Style>>.

<sup>253</sup> Abbey and Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 225.

*More with a Critical Review of her Writings* under the pseudonym ‘The Rev. Sir Archibald MacSarcasm, Bart’. In *Fathers of the Victorians*, Ford K. Brown terms Shaw one of the “emissaries of Satan down in Somerset” who were involved in the Blagdon Controversy, and his *Life of Hannah More* “a burlesque lampoon” and a “serious blunder” (Brown, 218). This biography was just what the *Anti-Jacobin Review* under the regime of its editor John Gifford<sup>254</sup> wanted, because it had changed its tenor about Hannah More for her involvement with that “gospel-preaching ministry” (Brown, 159), as the magazine saw fit to term the Evangelical movement, which, in the light of the Blagdon Controversy, allegedly subverted the church, especially with a view to the Sunday school activities.<sup>255</sup> Despite its libellous character, this biography made Hannah More vulnerable in several respects. In fact, had Shaw not resorted to much baseness in criticising More, he would have secured for himself more serious attention, now and at his time. He attributed to her bigotry and an impure mind; accused her of being hypocritical and tyrannical; blamed her for her frigid morality and “bloody piety” (Shaw 165); and topped all this with allegations of plagiarism. But what really counted was that Shaw imputed to her also “a false judgment of the spirit of Christianity” (Shaw, 94) in general, and wrong ideas about how to get “the ticket of admission ... to eternal life” (Shaw, 96). That she was one of the Evangelical laity, and a woman on top, was certainly not helpful to her. Only in very few instances did Shaw (maybe in order to give the impression of being unprejudiced and objective) admit to be in conformity with her, for instance in his orthodox position towards church and royalty in the state as being “conductive to order and good government” (Shaw, 100).

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<sup>254</sup> John Gifford, after his return from France, was every inch a patriot when the French Revolution erupted across the Chanel. See Emily Lorraine de Montluzin “The Anti-Jacobin Revisited: Newly Identified Contributions to the Anti-Jacobin Review during the Editorial Regime of John Gifford, 1798–1806”. *Oxford Journals* (2003), Vol. 4, Issue 3, pp. 278-302. 10<sup>th</sup> March 2011.

<<http://library.oxfordjournals.org/content/4/3/278.full.pdf+html>>.

<sup>255</sup> In the course of the Blagdon Controversy, which raged from 1799 to 1803, Hannah More was blamed for being a Methodist and for religious enthusiasm, an allegation she vehemently rejected. As More’s reputation and her schools were at stake she, contrary to her habitual attitude, got involved in a bitter public dispute with the curate of Blagdon, Thomas Bere. The allegations against Hannah More were only a guise for the actual cause: the fear of the Church of England of the Evangelicals’ rapid spreading. The Blagdon Controversy will find further attention in the Chapter about Hannah More’ school schemes later in this thesis.

He grounded his assertion of More having “a false judgment of the spirit of christianity [sic]” (Shaw, 94) on her alleged lack of toleration. In fact, he calls her as “an enemy to toleration”<sup>256</sup>, arguing that toleration was the very “spirit of christianity [sic]” (Shaw, 104). In this context, William Shaw really had something of importance to say since his criticism pertained to a fundamental question of Christian behaviour: he sees the spirit of Christianity seriously threatened on the ground that there was in none of her writings any disapprobation of “war and bloodshed” (Shaw, 114/115). Shaw asks whether “[i]t is lawful for Christian men to serve in 'war' [and] [w]hat becomes now of her doctrine of 'forbearance and self-denial'.” He surmises that “[h]er doctrines are either false, or the practice of Christian societies wrong.” (Shaw, 115) He cannot help a passing shot at her strict adherence to the Sabbath rest, wondering with a sneer why she does not disapprove of fighting on Sundays.

Hannah More defended the War with France with the argument that “[i]f ever [...] a war was undertaken on the ground of self-defence and necessity [...] this seems to be the occasion.” In view of the assault on king, constitution, and religion England was acting on “defensive principles”; and it was “not so much the force of French bayonets, as the contamination of French principles that ought to excite our apprehensions,” she argued and entrusted army and fleet to God’s blessing and Providence.<sup>257</sup>

Indeed, instead of disapproving of war, Hannah More, on the contrary, as a fervid patriot in a letter dated Oct. 26, 1803 exuberantly praised the able clergyman at Cheddar, where the More sisters had set up a promising Sunday school, the Reverend Thomas Drewitt, who deceased in young years:

The last act of his useful life was to raise two hundred and ten volunteers in Cheddar, and his last sermon was a most spirited and patriotic exhortation to them. (qtd. in the *Mendip Annals*, 189)

The adjoined footnote reads as follows:

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<sup>256</sup> William Shaw enlarges on Hannah More’s lack of toleration in *Strictures*.

<sup>257</sup> “Remarks on the Speech of Mr. Dupont” (1793), *Works I*, p. 310. Hannah More argues against Dupont’s speech in the National Convention of France on the subject of religion and public education with a strongly atheist tenor.

Mr. D. was led thus far to deviate into politics by the dangers of his country at that fearful crisis. On one of the occasions, we are told, when he was addressing his rustic hearers on their duties and obligations as good subjects, one of them stepped forward, saying, "Sir, you have spoken enough; do get us some arms, and we will try what we can do." (qtd. in the *Mendip Annals*, 189)

The question is, how did this attitude of More's fit into her religious frame of mind, correlate with the Evangelicals' peace-loving and their mission as guardians of the Protestant interest? Shaw was apparently in line with those who, like the Reverend Gilbert Wakefield, vehemently stood up against any

shedding of man's blood to a disciple of *Christ*, [...] [unless] an uplifted sword [was] ready to fall on his own head. (*The Spirit of Christianity*, 5)<sup>258</sup>

Wakefield underlines his position by clearly expostulating that the Gospel could neither be defended nor propagated by the sword.<sup>259</sup> He strongly criticises England's engagement in the war with France because of the loss of lives and the entailing afflictions and devastations.<sup>260</sup> His opinion is that without England's interference "the combined powers on the continent would not have been able to prosecute their hostilities." (*The Spirit*, 4) He imputes these "enormities in a large degree, if not entirely," to covert stratagems or open exertions of England's government. Wakefield is in strict opposition to those who thought the wars imperative for the survival of the English nation.

John Bowles, for instance, claimed that the French intended to use the war for disseminating their immoral ideas throughout Europe.<sup>261</sup> The question whether the sword was lifted to fall on the English people's head, which severely troubled the Reverend Gilbert Wakefield, did apparently not so much put his mind at unrest, because he took a different stance, arguing that

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<sup>258</sup> Gilbert Wakefield's *The Spirit of Christianity Compared with the Spirit of the Times in Great Britain* (1794) is a lengthy essay condemning warfare in general and with France in particular. See also Rev. Gilbert Wakefield (1756-1801), in *Memoirs, etc.* (1804), Vol. II. .

<sup>259</sup> See Wakefield, *The Spirit of Christianity*, p. 7.

<sup>260</sup> Within twelve months after the beginning of the war, 250.000 lives were lost either in the field or on the scaffold. (see Wakefield, p. 4)

<sup>261</sup> See J. Bowles, *The Real Grounds of the Present War With France* (1793), p. 5.

the French people, insensible of their own delirium, seem eager to spread the infection, and to render all mankind as miserable as themselves. Like the fallen Angels, they aspire to no other happiness than that of involving others in their guilt and wretchedness. (Bowles, *The Real Grounds*, 5)

Bowles went on saying that “[o]nly by extending the Reign of Anarchy abroad, [...] [can] they preserve its Empire at home.” (*The Real Grounds*, 6) He concluded, much contrary to Gilbert Wakefield, that the English nation had no option between war and peace; that there was no calculating between what could be gained or lost by the war. War with France was not a “deliberate choice”, but “A WAR OF DEFENCE” (*The Real Grounds*, 66). What truly bothered John Bowles, however, was that

[a]n Enemy of a new kind has risen up – one who fights not merely to subdue States, but to dissolve Society – not to extend Empire, but to subvert Government – not to introduce a particular Religion, but to extirpate all Religion. (Bowles, *Objections to the Continuance of the War*, 2)<sup>262</sup>

However, when *Estimate* was published in 1790, the French Revolution, after a period when it had been welcomed by a large part of English society, was in full swing and had not reached the time of its atrocities yet. But it was clear to all religious moralizers that the low morals of the French had brought the revolution upon their heads by the hand of Providence, and that it was up to all conscientious citizens in England to ward off the assumed devastating influence, if the existing social order, which was based on religion and sound morals, was to be kept up. In consequence, moral behaviour and moral reform were an increased concern in the 1790s. Hannah More’s *Estimate* may, thus, be regarded not merely as a logical successor of *Thoughts*, but also as an igniting work, to be followed by evangelically inspired epistles by way of the Evangelical revival. Religion, morality and patriotism were intrinsically interwoven. There was, apparently, little room left for a “spirit of Christianity” as Wakefield understood it and as it was demanded from Hannah More by her severe critic, William Shaw.

No wonder, then, that Shaw accuses Hannah More's "doctrines [...] [to be] either false, or the practice of Christian societies [to be] wrong.” (Shaw,

115) He also reproaches her for having given a definition of religion, "which is not a true one". (Shaw, 104) To prove this error he avails himself of a paragraph in *Estimate*, quoting it in his *Life of Hannah More*. It is, however, grossly mutilated by being deliberately shortened.<sup>263</sup> The following quotation is the original and complete text:

Religion is not, on the one hand, merely an opinion or a sentiment, so neither is it, on the other, merely an act or a performance; but it is a disposition, a habit, a temper: it is not a name, but a nature: it is a turning the whole mind to God: it is a concentration of all the powers and affections of the soul into one steady point, an uniform desire to please *Him*. (*Works I*, 281)

Had Shaw bothered to fully render the above quotation, he would have had to admit that Hannah More only tries to explain the two practical parts of religion, namely the desire to please Him and to do good. To Shaw, however, religion is simply "*a rule of conduct looking to God*" (Shaw, 104); and for being "a Christian and a good man, it is not necessary to be baptized, and be called a Christian" (Shaw, 108), so he cannot help making snide remarks.

Shaw strongly disapproves of Hannah More's belief in "everlasting torments" and her rousing of fear. "The scriptures say, *eis aiona, for ages* [emphasis added]", so Shaw (102), which sounds cruel enough, but More, according to his observations,

is too bloody and tyrannical. She is for *everlasting* [emphasis added] torments [...] ready to cast all into that furnace who do not agree with her in modes and opinion. (Shaw, 102)

What More, contrary to Shaw's assertion, tries to impart is that if fear of offending God cannot stop man from bringing upon himself God's eternal disfavour, how could a weaker motive be successful? On the other hand, fear had been a strong motive to keep men away from sinning ever since the Christian creed had existed. Many a statement made by Shaw to disparage Hannah More thus could have been regarded as an attack on the church, had the author of *The Life of Hannah More* not been an ecclesiastic himself.

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<sup>262</sup> This "Enemy of a new kind" can only be the aggressor against the old order, whom Bowles feared as much as Hannah More did.

<sup>263</sup> See Shaw, p. 104.

The Reverend Charles Daubeny (1745 – 1827), minister of Christchurch, Bath, and afterwards Archdeacon of Sarum, in 1804 made reference to his published letter to Hannah More in the ‘concluding letter’ in *An Appendix to his Guide to the Church*<sup>264</sup> in which he firmly objected to some of Hannah More’s doctrines for being unscriptural. Although this letter unmistakably refers to the *Strictures* published in 1799, it seems clear that Daubeny must have been familiar with all of More’s moralizing writings she had so far published pertaining to religious issues, which she wrote with the intention of sharpening the Evangelical doctrines. Thus, his remonstrance certainly also related to her *Estimate*, for, as More’s biographer assured the readers, Daubeny “did not hesitate to admit that such was his belief from *her recorded opinions elsewhere* [emphasis added]” (Henry Thompson, 172) that Hannah More would not contradict him. The full tenor of the Reverend Daubeny’s letter to Hannah More, whom he highly appreciated for her invaluable contribution to lifting the moral and religious standards of their time, was far from being offensive. More’s Evangelical brethren, however, saw it otherwise.<sup>265</sup>

The Reverend Charles Daubeny’s arguments were well founded and, as anticipated, never contradicted by Hannah More, who, although well versed, perfectly knew and accepted her boundaries as a laywoman. This example shows how, not unsurprisingly, also divines took notice of her overstepping boundaries in two ways: one, by spectacularly penetrating into the sphere of the clergy, not only as a laywoman but as a woman per se; two, by changing the private sphere for the public sphere. She unavoidably moved herself into the focus of the orthodox High-Church Clergy and risked being eyed with suspicion.

Her first biographer, William Roberts, wrote a year after Hannah More’s death that she felt it to be her duty to address “the vain, the unthinking, and the unstable [...] penetrating the proudest and gayest resorts,” telling them “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” (Roberts I, 350),

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<sup>264</sup> See Ch. Daubeny. *An Appendix to the Guide to the Church in Several Letters*, Concluding letter, pp. 463-528, esp. p. 484; also H. Thompson, *Life of Hannah More*, pp. 171-178, esp. p. 172.

<sup>265</sup> “No one of Miss More’s formal Evangelical views, social, moral or doctrinal, was questioned at any time by any Evangelical in any surviving record,” Ford K. Brown maintains (p. 105).



because the worldly spirit of some of Hannah More's amiable and benevolent associates was not compatible with 'true religion'. And as she also spotted a general declension of piety, which, owing to the increasingly dissolute behaviour of their superiors,<sup>266</sup> was spreading among the common people, More

brought her charges so home to the experience and conviction of her readers, as to make many a Felix tremble, and to touch the consciences of many who were sitting at their ease in self-righteous complacency. (Roberts I, 350)

Roberts' enthusiasm was generally shared by More's early biographers. Thomas Taylor (1838), for instance, quoted the Bishop of Salisbury, who said that

[t]he work is admirably calculated, from its topics, the mode of pressing them, and the happy interweaving of Scripture language (110);<sup>267</sup>

Helen C. Knight (1851) found that

[t]he Estimate is full of sound, clear, and discriminating views, applicable quite as much to our time as it was to the spirit and tendencies of seventy years ago (114);<sup>268</sup>

whereas Anne J. Buckland (1882) praised More's

courage and steadfastness to duty to write on such an unpopular subject for the very circle in which her little lively pieces had always met with so much applause (67);<sup>269</sup>

and appreciated that Hannah More did not "attempt [...] to smooth things over", but rather kept to "perfect simplicity, independence and straightforwardness" (67).

However, it was Charlotte M. Yonge who brought a special note into the reception of *Estimate* with her assumption that the Duke of Grafton had a notable share in More's decision to write another moralizing pamphlet. She must have seen More's interest resting in the debate about the importance of church order and liturgy, an issue most likely of special interest to

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<sup>266</sup> Hannah More gave a deep insight as to this failure in her *Thoughts*, which she had published two years earlier.

<sup>267</sup> The remark of the Bishop of Salisbury with reference to 'Scripture language' was possibly hinting at the Evangelicals' proneness for biblical sayings and their 'biblicism'.

<sup>268</sup> Knight's opinion bears witness that Hannah More did not sink into oblivion soon after her death in 1833.

<sup>269</sup> To indulge in unpopular subjects of religion was a typical Evangelical marker.

Yonge, since the strict adherence to the ordinances and ecclesiastical structures of the Church of England was what visibly separated the Evangelicals from the Methodists, who practiced itinerant preaching by their lay preachers.<sup>270</sup>

It seems that the following footnote, which was attached to the edition of Hannah More's *Works* of 1834<sup>271</sup> together with several references to a "noble author" in More's *Estimate*, induced Yonge in her biography on Hannah More (1888) to assume that her second epistle on fashionable society's lax religious behaviour was More's reply to Grafton's tract of "a latitudinarian character" (Yonge, 88). It reads as follows:

"Hints to an Association for preventing Vice and Immorality, written by a Nobleman of the highest rank." [This tract was written by the late Duke of Grafton; and die Association which occasioned its publication was set on foot by Mr. Isaac Hawkins Browne, and other virtuous patriots, to enforce the royal proclamation for the suppression of Vice and Immorality. The duke's professed object was to attack the liturgy and clergy of the Church of England. His performance was keenly replied to by Bishop Horne, in "An Apology for the Liturgy and Clergy," 8vo. 1790. – ED.]<sup>272</sup>

However, this assumption can only be true to some extent, for Hannah More had informed one of her sisters after the anonymous publication of her *Thoughts* in 1788 that it was not digging deeply enough, announcing that after this 'test' there was more for the great and gay to come and that it was going to be less good-natured and less easy to ignore. More's intention was to enlarge on the topic of the manners and religious attitude of the great. It may, however, well be that the Duke's *Hints* spurned Hannah More's treatise.

Yonge, apparently not really well acquainted with the contents of the Duke of Grafton's tract, cleverly drew from More's reaction his remarks and deliberations, saying that

there must have been a great deal in His Grace's paper like complaints we are familiar with. It affirmed and asserted that people

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<sup>270</sup> See Hylson-Smith, p. 12.

<sup>271</sup> *The Works of Hannah More*, Vol. II., London: H. Fischer, 1834, p. 288.

<sup>272</sup> In the 1843 edition of More's *Works*, Vol. I, New York: Harper & Brothers, on which this paper is based, the mentioned footnote was reduced to "Hints to an Association for preventing Vice and Immorality, written by a nobleman of the highest rank," p. 276.

absented themselves from church from objections to the Liturgy. (Yonge, 88)

In fact, Hannah More, who found fault with the Duke of Grafton's opinion that the objection to the liturgical practice was the real cause of absence from church, maintained that it would hardly be either the liturgy or the Athanasian creed <sup>273</sup>.

It is of no little interest that we seem to meet here several strands of thought: the allegedly latitudinarian attitude of the Duke of Grafton, that of Yonge, a High-Church woman, and that of Hannah More, a zealous Evangelical, whose attitude towards church ordinances Yonge was particularly interested in.<sup>274</sup> She found that *Estimate* was "curiously lacking in any reference to church ordinances or means of grace", suggesting that the point was what "[More] had *not* said" (Yonge, 129), and implying that More might not have clung to the Anglican Church to the extent she professed. Yonge was obviously playing off Grafton's opinion against More's, whereas she herself withheld her opinion in the question of liturgy and litany or the Athanasian creed.<sup>275</sup>

Marion Harland, one hundred and ten years after More's *Estimate* first appeared, attributed in her biography (1900) much of its success to the sermon-loving age, "when people read homilies without ennui, and relished hard hitting," because at Harland's time, when Addison and Johnson were already out of fashion, *Estimate* was regarded as "sensible, but dry, reading." (149)

Annette M. B. Meakin (1911) made a point in saying that

there were [probably] many divines who could have written her *Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*, [but that] there was perhaps no clergyman living who would have dared to write it. (303)

In this she very much echoed the Reverend Newton, whom she quoted to having written to Hannah More: "Zeal, perhaps [...] might be found in

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<sup>273</sup> The Athanasian Creed's (i.e. the Catholic faith) outward sign was its strong emphasis on Trinitarian faith. For the history of this creed see J.N.D. Kelly's *The Athanasian Creed*. Also the essay "On the Athanasian Creed" by Herbert W. Richardson and Jasper Hopkins in *The Harvard Theological Review*.

<sup>274</sup> See Yonge, p. 129.

<sup>275</sup> See Yonge, p. 89.

many, but other requisites are wanting (qtd. in Meakin, 303).” Meakin, too, mentioned the Duke of Grafton and his recently published *Hints to the Association for Preventing Vice and Immorality*, to which More refers in her *Estimate*, but did not, like Yonge, regard the work as an answer to the Duke’s effusions.

But even if *Estimate* was read assiduously by some, it may be assumed that others were much less impressed and may even have entertained ill-feelings for a nose being unduly poked into their affairs, because More complained in a letter to a friend in 1795 that for the higher ranks,

buried as they are in luxury and indulgence [...] religion must be made [...] tangible, palpable, visible; else they are apt to think it but an idle speculation. (qtd. in Roberts I, 469)

She felt that the world of the fashionable was no longer her world, but as she could not avoid their society, because they came to see her on their own account, she could not help the feeling of being unable to do them any good. She felt that she had “done with the aristocracy” (qtd. in Roberts I, 469) and, being “no longer a debtor to the Greeks” (qtd. in Roberts I, 470), she turned over a new leaf to become one to her “poor barbarians”.

Of the more recent publications on Hannah More, M. G. Jones (1952) for instance, clearly detects in Hannah More’s *Estimate* an indicator of Christianity being “in danger from those who accepted the Bible as their guide, but made no effort to understand its principles.” (Jones, 110)

Ford K. Brown (1961) refers to *Estimate* as Hannah More’s

second introductory statement of the gulf between mere nominal Christianity and true religion, [...] designed to go to the source of the ‘visible declension of piety’ and consequent profligacy, dissoluteness, depravity and laxness of the upper classes [...] [and] to ‘that more decent class’ who make a public confession of Christianity and ‘are not inattentive to any of its forms’ but ‘exhibit little of its spirit in their general temper and conduct’. (Brown, 104)

Charles Howard Ford (1996) feels the loss of Hannah More’s “rosy view of universal toleration” (Ford, 105) she had still held only two years ago in her *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great*. No doubt, her tone of preaching was omnipresent, a fact which ought not to really surprise those readers who were aware of her growing Evangelical zeal.

### The Christian Faith Mistaken for the Mahometan Faith

Of such kind was Hannah More's opinion of the religious state of the great and rich that if an "ignorant and unprejudiced spectator" was asked to have a guess to which religion England belonged, he would most likely have concluded that it was the Mahometan faith, More anticipates, owing to the fact that the gay and thoughtless professed a religion which preached "non-conformity to the world"; where sons of high-born men, "scarcely old enough to be sent to school", were admitted to be spectators of such unnatural diversions as racing and gaming; where almost "infant daughters of even wise and virtuous mothers (an innovation which fashion [...] forbade till now)" were frequently taken along to late protracted balls. How could this spectator, More is asking, believe that this society believed in a religion requiring from parents that their children "be bred up 'in the nature and admonition of the Lord', [...] believing God's holy word and keep[ing] his commandments?" She wonders how these ambitious, vain and wealthy pursuers of worldly enjoyment could be "the disciples of a master [...] [whose] KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD". (*Works I*, 296)

Hannah More, when comparing the Christian and the Islamic faith, obviously shows gross religious prejudice,<sup>276</sup> much in contrast to her occasional claim to religious liberalism, for instance, when suggesting that any religion is better than none at all.<sup>277</sup> It seems certain, however, that More, in perfect harmony with the opinion of the British as the 'noble race'<sup>278</sup>, shared the tendency to be primarily interested in the Muslims in North Africa and elsewhere because of the desire to improve the commercial and political standing of the British Empire. "Empire was British and Anglican, and if Muslims and their resources were the means to that glorious end, so be it", Nabil Matar (299) writes in his study of

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<sup>276</sup> According to More, the indulgences of the fashionable set exceeded even those of "the sensual Prophet of Arabia." In general, oriental people are positioned as archetypes of wantonness, immodesty, and excess. This aura of licentiousness was a broadly accepted view of the "sensual East". In Britain Fordyce and More were popular authors and their (and other writers') imagery of the Orient was probably accepted and absorbed. See Isabel Breskin referring to *Estimate* and Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women*, p. 117.

<sup>277</sup> See "*Thoughts*", *Works I*, p. 273.

<sup>278</sup> See *Works I*, p. 90.

Muslim social and historical contexts. The English interest in the Middle East during the eighteenth century, thus, was mainly secondary and determined more or less by mercantile and utilitarian considerations.<sup>279</sup>

This imaginary spectator mentioned above, beholding “the nightly offerings made to the demon of play” even in the close vicinity of the royal residence, a place supposedly free from any pollutions which are causing much unhappiness in many families, would think that the inhabitants belonged to a barbarous religion. But as we live in “really a Christian country, professing to enjoy the purest faith in the purest form”, Hannah More suggests to inquire how Christianity is “really practiced” by the fashionable, who are “absorbed in the delights of the world” and “devoted to the pursuit of pleasure”, and yet claim to be Christians because of an “occasional compliance with the forms of religion, and the ordinances of our church.” (*Works I*, 297)

Surprisingly and contrary to her pejorative remarks about the Mahometan faith, More argues against a comparison of the present state of Christian religion with that of other countries unless it were done “from a scripture view of what real religion is”, as it was presented in “so many passages of the sacred writing.” (*Works I*, 297) Any other comparison, so More, be it from the standpoint of custom or from a human standard, would be fallacious.

It was this kind of patriotism linked with bigoted chauvinism which belonged to the many recurring inconsistencies of Hannah More, as it was in sharp contrast to her growing Evangelical demeanour and her claim to altruism.

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<sup>279</sup> British travellers of the 18th century contributed very little to a closer contact with the native population. There were many factors that stood in the way of better contact and better understanding. Mistrust and religious bigotry were prevalent among both parties. The British victories in Egypt a decade after the publication of *Estimate* won the British a renown for valour and military discipline, and the battle of the Nile became a myth of English patriotism. With the ongoing slave-trade from the North of Africa, a circumstance Hannah More was very well aware of, prejudicial remarks on the Mahometan faith were probably felt as inappropriate by some of her readers. (See Mohamad Ali Hachicho, *passim*).

### The Question of a Defective Liturgy

In her search of the reasons for the decline in piety, one of the fundamental questions More raised in *Estimate* is what caused the growing general decline in piety and religiosity. When setting out to trace the various reasons for the obvious neglect of all religious duties, she wondered whether the “disuse of public worship” (*Works I*, 276), that is the way the liturgy was practised, could be one.<sup>280</sup> The beneficial religious services, “pure” and “evangelical”, as More labels them, are often condemned for being fruitless and unprofitable, a circumstance which, so More, rested in the missing fervency when asking for blessing. This decrease of public worship is, Hannah More says, often excused as being occasioned by a “disapprobation of the Liturgy” (*Works I*, 276). However, she clearly declines to see in the liturgy the main cause for the emptying pews. Her leanings for a biblically based liturgical simplicity are noticeable in several depictions in the *Mendip Annals*. In fact, Hannah More, as an Evangelical, seemed to be tending to the low-church tradition both in worship and liturgical practice, in which existed neither a certain liturgical pattern for the service nor a developed ritualized worship practice. For this reason Hannah More obviously took little interest in liturgical questions and permitted one of her teachers, Mr. Young, to have his way with praying activities, which critics deemed to be fairly close to Methodist extempore preaching, reason enough to kindle the Blagdon Controversy.

The question of liturgy, however, must have been of some interest to the upper orders, many of whom belonged to the Anglican High Church, whose liturgical tradition very much reminded of the Catholic practice. When More speaks of the Evangelical services as being “pure” (*Works I*, 276), she probably means that they are free from ornamental liturgical assets, and accompanied by spontaneous worship as an outward sign of their return to biblically based simplicity.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> “Public worship” or “communal prayer” was one important basic liturgical element out of seven. See Bratcher “What is Liturgy?”.

<sup>281</sup> See Dennis Bratcher. “Low Church” and “High Church”. *The Voice. Biblical and Theological Recourses for Growing Christians*.

Hannah More, thus, must have shared the opinion of the Reverend Charles Simeon, a leading Evangelical, who confessed in his diary that

the deadness and formality experienced in the worship of the Church arise far more from [sic] the low estate of our graces than from any defect in our Liturgy.<sup>282</sup>

However, the attitudes of More and Simeon differed in as much as More declined to see the importance and impact of what the Reverend Lindsey termed the idolatrous part of the liturgy<sup>283</sup>, whereas Simeon, despite his critical remarks about the absence of grace in the worship, defended the absolute beauty of the liturgy. In his sermons before the University of Cambridge about *The Excellency of the Liturgy*<sup>284</sup> he clearly testified to his point of view, saying that

an entire congregation praying not merely in the words but in the *spirit of liturgy* [emphasize added] would be the nearest thing imaginable to heaven on earth.<sup>285</sup>

But even Simeon saw the "multitudes" possibly kept away from the pews by a few "blemishes" of the liturgy, which, although negligible in comparison to the excellence of it in general, had better be removed (Simeon, 100).

While, on the one hand, Hannah More deplores the decline in public worship, possibly also owing to some imperfections of the liturgy, she is not without praise for it, on the other hand, when referring to the new zealous efforts of her Evangelical brethren to awaken Anglican worship from its drowsy state:

Perhaps there has not been since the age of the Apostles, a church upon earth in which the public worship was so solemn and so cheerful; so simple, yet so sublime; so full of fervour, at the same

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12 Dec. 2010 <<http://www.crivoice.org/lowhighchurch.html>> and Dennis Bratcher and Robin Stephenson-Bratcher. "What is Liturgy? Evangelicals and Liturgical Worship". *The Voice. Biblical and Theological Recourses for Growing Christians*.

12 Dec. 2010 <<http://www.crivoice.org/whatisliturgy.html>>.

See also Chapter III. of this thesis.

<sup>282</sup> "In Memory of the Rev. Charles Simeon, M. A.", quoting an entry in Simeon's diary. *Truth for Today*. 12 Dec. 2010 <<http://www.tecmalta.org/tft353.htm>>.

<sup>283</sup> See Thomas Belsham, *Memoirs of the Rev. Lindsey*, p. 237.

<sup>284</sup> See Rev. Charles Simeon, M.A. "The Churchman's Confession or An Appeal to The Liturgy". *The Excellency of The Liturgy, in Four Discourses*.

<sup>285</sup> Alexander C. Zabriskie "Charles Simeon: Anglican Evangelical". *Church History*, p.113, citing A. W. Brown, *Recollections*, 221.



time so free from enthusiasm; so rich in the gold of Christian antiquity, yet so astonishingly exempt from its dross. (*Works I*, 276)<sup>286</sup>

More clearly discriminates between the often overestimated liturgy, with its rites and ordinances, and the undervalued practice of public worship ("communal prayer"), which was an important liturgical element, too.<sup>287</sup> "[I]n a spirit of evident affection to the Prayer-Book" (Yonge, 88), she beautifully puts her unlimited appreciation for the importance of it the following way:

If we do not find a suitable humiliation in the *Confession*, a becoming earnestness in the *Petitions*, a congenial joy in the *Adoration*, a corresponding gratitude in the *Thanksgivings*, it is because our hearts do not accompany our words. (*Works I*, 276)

Therefore, the reading of an "obnoxious creed" three or four times a year, Hannah More is certain, can only serve as a further and rather poor excuse for shunning the pews; and she is also certain that neither a reform of the Prayer-book nor an abridgement of the New Testament would contribute much in order to change a lukewarm Christian.

Yonge, referring to the Duke of Grafton (see above), gave the question of the liturgy a new dimension. Though rather passed over by Hannah More, as research clearly shows, it was the subject of an ongoing debate, which preoccupied a number of public figures for several decades. Grafton published his *Hints to the Association for Preventing Vice and Immorality by a Layman* in 1789, warning that the Athanasian creed (used in the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church) gave "more offence than any other part of the service." (*Hints*, 31) He had set his heart on a return to the "true spirit of Protestantism" (*Hints*, 35). The resonance to his *Hints* must have been prolific, because in Grafton's second publication *Considerations on the Liturgy* in 1790 he mentioned two pamphlets which were in "opposition to the principles of [his] first publication" (*Considerations*, 1): one, *A Vindication of the Doctrines and Liturgy of the Church of England*, signed only by "'W. B.' a gentleman in the country", the other, *An Apology for the Liturgy and Clergy of the Church of England*, by Samuel Horsley, a clergyman. It was a debate in which also Bishop Horne, Bishop Watson

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<sup>286</sup> See Elisabeth Jay, p. 106 and M. G. Jones, p. 100.

and others were involved. The Duke of Grafton, conscious of the imperfections of the liturgy, thought that a change of the forms of worship, rites and ceremonies was not only "allowable", but even quite "natural", and in the case of the book of Common Prayer (for which Hannah More showed so much appreciation) even "necessary" (*Hints*, 16). It was also the only method, the Duke was certain, by which the Church of England could effectually maintain its ground against the dissenting sects.<sup>288</sup>

Even if William Wilberforce was not alarmed in this way, he, too, spotted incongruity in the practised liturgy, but thought that its abolition would be of outrageous consequence:

To what a degree might even the avowed principles of men [...] decline, when our inestimable Liturgy should no longer remain in use ! a Liturgy justly inestimable, which continually sets before us a faithful model of the Christian's belief, and practice, and language. (*A Practical View*, 422)

Urged by the same apprehension, a writer in *Wisdom in Miniature* (1795) argued that "[r]eligion, of which the rewards are distant, and which is animated only by faith and hope", must be kept in the minds "by external ordinances, [and] by stated calls to worship" (190).

In 1772, Beilby Porteus, before he was Bishop of London, was the promoter of a private petition to the bishops for a revision of the Liturgy, "particularly those parts which all reasonable persons agreed stood in need of amendment" so that "moderate and well disposed persons of other persuasions" might be brought over to the Established Church. However, the bishops decided that it was more prudent to let the Liturgy remain without revision, and Porteus acquiesced in the decision, being satisfied that he had expressed his judgment.<sup>289</sup>

The impact the liturgy had on many, however, may be inferred best from the case of the Duke of Grafton's serious endeavours to purge it of its deficiencies. In 1789 he met the leader of the Unitarians, the Reverend

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<sup>287</sup> For the basic components of the liturgy see Bratcher "What is Liturgy?"

<sup>288</sup> Thirty years later, the same issue was still a matter of debate as an anonymous letter to Lord John Russel, dated 1819 and signed CIVIS (pseud.), proves; a debate remembered by Joseph Ivimey, looking back in 1833, in which the "Hierarchy and Liturgy [were] such strange bugbears" (*John Milton: his Life and Times*, p. 104).

<sup>289</sup> Qtd. in John Hunt, *Religious Thought*, pp. 10-11. See also Hodgons, *Life of Porteus*, p. 32.

Theophilus Lindsey, after he had asked for a meeting in a letter dated June 4, 1789.<sup>290</sup> When Lindsey published a small work entitled "Conversations upon Christian Idolatry" in 1792 and "A New and Reformed edition of his liturgy" in 1793 (Belsham, pp. 237, 257), the Duke was convinced and converted to Unitarianism in mature years shortly after.<sup>291</sup>

If Hannah More refrained from officially criticising the higher echelons of the clergy in the Established Church for this defect, of which she must have been very well aware, it was probably foresight. Her utilitarian bent probably told her that little was to be gained in such a crucial matter if it was taken up by an Evangelical lay woman. Her true interest seemed less guided by Anglican doctrinal rites than by the disposition of a 'true Christian'. In spite of More's reticence to engage in the debate, the question of rites and liturgy was an important one and remained an unsatisfactory issue for several decades. More's seeming lack of interest in it seems rather strange, since in *Hints for the Education of a Young Princess*, published by her in 1805, she emphasized the importance of the liturgy for the future sovereign Charlotte as defender of the faith.

### **The Neglected Religious Education of the Young**

Train up a child in the way he should go: and  
when he is old, he will not depart from it.  
(King James Bible)

In *Estimate*, much room is given to the indispensable necessity of religious education, especially for the young, because the "notorious neglect" of it may be, so More, both cause and effect of the decline of Christianity. An early instruction of children in the principles of religion, Hannah More presumes, would be "the way in which we may most confidently expect

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<sup>290</sup> See Belsham, *Memoirs of Lindsay*, p. 245.

<sup>291</sup> According to Charles H. Bennett, Hannah More wrote to Horace Walpole "[a] six-line passage (c. 10 Sept. 1789) relating to the Duke of Grafton's conversion to Unitarianism [which] was entirely suppressed, since the context could not be concealed" (p. 344), illustrating "Miss More's 'disencumbering'" (p. 343). The date of the letter may be incorrect, because according to it Grafton's conversion must have been already underway by then.

Divine blessing.”<sup>292</sup> (*Works I*, 282) Instructing the young would mean to trigger an early positive disposition towards religious principles, to an extent which would guarantee “a congruity between the mind and the object” (*Works I*, 282) and, in consequence, produce enjoyment, an enjoyment for which the foundation had to be laid in early years.

Hannah More also deeply deplors the growing lack and contemptuous treatment of paternal authority as a result of the lack of natural subordination<sup>293</sup> among the frivolous and “high-born youth”, whose “passions have been prematurely excited by agitating pleasures” and whose “vitiating intellect [...] [led to] depraved morals”. (*Works I*, 283) Restraint in amusements in young years<sup>294</sup> would hold more happiness ready later in life. That religion is not early and strongly enough taught but rather “incidentally”, Hannah More holds to be “a great and radical defect”. (*Works I*, 283)

Lapses from virtue by those who had an early Christian instruction may not be infrequent, Hannah More believes, but the chances to recover from them are more likely, because

men will seldom be *incurably* wicked unless that internal corruption of principle has taken place, which teaches them how to justify iniquity by argument, and to confirm evil conduct by the sanction of false reasoning; or where there is a total ignorance of the very nature and design of Christianity, which ignorance can only exist where early religious instruction has been entirely neglected. (*Works I*, 283)

In this context, Hannah More differentiates between “errors occasioned by the violence of passion” and those of “systematic wickedness”, whereby the former “may be reformed” and the latter “fortified by time”, the former “deliberately commit[ing] a bad action”, the latter “adopt[ing] a false principle”, paving the way of no return. (*Works I*, 283) That piety was perceived by the majority as obsolete in More’s time had its root in the

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<sup>292</sup> It is this blessing Hannah More also anticipated from her work for herself and the young with her school projects.

<sup>293</sup> The hierarchical structure, even in the small unit of family circles, was a most important subject to Hannah More. She feared that the disregard of it would spread and have disastrous consequences on King, Church, and Government and the existing social order.

<sup>294</sup> The Evangelicals for instance would not allow dancing. Hannah More greatly criticised the children’s balls in her *Strictures*, which much agitated some of the children’s mothers.

neglect of early religious instruction.<sup>295</sup> Thus, the deferment of religious instruction until the time had come when a person was capable of choosing for himself, is regarded by her as an evil “maxim of modern refinement” (*Works I*, 284).

Early religious instruction, Hannah More says, causes excitement for being devout at the most susceptible season of life and can trigger in old age the enjoyment of revival instead of mere recollection. The defective memory in old age will thus be outwitted by parents early storing in their children’s minds “the seeds of piety” (*Works I*, 284). More thinks that remonstrations against the negligence of adhering to this principle ought not to be termed as “bigotry or enthusiasm” (*Works I*, 284),<sup>296</sup> because it is imperative that religious training should inculcate interior restraint and self-control as an important part of the moral law. With this controlling principle, so Hannah More, a disciplined heart would easily overcome temptation by way of “resistance” (*Works I*, 285), a habit which fortifies the heart. In an ironical vein she raises the question for what motive, if the religious principle failed, an “accountable being” would resist “a strong temptation to a present good, when he has no dread that he shall thereby forfeit a greater future good?” (*Works I*, 285)<sup>297</sup> Any possible objection that intensive early education might be counter-productive to the purpose of education is decidedly negated by Hannah More, who underlines that quite the contrary is the case.

In her rather practical demeanour she says that religious principles go very well with the qualities of a business man, which are “punctuality, diligence, and application” (*Works I*, 285) Diligently serving God will have a positive effect on dealing with men, too, she says. But, on the other hand and without doubt, those accomplishments which in our days “constitute the *gentleman*”, with his polished manners, are in need of being

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<sup>295</sup> Hannah More, like the Evangelicals in general, had a leaning for history and was repeatedly conjecturing up the past. With reference to piety she maintained that in Elizabethan and early Stuart times, statesmen were far more openly zealous in piety. (*Works I*, p. 283)

<sup>296</sup> Religious enthusiasm was imputed to the so-called Methodists who became very unpopular because of their zealous attitude. Hannah More was strongly suspected of being a Methodist even though she always vehemently and openly disapproved of it. See Martha More’s journal *The Mendip Annals*.

<sup>297</sup> E. Jay writes that “Butler took perverse pleasure in intimating that the thought of hell alone maintained men’s loyalty to Christianity.” (p. 87)

transformed.<sup>298</sup> Although good breeding, according to More, is an admirable substitute of goodness, the principles of Christianity will produce even more, and genuine politeness. Hannah More uses the example of Saint Paul by saying that he would make such a fine gentleman, whose “sweetness of manners” (*Works I*, 285) would naturally design him to an example of virtue as compared to some famous polished gentlemen, whose lives left but “a taint upon the public morals” (*Works I*, 286).

It is a further indication of Hannah More's utilitarian disposition that beyond all ethical and religious assets to be gained by early instruction, she also saw its practical side: piety could also result in the acquisition of courteous behaviour and prudent communication as befitting ornaments of a young man.<sup>299</sup>

Hannah More certainly was not alone with her clamour for an early Christian education, but as a moral instance, which she had meanwhile become, her voice naturally mattered particularly. Like More, Sarah Trimmer, for instance, saw the

knowledge and practice of Christianity, not merely as *an essential branch of instruction*, but as the *foundation* of a good education, to which every other branch of instruction should be kept in subordination. (*An Essay on Christian Education*, 1-2)

In order to promote the education of the "rising generation" in principles of Christianity, she offered in her *Essay* (1812) means and methods for exciting children for Christian doctrines and the early performance of Christian duties, proposing how to communicate Scripture knowledge to children and young people.

John Bowles, too, saw the education of the "rising generation" as the Government's foremost duty in order “to render its subjects virtuous [...] in the knowledge and practice of their Religious and Moral Duties” (Bowles, *Moral State*, 107). Thinking that education ought not to be left to mere chance, he requests the Government to “*immediately* interfere” with religious education, and, "in order to secure the benefits of Religious education to the lower classes", to keep a special eye on the "moral

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<sup>298</sup> Hannah More is pointing at the great many of useless and superficial conduct books.

<sup>299</sup> See *Wisdom* 1795, p. 11.

protection" (108) of the wanting children of the poor. On the one hand, Bowles is anxious to "prevent education from becoming [...] noxious", on the other hand he is fearful of the chance of "promoting an indifference for the obligations of Religion and morality" with an entailing "contempt for the sanctions of law and the authority of government", even of "depriving the established Worship" of the respect it is entitled to. (Bowles, *Moral State*, 108) His way of looking at the necessity of education for the sake of good morals and the keeping up of the religious establishment, conflicts with his fear that too much education could have the opposite effect, namely that of producing contempt for the law and the authority of government, and possibly even indifference for religion. He seems to be at a loss how education was to be handled.

Even if Hannah More had no distinct educational concept for the higher ranks either, her concept for the poor, by contrast, was perfectly clear. She concentrated on the Evangelicals' focus on the Gospel by teaching to read the Bible, but thought there was no need to learn how to write.<sup>300</sup> By this method, she met several goals: promoting Biblicism, as a very important marker of the Evangelicals; gratifying her desire, much urged and supported by William Wilberforce, to alleviate the lives of the poor within the station Providence had pleased to place them, always keeping in mind that her foremost mission was to morally prepare them for the life to come; and supporting a social hierarchical order in which she believed as an orthodox Church woman throughout her life.<sup>301</sup> Since *Estimate* was in the first place an appraisal of the religious situation of the upper-classes, an excursion to the educational efforts Hannah More was beginning to undertake for the poor may serve to illustrate how, contrary to her schools

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<sup>300</sup> Hannah More's stance as to what extent education was 'useful' for the poor is most revealingly explained in her famous and lengthy letter to the Bishop of Bath and Wells in 1802. She is desperately defending her teaching methods in order to avoid her schools being closed down: "My plan of instruction is extremely simple and limited. They learn on week days such coarse works as may fit them for servants. I allow of no writing for the poor." Her object was not to make "fanaticks [sic]", but to train them "in habits of industry and piety." (Qtd. full length in Thompson, pp. 200-222. W. Roberts, unluckily, only quoted More's letter in parts.) For the education of the poor see Chapt. IV.

<sup>301</sup> M.G. Jones argues in her biography on Hannah More that she made her "slow and tentative approach to Evangelicalism by way of her new humanitarian interests" (p.82). However, it rather seems to be true that her humanitarian work, although a project inspired by the Evangelicals (see Brown 105), was the side effect of her rising Evangelical outlook. Of course, the two aspects may well have had a mutually stimulating

in the Mendips, she had not offered a complete concept of education in general prior to the publication of *Hints Towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess* in 1805. *Hints*, however, can be regarded as a "complete system of education", so Thomas Taylor (241). Although it was principally designed for the education of the future queen Charlotte, it comprised a range of lessons suitable for the young of all ranks, but especially for the higher ranks: religious education was no longer seen as ending up with "drawing a beautiful picture" (Yonge, 89) of a true Christian life, but had become the result of observed rules of Christian behaviour. Hannah More, in a wise manner, combined religious instruction with education, aware of their necessary co-existence,<sup>302</sup> which was, in the words of her biographer Henry Thompson, a "theory of education [...] [which] was a suitable education for each, and a Christian education for all." (Thompson, 97).

William Wilberforce was inspired by the "same stern code [...] [of] the Evangelical's social conscience". He, too, felt strongly that there was "little point in altering the social order in this world", and risking the possibility of losing God's kingdom, the only kingdom, which finally mattered. Revolutionary France was an example in point showing what was at stake.<sup>303</sup> Wilberforce's plea for instruction and improvement of the "rising generation" had a clear political message, which was to provide a most effective "antidote" for fighting the developing "brood of moral vipers" being bred in France. He hoped that by giving religious instruction to the young this could "in some degree restore the prevalence of Evangelical Christianity" (*A View*, 429); and that "men of authority and influence" (*A View*, 428) would take care of this matter. Wilberforce's message was underlined by the Reverend William Barrow (warmly recommended by Mrs. Trimmer with regard to liberal education and prejudices of education), who said that "it [was] the duty of a schoolmaster [...] to instruct his pupils in the established religion" in view of the fact that "*christianity [was] part of the laws of the land*". (Barrow, Vol. II, 189), and that religious instructions

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influence. The allegiance to a higher than human morality distinguished the Evangelical from the humanitarian in any case.

<sup>302</sup> See Taylor, p. 126.

<sup>303</sup> See Meacham's essay "The Evangelical Inheritance". *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (Nov., 1963), pp. 91-92.



would thus strengthen and support the "political establishment" and the "doctrines and the worship of the national church". (Barrow, Vol. II, 190)

More's remarks on religious education in *Estimate*, so Buckland, contained "a good sense" (Buckland, 65), which later discussions were lacking, she deplored, namely with regard to the factor that "religion is the only thing in which we seem to look for the end, without making use of the means" (More, *Works I*, 282). Buckland certainly was not familiar with the Reverend William Barrow's statement that "[i]t is the end at which we aim in [religious] education not the means by which we pursue it" (Barrow, Vol. I, 65), which was in tune with Hannah More's.

In 1777 Hannah More had already said in her *Essays on Various Subjects* that "next to religious influences, an [sic] habit of study is the most probable preservative of the virtue of young persons" (*Essays*, 23). What she meant was the necessity of getting absorbed in serious and religious reading, even if its best effects were "often very remote [... ] [and] to be discovered in future scenes, and exhibited in untried connections." (*Essays*, 137) With her *Essays*, Hannah More's didactic religious writings had begun to gradually take on shape more than a decade before *Estimate* was published.

This eighteenth-century revival of the classical-antiquity awareness of the importance of an early moral instruction goes back to 1743 when J. Barclay articulated its necessity, albeit not necessarily for religious reasons:

If the mind is not early seasoned with right principles, after fifteen or sixteen the instruction of the best master is like water spilt upon the ground. Custom by this time becomes a second nature, and it were folly to expect a change.<sup>304</sup>

This statement was certainly, so Hutchison, one of Barclay's most telling arguments for devoting time to this aspect of education.<sup>305</sup> Even 'Quintilian', as the famous rhetorician is often called,<sup>306</sup> knew about the

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<sup>304</sup> Henry Hutchison, "An Eighteenth-Century Insight into Religious and Moral Education", p. 240, quoting J. Barclay, *Treatise on Education* (1743), p. 176.

<sup>305</sup> See Hutchison, p. 240.

<sup>306</sup> Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (c. 35 – c. 100), the Roman rhetorician from Hispania, is widely referred to in medieval schools of rhetoric and in Renaissance writing. (Source Wikipedia)

importance of early intellectual and ethical training and recommended to all parents the timely education of their children.<sup>307</sup>

The question of early religious instruction was also raised in a collection of sentences of divine, moral, and historical character.<sup>308</sup> Quoting Aristotle, one of the unnamed writers stated that

virtue is necessary to the young, to age comfortable, to the poor serviceable, to the rich an ornament, to the fortunate an honour, to the unfortunate a support; that she ennobles the slave, and exalts nobility itself. (*Wisdom* 1795, 173)

In a sober manner, he adds that "timely instruction" (13) would also save many people from the gibbet, because early acquired piety would prevent crime. It was better to "[b]e timely wise, rather than wise in time!" (151), so the writer suggested. Piety was seen as a bulwark of virtue, or, as the author of the *Essay: Reflections, Moral and Divine*<sup>309</sup>, put it:

Piety is the foundation of virtue ; where the spring is pointed, the stream cannot be pure ; and where the groundwork is not good, the building is not lasting ; he does nothing that begins not well ; that is only praise worthy, which proceeds from a right principle. (166)

And in as much as piety was the foundation of virtue, "[i]gnorance [was] a frail base for virtue!", we are reminded by Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication* (Penguin ed., 156).

Summing up, it can be said that "[p]iety [was] the best possession ; honesty the best policy ; vice its own punishment ; and virtue its own reward." (*Wisdom* 1795, 158)

Hannah More knew that early religious instruction was an essential means of generating confirmed Christians, and not mere nominal ones, who merely professed to be Christians; and that early instruction, ethical and religious reasons aside, also included the learning of filial obedience towards parents and any kind of superiors.<sup>310</sup> As obedience and submission were important preconditions of the social hierarchical order, Hannah More never grew tired of demanding early instruction.

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<sup>307</sup> See *Wisdom* 1795, p.12.

<sup>308</sup> See *Wisdom*, 1795.

<sup>309</sup> See *Wisdom* 1795, pp.158-173.

<sup>310</sup> See *Wisdom* 1824, pp. 10-11.

Submission, closely knit with obedience, was also requested by the Reverend William Barrow from infancy onwards.<sup>311</sup> This could also mean, especially in the case of girls, a chance of getting away from "the foolish methods of education among the nobility", as they were practised in More's time.<sup>312</sup>

In view of her interest in early religious instruction, Hannah More must have been thunderstruck when Citizen Dupont at the National Convention at Paris on December 14, 1792, openly opposed religious education for the youths of his country. He was confirmed by Citizen Manuel, who wrote that "Religious faith, impressed on the mind of an infant seven years old, will lead to perfect slavery," and that "NO religion must be taught in schools which are to be national ones." (*Remarks*, p. 23)<sup>313</sup> This was "a direct attack on religion, not unlike the declamations which, after the lapse of nearly another century, [were] again heard in France" (Yonge, 105). More, who feared this poison swapping over to England, was righteously indignant and decided to give an appropriate answer without delay. Her answer to Dupont's atheism was *Remarks on the Speech of M. Dupont*, published in 1793, a short but pregnant defence of her Christian faith and its true benevolence, which prompted the English to alleviate the starvation of the Catholic French priests who were expelled from their country.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> See Barrow, Vol. I 65.

<sup>312</sup> G. J. Barker-Benfield quoting Swift, p. 115.

<sup>313</sup> FN (Extract from Mons. Manuel's Letter to the National Convention, dated Jan. 26, 1793).

<sup>314</sup> The noteworthy profit yielded from More's pamphlet was used for the support of the French clergy.

### **The Fight Against Infidelity, Scepticism and the New Modern Philosophy**

One of the problems Hannah More was particularly worried about was the low esteem the Christian religion was held in by the young generation. Already in her *Essays on Various Subjects* (1777) she had complained about the prevailing notion that religion was only a matter for "the old and the melancholy" (*Essays*, 174) and made "a handsome woman ugly, or a young wrinkled" (*Essays*, 175), and that the young should put off religion until they had "lost all taste for amusement" (*Essays*, 177). All these estimations did great harm to the religious interests.

But she was also distressed at the notion entertained by the young and gay that religion was the enemy of "wit and genius" (*Works I*, 286). This is surprising in so far as More later remonstrated against wit in her *Strictures*, where she thought it as thoroughly unfit in women, and pointed at its inherent danger unless it be used in the "service of religion" (*Strictures I*, 237), one of several inconsistencies we come across in More's writings. She also argued that although irreligious men often used wit and genius, piety did not enjoin a man to be dull. But nowadays one class of writers infused into the young the opinion that religion was a sign of weakness in men, while another told them that religious men were ridiculous. Such false views, so More, were generally derived from "those favourite works of wit and humour" (*Works I*, 286) which introduced many a pious character with such dangerous abundance of virtues that they were lastly felt to be absurd, because "witty malice can make the best character ridiculous" (*Works I*, 286).<sup>315</sup>

While among the young, sincere piety had the reputation of being severe and sullen, irreligion deceived by a facade of tolerance and candour, More goes on. On subjects such as eternal life and salvation, however, witticism, she felt, was out of place. Hence she attacked the "scoffers" (*Works I*, 286) who paint a hostile picture of religion "with the sword of persecution in the one hand, and the flames of intolerance in the other", and then ridicule believers for "worshipping an idol" which their

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<sup>315</sup> Unfortunately, Hannah More does not name any of these satirical poets.

misrepresentation has “rendered as malignant as Moloch”. (*Works I*, 287) It was no wonder that young people, in particular, should be attracted to the blandishment of these new philosophers or “fashionable reasoners” (*Works I*, 287), as Hannah More calls them, who wrote about the so-called “revealed religion” in the same light manner as they “often quote[d] satirical poets as grave historical authorities.” (*Works I*, 287)

“Revealed religion”<sup>316</sup>, however, was infinitely superior to the new systems of philosophy and these “fashionable reasoners” who made light of it. Revealed religion, in conformity with human nature, as More stresses, drew up “rules of conduct”<sup>317</sup> which point out what man is “to hope, [...] to fear, [...] [and] to believe”, and what he has “to do”. Religion, then, in More’s point of view, is the “lamp” with bright light, showing the way as against the poor “glimmer of a cold and comfortless philosophy.”<sup>318</sup> (*Works I*, 288) In contrast, the “fashionable reasoners” with their jargon of French philosophy, blame Christians for look[ing] for reward”(*Works I*, 287), while they unrealistically call for “pure disinterested goodness acting for its own sake”. (*Works I*, 287)

It was this new philosophy and scepticism rather than infidelity “in the grave and scholastic form of speculation, argument, or philosophical deduction” (*Works I*, 277), which More blamed for the growing disinclination for Christianity. Thus “prudent scepticism”<sup>319</sup>, More complained,

hath [sic] wisely studied the temper of the times, and skilfully felt the pulse of this relaxed and indolent, and selfish age, [...] when it

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<sup>316</sup> “Revealed religion” is religion as proclaimed in the New Testament and explained by the Apostles in their Gospels. Lee Gatiss: “[R]evelation is the deliberate and active disclosure by God of something previously unknown which communicates real but not exhaustive knowledge.” See his Essay “Is Christianity a Revealed Religion?” *The Theologian. The Internet Journal for Integrated Theology*.

22 December 2010 <<http://www.theologian.org.uk/doctrine/revealed.html>>.

<sup>317</sup> Hannah More in some way seems to regard Holy Scripture, and particularly its Gospels, as an extended conduct book.

<sup>318</sup> This is but one example of how far from the ideas of the Enlightenment Hannah More’s position was.

<sup>319</sup> Hannah More must have had the English sceptics in mind of whom David Hume (1711-1766) was the best-known. He is regarded as one of the most important figures in the history of Western philosophy and the Scottish Enlightenment. See Hackett Lewis, „The Age of Enlightenment. The European Dream Of Progress And Enlightenment” (1992).

10 March 2011 <[http://history-world.org/age\\_of\\_enlightenment.htm](http://history-world.org/age_of_enlightenment.htm)>.

adopted sarcasm instead of reasoning, and preferred a sneer to an argument. (*Works I*, 277)

The consequence was, so More, that the "gain[ing] of proselytes" had now to take place "under the bewitching form of a profane bon-mot." (*Works I*, 277)

Even if infidelity, in this "voluptuous age", was unlikely to be the target of close studies, Christianity was even less likely to be the object of research and engagement for the gay world because it required exertion as well as "humility" and "self-denial" (*Works I*, 277). On the other hand, self-abasement, also "inseparable from true Christianity," could be assumed effortlessly by way of imitation. The question was why bother about moral principles if they can be obtained more cheaply and with less effort through glittering profane literary effusions; when being a philosopher was a reputation to be obtained without any sacrifice and severe study by simply picking up "a few sprightly sayings" (*Works I*, 277).

Apart from her fear of the irreligious influence of the new philosophy, the Zeitgeist of scepticism and the irresponsible scoffers, however, Hannah More regarded the all pervading "*practical irreligion*" and its hostility to "that spirit, temper, and behaviour which Christianity inculcates" as the "leading mischief" of the time. (*Works I*, 277) Indeed, she deemed it as possibly even more dangerous, as it trickled down to the lower orders and led them astray. In opposition to this Zeitgeist, she makes it a point throughout *Estimate* to define what makes a true Christian.

### **The True Christian**

In *Estimate*, Hannah More tries to explain the nature of a true Christian by his behaviour and creed. She realized that Christianity is often confronted with the question of why it has not produced more visible consequences in the reformation of mankind. She concedes that "vice and immorality" indeed prevail in countries professing Christianity and that the behaviour of "professors", who pretend to receive Christianity with great reverence, but do not adopt it as a rule of conduct, differs but little from unbelievers. If

all Christians accepted the principles of their religion with sincerity, we would see “[a]ll the heavy charges which have been brought against religion have been taken from the abuse of it.” (*Works I*, 292) Worldly and irreligious men thus draw their notion of Christianity not from its pure fountain, but from the “polluted stream of human practice,” and judge the creed by the “misconduct of its followers”. (*Works I*, 293) These negligent Christians should be aware that “by a conduct so little worthy of their high calling”, they

not only violate the law to which they have vowed obedience, but occasion many to disbelieve or to despise it; that they are thus in a great measure accountable for the infidelity of others. (*Works I*, 293)

If they lived up to the principles they professed and showed the “beauty of holiness’ in their daily conversation” (*Works I*, 293), they would give witness to their sincerity and obedience. In view of the conduct of most Christians, however, More felt that outsiders could not help concluding that “Christians do not believe in the religion they profess, or that there is no truth in the religion itself,” because they habitually violate the divine law.<sup>320</sup> More also warns of the consequences of “careless Christian[s]” preaching water and drinking wine, and passionately writes:

But, while a man talks like a saint, and yet lives like a sinner; while he professes to believe like an apostle and yet leads the life of a sensualist; talks of ardent faith, and yet exhibits a cold and low practice; boasts himself the disciple of a meek Master, and yet is as much a slave to his passions as they who acknowledge no such authority; while he appears the proud professor of an [sic] humble religion, or the intemperate champion of a self-denying one – such a man brings Christianity into disrepute, confirms those in error who might have been awakened to conviction, strengthens doubt into disbelief, and hardens indifference into contempt. (*Works I*, 293)

Hannah More divides Christians into “nominal Christians” and “real Christians”. The former persuade themselves “that there can be no harm in going *a little farther*”, the latter are “always afraid of going too far.” (*Works I*, 299) She wonders whether “the motives of virtue are not high enough to quicken ordinary men to very extraordinary exertions”. But nominal Christians incessantly “do and suffer” for such things as popularity, custom, fashion, and honour much more than good men would

“do and suffer” for what religion requires them to do; for all religion demands them to do is sanctioned by “good sense, sound policy, right reason, and uncorrupt judgment”. (*Works I*, 299) The “fashionable professors”, however, mistake the nature of God's mercy, she insists, and harbour “a most fallacious hope” in God's infinite mercy, which would mean that He is violating “his own covenant”. (*Works I*, 299) But He is merciful to sin repented, but not to sin continued in. She terms it a “dangerous folly” to trust that God will forgive us “in our *own way*” after God’s clear revelation that “he will only forgive us in *his way*”. More then asks whether it was not “singularly base” if we sinned “against God *because he is merciful?*” (*Works I*, 299)

Living in opposition to God’s will and not obeying him, means not to trust in Him, so More, maintaining that

to break his laws, and yet to depend on his favour; to live in opposition to his will, and yet in expectation of his mercy; to violate his commands, and to look for his acceptance, would not, in any other instance, be thought a reasonable ground of conduct; and yet it is by no means as uncommon as it is inconsistent. (*Works I*, 299)

One of the wrong principles of education in More's opinion was to separate “duty and pleasure”, thus “forcibly disjoining what should be considered as inseparable.” As an example she lists the way how Sundays are commonly spent: people seem to strike a bargain of pleasure for duty, or, in other words, “amusement in pay for [...] drudgery” in proportion. It should, therefore, not surprise that “a religious life is reprobated as strict and rigid.” (*Works I*, 295) A Christian, Hannah More is convinced, must act from nobler motives than buying amusement, namely from serving God as a privilege. In reality “reprobated strictness is [...] the true cause of actual enjoyment” by wiping out all uneasy passions, she says. While to someone “immersed in the practices of this world”, religious life “is [...] a hard bondage”, to a “real Christian it is ‘perfect freedom’.” (*Works I*, 295) The common notion that “a little religion will make people happy”, but that a “high degree of it is incompatible with all enjoyment”, is wrong, More says. The point is that “[a] religion which ties the hands, without changing the heart [...] is indeed an uncomfortable religion,” (*Works I*, 295) because

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<sup>320</sup> See *Works I*, 293.



such a religion would give a man “but little inward comfort”. (*Works I*, 296) It is not intended to operate “as a charm, talisman, or incantation”, but as “an active, vital, influential principle [...] *on the heart* [emphasis added], [...] regulating our commerce with the world.”<sup>321</sup> (*Works I*, 296)

The entire “present system of fashionable life is utterly destructive of seriousness,” More complains. People frequently attend great assemblies, but as they have no esteem for each other, they remain without pleasure, and part without regret. They seem to her as a joyless round of diversions, wearing out in time.<sup>322</sup> The “mere spirit of dissipation [...] contracted from invariable habit [...] is in itself hostile to a religious spirit” (*Works I*, 296), More is convinced.

As a devout Evangelical, More criticizes the general laxness both in morals and in religious belief. “In these times of relaxed principle”, Hannah More deplores that “enthusiasm”<sup>323</sup> has been discredited and is guarded against, while licentiousness is practiced nonchalantly. Does “enthusiastic piety” need moderation like an “epidemic distemper”, she asks, even though on the other hand she admits that enthusiasm is “an evil to which the more religious of the lower class are peculiarly exposed for a variety of reasons” (*Works I*, 294), which she refrains from naming, though they exist among the higher ranks as well. The era, however, according to More, is in general characterized by “indifference in religion and levity in manners” and in desperate need of “lively patterns” of piety. Many real Christians hesitate to show their conviction openly, because they are fearful of being thought “overscrupulous” and afraid of either “*doing too much*” or of “*going too far*”, and in their eagerness to “*liv[e] like the rest of the world*” yield to “indiscriminate conformity”.<sup>324</sup> (*Works I*, 294) As soon as things are asked to be “*done*” or to be “*parted with*”, pious activity is “stigmatize[d]” by the world. (*Works I*, 294) But, Hannah More says, there cannot be any “being

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<sup>321</sup> Hannah More understood this “active principle” as the ‘conversion’ to the ‘religion of the heart’, paying tribute to the spreading emotional revival of the Anglican Evangelicals by putting stress on the heart rather than on the mind.

<sup>322</sup> Hannah More seems to be reflecting on her time and experience with the gay and great during her London time.

<sup>323</sup> Hannah More’s referring to “enthusiasm” must be understood in the positive sense of ‘zeal’ and Evangelical ‘activism’, and not as fanaticism as it was practised by the Methodists of her time.

<sup>324</sup> Hannah More is never getting tired of instigating to more freedom and independence of the mind among the higher ranks.

too holy, too strict, or too good”, unless there is a failure in the judgement, because “in goodness [and in piety] there is no excess” (*Works I*, 295) both in the love of God and of our neighbours. “Many a fashionable reader” may take the writer of this little tract to be the “palpable enthusiast [...] [and] the abettor of ‘strange doctrines’” (*Works I*, 298), but this, she argues, makes the “simple and faithful description of Christianity” she gives no less true:

It consists of repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; [...] it is the peculiarity of the Christian religion to humble the sinner and exalt the Saviour; [...] that all have sinned [...] [and] are by nature in a state condemnation; that *all* stand in the need of mercy, of which there is no hope but on the Gospel terms; that eternal life is promised to those *only* who accept it on the condition of ‘faith, repentance, and renewed obedience’. (*Works I*, 298)

It is “strange”, she says, that acting according to the principles of religion is regarded as a “weakness”, and what alone is consistent is branded as “absurd” (*Works I*, 298). When giving signs of “a transformation of heart”, men will “be accounted, if not fanatical, at least, singular, weak, or melancholy.” (*Works I*, 298) It is, according to More, “a very fortunate combination of circumstances” if somebody, who has acquired the reputation of being a Christian, has nevertheless retained the reputation of being “a man of sense”.<sup>325</sup> (*Works I*, 295)

The most common and intelligible definition of “human duty”, so More, is to “[f]ear God, and keep his commandments.” (*Works I*, 297) Since keeping the commandments grows out of fearing God, the effect of it ought to show clearly. But unfortunately, she sees few proofs of “heavenly-mindedness” (*Works I*, 298).

Hannah More also criticises the habit of

a kind of reading which, while it quiets the conscience by being on the side of morals, neither awakens fear, nor alarms security [...] flatter[ing] the passions of the reader [...] [by] enable[ing] him to keep heaven in his eye, and the world in his heart. (*Works I*, 298)

The readers are, so to say, represented to themselves “as amiable persons, [if] guilty indeed of a few faults, but never as condemned sinners under sentence of death.” (*Works I*, 298) This kind of reading “commonly

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<sup>325</sup> The perfect example is rendered in the person of Mr. Stanley in More's novel *Coelebs*.

abounds with high encomiums on the dignity of human nature; the good effects of virtue on health, fortune and reputation" (*Works I*, 298/99). It strongly reminds her, More says, of the "too successful practices of certain luke-warm and temporizing divines" who tend to divide soul and spirit, whereas "those severer preachers of righteousness" disgust people by appealing too much to their conscience, treating "principles as the only source of manners" and insisting on the "great leading truths, that man is a fallen creature<sup>326</sup> who must be restored." (*Works I*, 299) But such "heart-searching writers", as More calls them, only on rare occasions will get access to the hearts of the "more modish Christians", an experience she herself had made among her rich London friends, unless they are able to captivate with the "seducing graces of language" such well-bred readers, who, Hannah More mockingly says, though they are "perishing for want of food", amuse themselves with the "garnish"; and instead of being anxious for eternal life are looking for "elegance of composition" (*Works I*, 299). Even though comparing favourably to writers of a "less decent order", More is not sure whether so many books of "frigid morality" have not done religion much more harm than good, because of "exhibiting such inferior motives of action, [...] moderate representation of duty, [...] and low standard of principle." (*Works I*, 299) Have they not made readers "inquire what is the lowest degree in the scale of virtue", and by doing so content themselves with as little virtue as to "barely [...] escape eternal punishment"; and with as much indulgence as possible without forfeiting the chance of hope for the next world, she wonders. Such low views of duty seem to owe much to what Hannah More terms as "bare-weight virtue" (*Works I*, 299), many Christians content themselves with.

Hannah More draws up rules by which a true Christian may be judged: first, the great rule of social duty, which means to care for the comfort of others, especially for that of dependents and inferiors; second, to act towards others as he would wish others should act towards him; third, to

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<sup>326</sup> That man is a fallen creature, was Hannah More's conviction which she derived from the Evangelical doctrine. William Wilberforce dedicated a whole chapter on the "corruption of human nature" and the 'original sin', the "linchpin of the Evangelical creed" (Jay, p.54), as its outset, in his much lauded book *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians*, 1797.

keep himself “*unspotted from the world*” despite their “visiting[ing] the fatherless and widows in their affliction.” (*Works I*, 298).

### **Morals and Faith**

In *Estimate*, Hannah More also censures those Christians who regard their creed as a perfect system of morals, but do not accept its divine authority. Hence they have the advantage of not being discredited for “blind submission” (*Works I*, 300) to authority but at the same time secure for themselves the reputation of “good men”, being counted as “liberal” by the philosophers, and as “decent” by the believers. Such Christians cannot realize the “pure morality of the Gospel”, because only the influence of the divine truth prepares the heart best for “an unreserved obedience to its laws”. A “lively belief” is thus the precondition for a profound obedience. (*Works I*, 300) A “set of duties” motivated by a mere adherence to their “beauty” or “a cold conviction of their propriety”, but not including obedience to the imposing authority, is not in conformity with God’s spirit. Since God made “the Gospel an instrument of salvation”, Hannah More urges us to accept it as a “divine institution”, so it may effectually operate on human conduct. (*Works I*, 300)

If Christianity is no mere system of morals, it is no “mere system of ethics” either, for Christianity must be embraced entirely, if it is to be received at all as a “perfect scheme”, as one “consummate whole”. There must be “no breaking the system into portions”, so that one is at liberty to choose one and reject another. (*Works I*, 300) There is

no separating the evidenced from the doctrines, the doctrines from the precepts, belief from obedience, morality from piety, the love of our neighbour from the love of God. If we allow Christianity to be any thing [sic], we must allow it to be every thing [sic]. (*Works I*, 301)

Christianity, in consequence, is for sure “something more than a set of rules”; faith is “indispensably necessary to its acceptance with God”; religion does not “supersede morality” even if the latter is “not the whole of religion”; piety is not only the best principle of moral conduct, but is

indispensable and absolute duty in itself; not only the highest motive to the practice of virtue; but is a prior obligation and absolutely necessary. Hannah More is convinced that religion will survive all the virtues of which it is the source. (*Works I*, 301)

A “real Christian” then, Hannah More says in conclusion,

is not such merely by habit, profession or education; he is not a Christian in order to acquit his sponsors of the engagements they entered into in his name; but he is one who has embraced Christianity from a conviction of its truth and an experience of its excellence. He is not only confident in matters of faith by evidences suggested to his understanding, or reasons which correspond to his inquiries; but all these evidences of truth, all these principles of goodness are working into his heart, and exhibit themselves in his practice. [...] He is so powerfully convinced of the general truth, and so deeply impressed by the general spirit of the Gospel, that he is not startled by every little difficulty; he is not staggered by every ‘hard saying’. (*Works I*, 301)

If there are mysteries which “surpass his understanding” (*Works I*, 301), More adds, they will leave the real Christian unshaken, realizing how one doctrine of the Scripture bears upon another. And most important, she claims that to be a real Christian does not at all mean that reason and religion cannot go together. Christianity will furnish the real Christian with both “all the evidences of its truth [...] [and] a living principle of action.” The “holy Spirit” will enlighten him, turning all his doings into sanctified actions, so that “the word of truth ‘is life indeed, and is spirit indeed!’” (*Works I*, 301)

A Christian life, according to More, consists of two equally difficult things: “the adoption of good habits, and the excision of such as are evil.” (*Works I*, 289) The “vigilant Christian” turns to his life hereafter rather than to present tributes. She underlines the importance of preparing for the life to come.<sup>327</sup> “Ceasing to do evil [is] the indispensable preliminary to learning to do well” (*Works I*, 289), Hannah More is sure, because these two actions go hand in hand. Self-denial of “permitted pleasures” would help to get a hold over those which are unlawful; and untainted domestic virtue would build an early restraint, as Hannah More elaborates earlier in this

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<sup>327</sup> Hannah More’s vision of two kingdoms is omnipresent in all her writings. This world’s kingdom is but a chance of preparing for the everlasting one to come.

essay. The increased dissipation practised by the higher ranks, on the other hand, had, no doubt, contributed to the corruption of morals and, in this manner, to the growth of evil. Hannah More sees fashionable families even as a place of “almost total extermination of religion” (*Works I*, 289). Those persons, she criticises, look with indignation at prisons crowded with criminals, yet harbour “an internal principle of vice” themselves, and the crimes they censure “are nothing more than that principle put into action.” (*Works I*, 289) Hannah More very much deploras that the laws made by the great to prevent crime are counteracted by their yielding to temptation. If the poor are expected to be thankful for a “scanty meal” (*Works I*, 290), how must they feel to see their masters sit down to a “hecatomb” every day. How must they feel when they see their masters playing at a game in the evenings, which was expressly prohibited by laws they themselves have contributed to pushing through Parliament in the daytime. Was it then not natural, More insinuates, that the inferior orders could not do otherwise than to become indifferent towards a law they were taught to hold in reverence next to the Scriptures if their initiators were blind towards it; that the “contempt of religion, [...] confined to wits and philosophers” so far, swapped over to the lower orders; and that their emancipation from old sacred usages, their being “more enlightened” (*Works I*, 290), did not make them any happier; and that crimes were increasing.

Her voice reaches a crescendo when she comments on the breaking of law on the side of those who are preaching morals but are unwilling to live up to them. She finds it strange that “the affluent [...] [should] encourage so many admirable schemes for promoting religion among the children of the poor” (*Works I*, 290) while they apparently fail doing so among their own children and servants. It seems clear that the higher ranks were promoting religion among the poor for keeping up the hierarchical order; and to trigger in them hopes for a life hereafter, hopes, however, as Hannah More criticises in *Thoughts*, which they were in reality robbed of by either not being given enough time off to follow their religious inclinations, or by being given poor moral examples by their superiors. Consequently, Hannah More deploras, servants see religion being neglected, if not even ridiculed by their superiors. The lower classes ought

to have “the operative principles of Christianity”<sup>328</sup> (*Works I*, 290) impressed on their conscience by their masters as a kind of “moral duty”, for instance by not opposing their going to church and doing their prayers at home, and by not banishing them from religion in the churches even if pious habits were banished in rich families.

Hannah More maintains that “religion is never once represented in Scripture as a light attainment” (*Works I*, 290), and, in order to underline her statement, as so often resorts to a warlike language, describing it to be a “combat”, a “race”, an “exertion”, “activity”, “progress”, and “warfare”, especially in view of a world where

[t]o keep an immortal being in a state of spiritual darkness, is a positive disobedience to *His* law, who when he bestowed the Bible, no less than when he created the material world, said *Let there be light*. (*Works I*, 290)

That “we should do to others as we would they should do to us”, is a “short and plain aphorism, which in its universality is a compendious law”, comprising social obligation in its entirety, an aphorism “that the dullest mind cannot misapprehend, nor the weakest memory forget,” More concludes. (*Works I*, 290)

While modern philosophers, More scathingly remarks, pull down “the boundaries of human knowledge” and enlarge “the stock of human happiness by demonstrating the extinction of spirit”, it will not do any harm to the “unlettered man” (*Works I*, 291), so Hannah More, to believe that “heaven and earth shall pass away, but God’s word shall not pass away”.<sup>329</sup> The “liberal scholar[’s] [...] study[ing] the law of nature and of nations”, is counterbalanced by the plain man’s conviction that “love is the fulfilling of the law”, culminating in “bear[ing] each other’s burthen”. (*Works I*, 291) The “wit [...] criticising the creed, [...] will be no *loser* by encouraging his dependants to keep the commandments”, More reasons. Even if the writings of philosophy were of “true sublimity” and of “great moral beauty”, the system would be defective, because it missed the

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<sup>328</sup> The operative principles of Christianity make it the power of God to save from both the guilt and the power of sin. (*The Ministry*, Vol. IV January, 1931, No. 1)

<sup>329</sup> Since obedience was a hallmark of Evangelical principles, Hannah More expected absolute obedience from the unlettered people as an essential precondition of social peace and the sustenance of the hierarchical order.

bright light of the Gospel. For Hannah More, the “covetous man” and the “man of spirit, as the world is pleased to call the duellist”, but also the “ambitious”, the “professed wit”, the “mere philosopher”, the “wise”, the “disputer”, the “self-satisfied Pharisee” (*Works I*, 291) are all incapable of embracing the true Christian faith since they are unable to comply with its commandments.

### **Benevolence - The Charity of the 'True Christian'**

Just as Hannah More refused to see in morality the whole of religion, she thought the same of benevolence. Abounding charity has made this century the “Age of Benevolence”, she felt, with its myriad of channels and structures to make charity flow. However, she had grown tired of looking behind the scenes during her London time, where she spotted increasing vice and disorder by which the growth of charity was offset: corruption was the origin of misery and made bounty necessary in order to alleviate it. In *Estimate* Hannah More in her utilitarian manner points at the possibility of “prevent[ing] distress by preventing or lessening vice, the greatest and most inevitable cause of want.” (*Works I*, 280) Benevolence without efforts at reforming the vices which caused poverty and misery is, so More, of no avail and thus a negative sort of benevolence, in contrast to that of former times, when alms-givers were not giving away from plenty but from private sacrifices as a “most natural way” of giving to the poor. Hannah More hastens to underline that “modern bounty” is still a “laudable object” (*Works I*, 280), even though the present mode of living and style of luxury make the scraps for the poor from the rich man's table probably of less moral value. Since, in More's Evangelical belief, the idea of alms-giving was part of a comprehensive idea of Christian behaviour, it should not be belittled as a simple “pecuniary relief” (*Works I*, 280), nor should “all religion [be] reduced to benevolence, and all benevolence to alms-giving.” Benevolence as a “branch of charity”, so More, throws up the question whether the way in which it is often practiced is not merely a “substitute for Christianity [rather] than [...] an evidence of it.” (*Works I*, 280) What



naturally follows in More's opinion is that to be benevolent on true Christian principles means also to combine it with self-denial.

In the eighteenth century benevolence was an important issue of philosophers like Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson and Jonathan Edwards. The most uncompromising position in this respect was held by Edwards, to be followed by radical Godwin and Thomas Holcroft. Edward's position was that "true virtue" resides only in "general benevolence", which he equates with the love for God; its universality should not be limited to a party, one's own nation, or the community one belongs to. Even "private" affections, if they are not derived from general benevolence, do not produce true virtue.<sup>330</sup>

William Godwin saw the benevolent intention as essential to virtue. If self-love was the only principle of action, however, there was no such thing as virtue.<sup>331</sup> The fundamental difference between Godwin and More rests in their attitude with respect to belief in God and the Bible.

Hannah More's vision of benevolence and virtue is grounded in their interaction. Only benevolence as the result of true virtue is accepted as benevolence. From the perspective of the strict precepts of Edwards, however, Hannah More's benevolence would have to undergo scrutiny. Her strict Evangelical orientation combined benevolence with the doctrinal Evangelical 'conversion'<sup>332</sup>, which may be regarded as being not quite disinterested. This conversional interest, united with her patriotic outlook, too, does not go with Edwards' position on benevolence. On the other hand, Hannah More's benevolence went so far as to even help the French Catholic clergy, who had become a victim of the Revolution, to gain a foothold in England. In the Prefatory Address to her *Remarks on the*

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<sup>330</sup> See Evan Radcliffe. "Revolutionary Writing, Moral Philosophy, and Universal Benevolence in the Eighteenth Century". *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (Apr. 1993), p. 222. Radcliffe is referring to Edward's *The Nature of True Virtue* (1765), ed. William K. Frankena (Ann Arbor, 1960), pp. 24 and 78.

<sup>331</sup> See Godwin's essays "Of Self-love and Benevolence", and "Of Personal Virtue and Duty" in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), Vol. I, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1798.

<sup>332</sup> According to D. W. Bebbington, the early main characteristics that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion are: *conversionism*, *activism*, *biblicism* and *crucicentrism*, meaning deliverance by Christ's atoning death on the cross. Later there was a shift of importance to Holy Scripture, the doctrines of human sinfulness, salvation, regeneration and sanctification. (Bebbington, pp. 2-3). E. Jay, differently, though with the

*Speech of Mr. Dupont* (1793) made in the National Convention of France, she appeals to the English citizens' charity, based on "self-denial", stressing that "[true] Christian charity is of no party" (*Works I*, 302), and asking for alleviation of the poor priests' living conditions, who were on the verge of starving. With the subscription of her *Remarks* Hannah More raised a substantial sum of money, which she placed at the disposal of the French clergy. "We plead not for their faith, but for their wants," More says. She is, however, rather hopeful that this help might "be the first step towards their [the clergy's] conversion if we show them the purity of our religion." In these "high motives" Hannah More sees the answer to the Biblical saying "*I was a stranger, and ye took me in.*" (*Works I*, 302)

Much as benevolence and charity were at the heart of Hannah More, they were forever strongly motivated by Evangelical principles. However, if we go by her strict Evangelical standpoint, the *Age of Benevolence*, as it was often called, was mere delusion, often profaned for purging one's social and religious conscience. Ultimately, however, utilitarian deliberations made her consider any instrument and motive as adequate for being benevolent, for all that counted in the end was the result. Therefore, no cause ought to be inquired into as long as the outcome was beneficial,<sup>333</sup> even if benevolence was only the varnish of a less virtuous life. But, More says with a touch of irony, it would "not surely lower the practice [of benevolence] by seeking to enoble [sic] the principle," (*Works I*, 281) refraining from the expectations that alms-giving could be used as barter for human indulgence and shortcomings. That it would be returned in the form of blessings for the giver's eternal good, Hannah More is convinced of. And she is also convinced that "no happiness [resulting from benevolence] can be fully and finally enjoyed but on the solid basis of Christian piety" (*Works I*, 281). It seems rather obvious that the motives of 'doing good' were particularly alive in the Evangelicals. Their desire to relieve distress and support charity was omnipresent in most of More's prose writings.

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same end, defines Evangelical belief as being based on the main doctrines of *original sin*, *conversion*, *justification by faith*, and *the authority of the word*. (Jay, pp. 54-69)

<sup>333</sup> Hannah More, inconsequently and apparently in view of the necessity of support of the poor by the affluent, is steering clear of troubles with the latter.

Hannah More explains her “religion of the heart”<sup>334</sup> in the following manner:

[Only those who unite] an [sic] uniform desire to please *Him* [...] [with the desire of] doing all the good we can to our fellow-creatures in every possible way [...] [will fulfil] the two parts [of] practical religion. (*Works I*, 281)

Nothing, she reasons, is better qualified for giving evidence of the “religion of the heart” than good deeds when they are derived from religious principles. Benevolence and charity, so Hannah More, have to become part of man’s conduct and duty, since it was man’s duty to lead the life of a worthy Christian within the world.<sup>335</sup> Only self-abasement and sacrifices by way of occasionally abandoning favoured indulgences will make doing-good, as Hannah More understood it, possible in the Christian sense, and “deserve the name of *benevolent*” (*Works I*, 282). In her private diary Hannah More is thanking God for “being enabled to assist the outward wants of the body” and as a result having access to the “spiritual wants” also:

Let me never separate temporal from spiritual charity, [but act] in humble imitation of my blessed Lord and His apostles, whose healing the sick was often made the instrument of bringing them to repentance. (qtd. in *Annals*, 139)

Hannah More is here summing up the practical side to the Evangelical doctrine of conversion.<sup>336</sup>

Only the spirit of the “conscientious Christian” can subdue self-love, so that benevolence is not “a feeble, or an accidental dominion”. (*Works I*, 282) Casual charity and benevolence, as they are often performed as a kind of side effect of excessive luxury and a voluptuous life, can by no means be the outcome of a Christian principle. More seems in great fear lest benevolence, a characteristic attribute of Christianity, instead of

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<sup>334</sup> ‘The religion of the heart’, as the Anglican Evangelical creed came to be known, was, besides the highly intellectual background of the members of the so-called Clapham Sect, of particular interest because of its ideas and social practices. That ‘the religion of the heart’ was also to become “peculiarly a religion of the home” (Helen M. Jones, “A spiritual aristocracy”, *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism*, p. 90) found its perfect proof in Hannah More’s only novel *Coelebs*, in which the Stanley family is depicted as a perfect example of love and harmony.

<sup>335</sup> In *Estimate* Hannah More was also positioning Evangelical peculiarities, in which benevolence and charity were part of the social attitude.

signifying complete absence of selfishness, might be separated from religion. What, according to her, is needed is a “habitual attention to the wants of others” (*Works I*, 282), which, carried by disinterestedness and free from vanity, will also be a good foundation for the life to come. Hannah More speaks of “the altar of charity” with its “gift[s] of obedience and the price of self-denial” as an accumulation of “prudence and economy” transformed into Christian virtues. (*Works I*, 282)

Hannah More also concedes that God, in his unlimited generosity and understanding of human nature, will make even a gift, given in the hope of expiation from “unallowed [sic] indulgences” (*Works I*, 282) beneficial to the receiver, even if the giver ought to be aware of the deceitfulness of his doing. Again, she is making concessions in order not to disturb the badly needed flow of almsgiving for the poor.

Turning to “benevolence”<sup>337</sup>, Hannah More says that in the present “age of gold” (*Works I*, 288), much is done by the rich in being kind and considerate, in promoting religious and charitable institutions, and in investing much money for instructing the poor. But their failure to encourage religion in their own families and their tendency to discredit piety among their own servants, often contributed to their corruption. Such behaviour meant to give the wrong example at home and to go by an “inferior laxity of principle” (*Works I*, 288), spreading corruption. The best benefactor to society, so Hannah More, is he who behaves in an exemplary way and “who does not only the most good, but [also] the least evil” (*Works I*, 288). “To do no evil” ought to be as much appreciated as “to do good”, Hannah More reasons, even if the former is a kind of goodness affording no “actual performance”. Such “secret habits of self-control” ought to be more appreciated for being the most difficult and sublime, representing a “secret combat and [...] silent victory, [...] a conquest which the world will never know, and, if it did, would probably despise.” (*Works I*, 289)

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<sup>336</sup> Hannah More’s diary entry in 1794, qtd. in the *Mendip Annals*, p. 139. Hannah regards her and her sister’s efforts to instruct the poor as “labour of love” and as an example how benevolence and charity ought to be understood.

## Religious and Moral Goals - Theory and Practice

The religious and moral goals Hannah More aimed at with *Estimate* are not only complicated and high-flying; they are in parts hardly possible to realize. Even More herself found it often difficult to adhere to them. We must, therefore, not wonder when William Shaw was not alone with his opinion about the practical side Hannah More's religious guidelines when he wrote that

[t]o practise literally all the virtues and graces, and to obey the precepts of Christianity, is more than any human creature hitherto atchieved [sic]. Whoever attempts it, is likely to be a victim to knavery. To turn the other cheek when the one is smitten, for the pleasure of fresh blows and insults; to part with the coat as well as the cloak; to live altogether unspotted from the world, may be talked about and preached, but none practise. (Shaw, 105)

He thought theory and practice to be poles apart, which, according to him, became especially obvious during the raging Blagdon Controversy (1799 - 1803), when Hannah More, engaged in restrained self-defence, allegedly did not act according to the Christian precepts, namely doing good, even if she was wronged.

Even Fanny Burney commented in 1795 on More's *Thoughts* that the "design is very laudable [...] but it sometimes points out imperfections almost unavoidable, with amendments almost impracticable."<sup>338</sup>

That there was a wide gap opening between theory and practice was also clear to Leigh Hunt (1784 – 1859), an English critic, essayist, poet and writer, who remarked in the preface to his *Religion of the Heart*, which he published in 1853, and which had privately circulated under the title *Christianity* since 1832:

if anybody question me further, and ask whether in other respects I practise what I preach, I answer, that I profess but to be a disciple in my own school ; that some of its injunctions tire harder to me than they will be to many; and that I pray daily for strength not to disgrace them. (Hunt, *The Religion of the Heart*, p. XVIII)

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<sup>337</sup> Benevolence as the overall term for charity, philanthropy, and caring for others.

<sup>338</sup> See the chapter on *Thoughts* in this thesis.

### Social Equality on the Religious Level?

In the question whether social equality can be obtained on the religious level, Marlene Hess' appraisal of Hannah More's "diplomatic style" (Hess, 84) is very interesting. "By advocating equality of religion for the poor and the rich," Hess maintains, More also succeeded in using to her advantage the "current spirit of democracy" in the wake of the French Revolution, but More at the same time ironically hints at its abuses, by asking:

[w]hile we glory in having freed ourselves from the trammels of human authority, are we not turning our liberty into licentiousness, and wantonly struggling to throw off the *Divine authority* too? Freedom of thought is the glory of the human mind, while it is confined within its just and sober limits. (*Works I*, 279)

In Hannah More's accusing the higher classes of "increased profligacy" (Hess, 84); and in her underlining the shared need for God's mercy of both rich and poor, because "not only the grossly flagitious, but [...] *all* have sinned; [...] *all* are by nature in a state of condemnation; [...] *all* stand in need of mercy" (*Works I*, 298), Hess detects another tendency of religious levelling<sup>339</sup>. In addition, Hess draws the attention to More boldly reminding her high-brow readership that "an uneducated serious Christian [will] read his Bible with a clearness of intelligence [...] which no sceptic [...] ever attains." (*Works I*, 291).

Though More is seemingly pulling down the borderline between the poor and the rich, she is careful to keep up "distinction and status", arguing for a "spiritual elevation" (Hess, 84) to the kingdom to come if the conditions of "faith, repentance, and renewed obedience" (*Works I*, 298) are complied with.

Marlene Hess' pinpointing levelling efforts on the religious level reminds one to a certain extent of More's endeavours of making the rich serve the poor during the meals of the annual school feasts, and thus bringing the social classes closer together.<sup>340</sup> Such instances, however, ought not to mislead us to see in Hannah More's efforts an attempt at pulling down social boundaries. Her idea was that social strata had their God-ordained,

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<sup>339</sup> See Hess, p. 85.

<sup>340</sup> See for this the *Mendip Annals*, e.g. pp. 88 and 146, and the chapter on Hannah More's school schemes in this paper.

and therefore providential, legitimation. The necessary hierarchical order guaranteed social peace. The social groups could only live peacefully together as long as they were aware of and fulfilled their specific duties, assigned to them from the day they were born, were content with their pre-given lot and appreciated that of the other social groups. That More's levelling efforts were of a purely religious kind is proved also by the following entry in her private diary on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov. 1794 which, however, is not without a certain tinge of apprehension:

Religion seems to be still spreading, and some of whom we were fearful seem more confirmed. O Lord, grant that this people never rise up in judgment against me, and that, with all my advantages of knowledge and education, I may not fall short of these poor ignorant creatures, many of whom are not called till the eleventh hour! (qtd. in *Mendip Annals*, 138)

To Hannah More religion was the binding link between all social groups. It connected so to say the two worlds of the rich and the poor, brought them closer together by showing that the rich were not infallible, and the poor, too, had souls to be saved. The rich, thus, had the task to equip the poor with enough leisure time as to enable them to go to church for this purpose. It was a kind of 'right' Hannah More conveyed on the poor, although social deliberations were most likely not at the centre of her thoughts. Rather, the siding with the poor was meant to serve the higher purpose of strengthening the poor people's morality to accept the station in life Providence held ready for them. It was an "allegiance to a higher than human morality [which] distinguish[ed] the Evangelicals from the humanitarian", (Meacham, 91) by way of which the social control of the lower orders was given and the keeping-up of the social hierarchical order was guaranteed.

What Meacham terms the "Evangelical social conscience" (Meacham, 92), which was dictated by a "stern code" he ascribed to William Wilberforce, is also true of Hannah More's, namely that

[...][there was] little point in altering the social order in this world, thus risking consequences of the sort then plaguing revolutionary France, when all so clearly had the chance to earn an equal place within God's heavenly kingdom, the only world that truly mattered. (Meacham, 92)

This belief in God and His future state was indispensable for the moral code and the “providential morality” which dictated the Evangelicals’ duty towards their brethren. “Take away the belief in a future state, and belief in God ceases to be of any practical importance,” Meacham (102) quoting a saying of James Fitzjames Stephen’s.<sup>341</sup>

### **Wilberforce’s *A Practical View* and More’s *Estimate* - A Comparison**

This seems to be the place to give also some thought and room to Wilberforce’s *A Practical View*, first published in 1797<sup>342</sup>, as a complementary treatise to Hannah More’s *Estimate*. Both *Estimate* and William Wilberforce’s *A Practical View of the Prevailing System of Professed Christians* were practically written at the same time. *A Practical View*, however, was published seven years later than *Estimate*. This delay was due to Wilberforce’s “various duties of his public station” (Introduction, 1) as a Member of Parliament, in the course of which he also introduced the first Bill to abolish the slave trade in 1791. What had initially been intended as a pamphlet turned out to be an elaborate manifesto of 540 pages in 1797. It was written much in the same vein as More’s *Estimate* and evolves around the same topics. Wilberforce must have been convinced of the importance of such a book for various reasons. First, being a prominent political figure and an Evangelical leader, the prospect that his writing as a layman on a religious subject would have a commensurate impact on the reading audience, seemed to be even better than in the case of Hannah More as a woman. Second, England, in imminent danger because of the war with France, and the threat of revolution, was badly in need of any moral support it could get. Third, his spiritual motivation of a salvationist mission as the calling of ‘real’ Christians, made him state in chapter VI (‘Brief Inquiry into the present State of Christianity’):

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<sup>341</sup> J. F. Stephen. *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (London, 1873), p. 304. The quotation here is taken from *The Online Library of Liberty* (LF ed.) [1874], p. 145. 10 March 2011 <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/572>>.

<sup>342</sup> This thesis uses the 6<sup>th</sup> edition (1798) by Cadell.



But fruitless will be all attempts to sustain, much more to revive, the fainting cause of morals, unless you can in some degree restore the prevalence of *Evangelical Christianity* [emphasis added].  
(*A Practical View*, 429)

Of interest are also the language and the style the two Evangelical writers made use of: extremely dogmatic for the most part and ill-structured in places, *Estimate* is, despite Hannah More's verbosity, worth reading, because of its astonishingly rich and diverse vocabulary and diction. That she was eager to be understood by her readers can be felt throughout *Estimate*, for her language is also highly explanatory. When these circumstances are taken into consideration, it does not surprise that a conscientious analysis of *Estimate* makes a close adherence to the primary text unavoidable. This fact is particularly conspicuous in Charles Howard Ford's analysis in his biography of Hannah More, and is also the method this thesis tends to follow.

Wilberforce's language, by comparison, is more matter of fact, well-reasoned and logically structured. Both *Estimate* and *A Practical View* can be seen as an homage to the 'Evangelical revival' within the Anglican High Church, elaborating on much the same issues and topics, and intrinsically united by their mission of offering salvation to a morally starving nation.

## Conclusion

In *Estimate*, which is based on *Thoughts* and which to a certain degree repeats, respectively enlarges, on some of its issues, Hannah More develops, in the main, her Evangelical 'religion of the heart' as the basis of all goodness, and the dominant concept of the Evangelical reform. She demonstrates the consequences of irreligiosity and her conviction that the neglect of religion is the breeding-ground of all evils. Surprisingly, and bewildering to the modern reader, she never touches upon the existing social situation of the deprived lower orders as the prime sources of poverty and misery but holds it to be either the outcome of a life in sin and the ignorance of God's calling, or the given state of Providence. With regard to the higher orders, however, she leaves us to speculate about those critical questions she did *not* ask, but merely touched on at best:

one of them was the question of duelling<sup>343</sup> and the cruelty towards animals.

As a whole, *Estimate* may be seen as an appraisal of the religious state during the last decade of the eighteenth century. With *Estimate* Hannah More, as a woman, had only just started to boldly criticize both the affluent circles and the clergy who, instead of being critical of the former, preferred to be in their good graces. *Estimate* was to be adjoined by a range of writings in the coming years when More was beseeched to compose a series of tracts of moral and political design. *Estimate* certainly was one of those publications of More's time which, as Karen Prior maintains, became part of a "continuing cultural shift" (Prior, 160) which culminated in the accentuated Victorian social and moral awareness.<sup>344</sup> Hannah More's ensuing moral writings were of great service in helping to draw a clear-cut borderline between Methodism and Evangelicalism. Of the latter she maintained "that it is [...] a *rule of life* suited to every condition, capacity, and temper, [...] being *the religion of the people*," (*Works I*, 287) not just for a selected group.

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<sup>343</sup> The issue on duelling is dealt with in detail in the Chapter *Thoughts*.

<sup>344</sup> See Karen Irene Swallow Prior. *Hannah More and the Evangelical Influence on the English Novel*, pp. 159-160.

### **3. *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education. With a View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent Among Women of Rank and Fortune. (1799)***

#### **Introduction**

When Hannah More published her third and most important ethical treatise in 1799, it was received with even more enthusiasm than its predecessors *Thoughts* (1788) and *Estimate* (1790). This time she claimed the authorship right from the beginning. *Strictures* passed through thirteen editions, selling 19.000 copies in all. Although allegedly calling upon the “ladies of *ton*” (*Strictures I*, 15) to use their influence “to raise the depressed tone of public morals, to awaken the drowsy spirit of religious principle, and to re-animate the dormant powers of active piety,” (*Strictures I*, 4) *Strictures* deals with a whole range of seemingly incoherent topics. However, the great idea behind them is always obvious, namely Hannah More’s striving for creating awareness in women that their high moral standard was indispensable for the future happiness of the British nation. As the educators of their children they carried an enormous responsibility. But women in general had received a completely wrong education themselves, which was the cause of all evil and not their “natural make” (*Strictures II*, 28):

“...till women shall be more reasonably educated, and till the native growth of their mind shall cease to be stinted and cramped, we have no juster ground for pronouncing that their understanding has already reached its highest attainable perfection [...] or rather, till the female sex are more carefully instructed, this question will always remain as undecided as to the *degree* of difference between the understanding of men and women, [...] till, by suffering their intellectual powers to take the lead of the sensitive in their education, their minds shall be allowed to reach to that measure of perfection of which they are really susceptible, and which their *Maker* [emphasis added] intended they should attain.” (*Strictures II*, 28/29)

Divine Providence, Hannah More was certain, destined woman’s subordinate station in life; and only “*Christianity*” would elevate her “to true and undisputed dignity” (*Strictures II*, 30). No longer inferior to man as the

result of being “redeemed by the blood of Christ” (*Strictures II*, 30/31), woman’s “more circumscribed powers of mind” (*Strictures II*, 30), due to her bodily frame and the defective education she is given, will be offset by her Christian dedication and the atonement of Christ.

Therefore, Hannah More found it unjustified to reproach women for the effects of this defective education, which was mainly the acquisition of accomplishments, orientated to merely serving the marriage market. Although at the very bottom of the hierarchical order, she felt that women were an important moral pillar, if not the last moral bastion, holding the existing hierarchical order together, the collapse of which would pull down with it religion, for “morality and religion will stand or fall together,” (*Strictures I*, 40) as More says. She saw both morality and religion severely assailed: from outside England by the aftermath of the French Revolution in the shape of the threat of post-revolutionary wars; and by agnostic trends from within its boundaries by liberal ideas which ignited the threat of upheavals. Hannah More had already contributed her fair share to ward off this threat by publishing the most popular *Village Politics* in 1793 in answer to Tom Paine’s *Rights of Man* (1791), and a range of tracts with partly political tenor, serving in the first place as ‘safe reading material’ for her schools for the poor in the Mendips.

At the time when she had the *Strictures* published, Hannah More must have been very busy, not only because of her school schemes, for she complained in her diary on May 20, 1799, which she had interrupted for a fortnight: “This week has been too much spent in receiving visits from the great. Lord, preserve me from these temptations to vanity.” (qtd. in Buckland, 108). Her apparent bad conscience, which made her “feel more and more [...] [like] a miserable sinner” (qtd. in Buckland, 108), stood in clear relationship with the divine calling she must have felt for contributing to the urgently needed moral rearmament of her country, and for the necessity of returning to women their natural dignity, which would make them use their positive influence as moral authorities within their domestic realms.

When Hannah More approached the ‘woman question’, she did so from the standpoint of a Christian moralist. Therefore, it is not woman's rights

and wrongs which she discussed, but her duties as a Christian, writing as a humble exponent of Christ's teaching. In this context, *Strictures* are also telling women their God-given natural boundaries. In the shape of Evangelical doctrines, Hannah More is narrowing down the female sphere by claiming it was decreed by Providence. In her self-assumed mission to save the world, she is drafting for women a world view of her own design. Restricting such harmless and innocent amusements like dancing, babyballs and to a certain extent even music, her moralizing efforts not only have a prevailing pious scent, but, unfortunately, also assume a tone of bigotry, and evoke, at times, even a suspicion of hypocrisy. Hannah More certainly had a strong lobby of followers and admirers who, like her, would not realize that time was changing rapidly; but there were also those who either met her with scepticism or even aversion.

Hannah More's patriotism is often bordering on arrogance or snobbism and, at its worst and only scantily disguised, on fierce nationalism. To declare that women of a Christian country like England are too superior to be compared to those of the rest of the world, or to declare that a mere comparative view is "almost an injury" (*Strictures I*, Introd., xi) to them, leaves a sense of bewilderment or even shock in today's reader.<sup>345</sup> This the more so as this statement is in sharp contrast to the modesty Hannah More never gets tired of preaching and is demanding from the women she addresses in *Strictures*. It could even be argued that such a statement may imply either unsound patriotism or an attempt to flatter her English female readers.

With respect to patriotism Hannah More draws also a parallel between the feeling for the religion of one's country and the love for the country itself. She declares both to be prejudices of the kind which ought to be embraced at an early date in youth. Both "the true British patriot and the true Christian" (*Strictures I*, 215) have in common a deep attachment to the constitution and to Christianity, even though they are fairly separate. If Hannah More, however, underlines the "immeasurable distance" (*Strictures I*, 215) of the two, she is only with difficulty and unconvincingly

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<sup>345</sup> That she was not alone with this presumption, however, is shown by the German poet Wieland's reaction to James Lawrence's statement of the same tenor. (See below in this thesis.)

hiding what she really seems to be feeling: a true patriot cannot help being a Christian, and a true Christian being a patriot. Such strong attachment to creed and patriotism, so More, was liable to scrutiny, but there was nothing to be feared, neither from “shallow politicians” nor from “shallow philosophers” (*Strictures I*, 216). In this context we are inevitably reminded of Richard Price, who in his famous sermon on the love of one’s country, preached in 1789 in the wake of the French Revolution, called patriotism “a noble passion” (Price, “Discourse”, 178), intrinsically linking it with “liberty” as the “object of patriotic zeal” (“Discourse”, 184) and as inseparable from knowledge and virtue. Enlightenment was praised by Richard Price as the way out from suppression and injustice, whereas Hannah More with a very different view of the world, over ten years later, is still cautioning her readers against the innovations of “shallow philosophers”.

Hannah More’s *Strictures* are “a work of many moods” (Stott, 222), as much as they are a work of contradictions and inconsistencies. Her not infrequently unsaying things she had said before makes the reader wonder whether she had really always reflected thoroughly on the possible consequences of what she was preaching. It makes the reader also wonder if she was not, against her better knowledge and belief, carried away by her mission as a moralizer and female lay theologian, using the reader of her time as target and instrument for disseminating and enforcing, at all events, her religious principles and her cherished vision of a hierarchical order of king, government and church, which she regarded as seriously jeopardized.

In this chapter, much attention is paid to the reception of the *Strictures* by More’s contemporaries, because it clearly mirrors the prevailing conservative spirit, but also the beginning of modern influences at the end of the eighteenth century. Hannah More’s correspondence, collected by William Roberts in his *Memoirs of Hannah More* (1834), proved to be the best source to serve this purpose and is thus mainly quoted.

## Contemporary Reception

### Letters to Hannah More

Letters poured in upon Hannah More from friends and dignitaries from all sides, enthusiastically praising her *Strictures*. Her first biographer, William Roberts, later spoke of “well-deserved eulogy” (Roberts II, 36). In a letter to Hannah More, Mrs. Barbauld, for instance, attested Hannah More “higher views than those of fame” and expressed her “ardent wishes” that More’s “benevolent intentions [...] may meet with ample success,” (qtd. in Roberts II, 44). In a footnote, however, Roberts maintained that “[t]he differences [...] were by no means small between Mrs. More’s and Mrs. Barbauld’s religious opinions.” (Roberts II, 45) In her essay *Thoughts on the Devotional Taste on Sects, and on Establishments* (1775), Anna Laetitia Barbauld with great sagacity, power of discrimination and careful observation explains her theory of religious feeling and the problems inherent in the institutionalization of religion. In her understanding of religion as ‘Devotion’ and ‘Providence’ as an indicator for conscientiously following our own opinions and belief, but not as a regulator of our own individual conduct, Mrs. Barbauld was in stark contrast to Hannah More. However, what she shared with her was the conviction that the ‘spirit of Devotion’ was certainly at a very low ebb, was treated with great indifference, and had even fallen into a certain contempt.<sup>346</sup>

Mrs. Kennicott remarked in her letter that even those who found More’s strictness to have gone too far were charmed by her wit. Although the book was much talked about, there was little criticism. She calculated that 50.000 persons had read the “*little work*” (qtd. in Roberts II, 45), a term which makes a reference to Hannah More’s own characterization, because each copy had in fact “ten readers or hearers” (qtd. in Roberts II, 45). Mrs. Kennicott was certain that much good would come from the *Strictures* and maintained that she knew of a woman whose only entertainment beside her spinning-wheel was Hannah More’s *Strictures*. She also did not fail to mention how well-received they were by the Royals.<sup>347</sup>

<sup>346</sup> See 10<sup>th</sup> July 2011 <<http://www.orgs.muohio.edu/womenpoets/barbauld/sects.html>>.

<sup>347</sup> See Roberts II, p. 46.

Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu assured Hannah More in her letter that she was in line with her that the miseducation of girls was the consequence of giving sentiment preference to principle and asserted “that principles only will preserve a woman in the constant observance of the laws of God, and the duties of her situation”. She ventured that “(for a wife) the most simple and unadorned” would be given preference “to the most highly finished, and accomplished, and graceful daughters of the demon of sentiment” by the most sentimental of their admirers. (qtd. in Roberts II, 47) Mrs. Montague foresaw that with women losing their

domestic virtues, all *the charities* will be dissolved *for which our country is a name so dear*, the men will be profligate, the public will be betrayed, and whatever has blessed or distinguished the English nation above our neighbours on the Continent, will disappear; and in a little time, national and natural Gloominess will take place of the thoughtless gayety that reigns at present. (qtd. in Roberts II, 47-48)

She praised the “tenour [sic] of *Strictures* to go in for things which give solid and lasting happiness” (qtd. in Roberts II, 48).

The Countess of Cremorne expressed her hope that *Strictures* would “do extensive good in these most perilous times” (qtd. in Roberts II, 48). She informed Hannah More about the Bishop of London, Beilby Porteus, having mentioned the *Strictures* in his Sunday Sermon at St. James’s Church “in a manner the most honourable” (qtd. in Roberts II, 48).<sup>348</sup> Interestingly, she briefly made a reference to Hannah More’s *baby balls*, so critically eyed by some reviewers and which made her but few friends, mentioning that her little daughter was perfectly happy without them.

The Reverend Thomas Robinson was obliged to More for “check[ing] the progress of vanity and irreligion, and [for] diffuse[ing] the principles of Evangelical truth in those circles where the preachers of the Gospel can scarcely expect to be heard.” He continued by saying that “amid all the gloom of the present dark and cloudy day, it is consoling to observe that books of such a tendency are read by thousands with avidity and delight.” (qtd. in Roberts II, 41)

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<sup>348</sup> Porteus later also enthusiastically mentioned *Strictures* in a charge to his clergy, a fact he later had much reason to regret when the notorious Peter Pindar made crude fun of it, rendering the Bishop to ridicule.



Some would have welcomed even stricter precepts. In his letter to Hannah More, the Reverend J. Newton, a man even more radical than More, for instance very much wished that her foot-note (in *Strictures I*, 171), criticizing the rage of novel writing, had been omitted. He found that although the contained censure was in fact a censure of novels which ought to be “extended to the proscription of the whole race, without mercy and without exception,” it might be interpreted as an invitation to “giving birth to a multitude of miserable imitations” by producing good originals. In Newton’s opinion, none of the most competent novel writers, such as Richardson and Fielding, could give sound ideas of religion or teach divinity, but were only filling the minds of the young with “wind-mills” (qtd. in Roberts II, 43)

Mr. Pepys was another friend to comment on the *Strictures* in a letter. He was of the opinion that Hannah More deserved not only his thanks but was entitled to the thanks “of all mankind”. Due to

[t]he profusion and brilliancy of imagination [...] even those who would perhaps have but little relish for the same exalted truths detailed in a dry syllogistical manner [...] many will feel the good effects of such a book upon their practice and habits.” (qtd. in Roberts II, 49)

Much attention is paid to Hannah More’s observations on the subject matter *conversation*. “Such a thing as conversation *has* existed,” Pepys deplored, even its “revival” was not completely illusory, but the striving for its “ultimate improvement” was hardly accompanied by success. He found the book humbling because of its “glowing representation of what one ought to be in comparison with what one is” (qtd. in Roberts II, 50). From this point of view Hannah More’s *Strictures* can be perceived as an ideal picture of how things ought to be rather than of how they really were. Nevertheless, Pepys suggested that if there were “some remaining sparks of goodness” (qtd. in Roberts II, 50) left, it was More’s duty to encourage them by her further writings to this effect.<sup>349</sup> There were, of course, readers who were determined *not* to read the *Strictures* out of fear that things simply could not be altered. However, they were offset by a great number of those who read them over and over again.

The Reverend James Bean was “greatly edified as well as pleased” by More’s *Strictures*. He trusted that her “pious labours for the good of mankind” would prove to be “a loud call to the world”, grateful that “the cause and cure of some of its most deplorable and most threatening evils have been so ably pointed out by [...] [her] engaging pen.” (qtd. in Roberts II, 50-51)

The Bishop of Durham (Dr. Barrington), too, highly praised the *Strictures*, remarking that although “the work is professedly written for the improvement of your own sex, [...] it must in parts of it be of essential service to mine.” (qtd. in Roberts II, 51)

The Bishop of Lincoln (Dr. Tomline) wrote from Downing-Street that he had read More’s *Strictures* with “the highest satisfaction”. Her book about the cause of “virtue and religion”, which was in everybody’s hands, although intended for women, was of benefit to anyone who cared to read it, whether it was written for “a duchess or Will Chip”.<sup>350</sup> (qtd. in Roberts II, 51-52)

Quite another turn was taken by the letter of the Bishop of London, Beilby Porteus, who wrote to Hannah More on October 20, 1799 that he was “determined never to say a civil thing to a lady again as long as [...] he lived” (qtd. in Roberts II, 52). Peter Pindar alias John Wolcott had ridiculed both Hannah More and Beilby Porteus “in a half-crown pamphlet”, so the Bishop wrote, on the ground that Porteus had lavishly praised Hannah More’s *Strictures* also in his charge to the clergy. Pindar’s answer was, so the Bishop, “nothing but gross and coarse ribaldry, rancour, and profaneness” (qtd. in Roberts II, 53), instead of what he had expected to be “some neat ridicule and attic pleasantry” (qtd. in Roberts II, 52) or “playful wit and humour” (qtd. in Roberts II, 53), something that would evoke smiles or even laughter.<sup>351</sup> Maybe, Porteus reasoned, not without

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<sup>349</sup> Mr. Pepys’ suggestion and that of other friends certainly had some effect on Hannah More. In her later days she produced one book after another, more and more concentrating on moral and evangelical matters.

<sup>350</sup> Hannah More’s *Cheap Repository Tracts* and *Village Politics* were repeatedly mentioned in these letters. They will also find attention in the chapter of this thesis on More’s school scheme.

<sup>351</sup> Peter Pindar (pseudonym of Dr. John Wolcott), 1738 –1819, was a notorious satirist of his time. In his famous *Nil Admirari* he ridiculed both Hannah More and the Bishop of London, Beilby Porteus, in the most crude and indelicate manner.

blaming Mrs. More, Pindar's extremely loose tongue might also be his vengeance for her asperity to and general abuse of the poets. However, he hoped that "this heavy mass of stupidity" would only evoke "indignation and disgust" (qtd. in Roberts II, 53).

Martha More, Hannah More's congenial sister for the school scheme in the Mendips, wrote to one of her sisters: "Nothing is more talked of than Robert Hall's Sermons" (qtd. in Roberts II, 58). She went so far as to place both Hall's Sermons<sup>352</sup> and the *Strictures* on the same level, namely as both being spoken of by the Bishop<sup>353</sup> as "grand engines to reform the times" (qtd. in Roberts II, 58). To top it off, she mentioned also a certain Mr. Cecil, whose eulogy culminated in maintaining that the *Strictures* were "one of the most perfect works in all its parts that any century or country has produced" (qtd. in Roberts II, 58).<sup>354</sup>

Hester Chapone, a conservative and highly appreciated writer of conduct literature of her time,<sup>355</sup> in a letter to Hannah More admired her for "most successfully practis[ing] the art of pleasing and entertaining, while [...] [she] instructs, and even while [...] [she] rebukes." She was hopeful that things would not turn out to be quite like a lady predicted, who said "Everybody will read her, everybody admire her, and nobody mind her." (qtd. in Roberts II, 37) Chapone's admiration for More was in fact mingled with scepticism, and this was an evasive way to make it known. Hannah More herself must have had some apprehension of this kind, too, for early in 1800 she wrote to one of her sisters that she was certain that some of the chapters of the *Strictures*, namely the chapters on 'Human Corruption' and on 'Baby Balls', were likely to "give most offence" (qtd. in Roberts II, 59). And she gladly mentioned that the Bishop of Bath and Wells (Dr. Moss) would back her up when confronted with some queries as to *Strictures*. His answer in such cases was going to be, More quotes Dr.

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<sup>352</sup> Martha More is referring to the Reverend Robert Hall's *Modern Infidelity Considered* with respect to its influence on society: in a sermon, preached at the Baptist meeting, Cambridge, 1799. (See chapter III of this thesis). See also Hall's *Sermons on Various Subjects*. N.Y.: Eastburn, 1814.

<sup>353</sup> Martha More did not disclose the name of the Bishop.

<sup>354</sup> As Hannah More had also ventured to elaborate on Christian principles and dogmas she certainly found critics sooner or later, as for instance the Reverend William Shaw alias MacSarcasm and the Reverend Daubeny. For further references to Daubeny, see the chapter *Estimate* of this thesis.

<sup>355</sup> She is still best known for her *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*. 1773.

Moss: "I never make any enquiries: I ask no questions when I know it is Mrs. More: I know she is doing right, and that is all as it should be." (qtd. in Roberts II, 59)<sup>356</sup>

This survey of letters shows the enthusiastic reception *Strictures* received not only from many of Hannah More's female acquaintances, but also from some of the clergy, who commended the book as a vehicle of moral reform.

### **The Reception in Biographies and Memoirs**

Hannah More's *Strictures* found also entrance in a number of biographies. Whereas William Roberts in his *Memoirs of Mrs. Hannah More* (1834) merely published a number of letters without making concrete statements of his own pertaining to the *Strictures*, Henry Thompson, in his *Life of Hannah More* (1838), for instance, spared no pains to closely comment on them. He was one of those who realized that it was Hannah More's intention to promote "a reformed education in all classes", suspecting her of having "projected [with her *Strictures*] an express treatise on the instruction of the upper and middle ranks of her own sex." (Thompson, 163) Picking up Hannah More's allusions to Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman* and to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Thompson wrote that under the infecting influence of the French Revolution "[o]ne English female [...] maintained in print the "rights" of her sex to reject their Bible, and follow no other guide than their wills and passions." (Thompson, 164) Luckily, and much owing also to the encouragement of More to ward off a contagion of the women of England, which would have meant "the total subversion of British religion and morals", women could now fulfil their pious Providential calling to keep up religion and morals as a supporting pillar of England's society. Hannah More's efforts were the "cultivation of the mind rather than that of the body; of the soul rather than of the mind" (Thompson, 165), Thompson surmised. She reminded the English woman of "the purpose of her being",

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<sup>356</sup> The Bishop of Bath and Wells enjoyed Hannah More's entire confidence. When the Blagdon Controversy raged, she wrote a lengthy and much admired letter explaining her inoffensive methods and intentions of teaching on a purely Christian footing.

namely “to be (as she was designed) the image of her Creator, and ‘a help meet’ for man” (Thompson, 165). For this object woman ought to be “trained”, a purpose which was much neglected and needed to be revived. Hannah More’s call, so Thompson, was for “true knowledge”, the knowledge for the practical and real life, instead of “external accomplishments” (Thompson, 166-167) with purely ornamental and useless attainments. It was also a call to draw away from “mischievous novels and romances” (Thompson, 167), which were only fit for perverting the minds of the readers. The Reverend Thompson identified Hannah More’s *Strictures* not only as “a moral picture of society” (Thompson, 177) of her time in general, but above all as a telling appraisal of the state of female education in particular. As a clergyman, the Reverend Henry Thompson in his biography (1838), naturally, took much interest in the religious aspects of the *Strictures*, but also in the Reverend Daubeny’s letter to Hannah More on some purely Christian principles.<sup>357</sup>

The same applies to Thomas Taylor. In his biography (1838) he, too, was rather interested in what the Archdeacon Daubeny had to say in his letter to Hannah More. To go by him, Daubeny apparently mistook some of Hannah More’s statements as being “dangerous and unscriptural” (Taylor, 198), while they presumably were merely her attempt at earnestly inculcating Evangelical piety.

From the distance of more than eight decades, Anna J. Buckland in her biography (1882) was more critical and sceptical about More’s effect. She suggested that although the *Strictures* were very warmly welcomed by a majority, she claimed that “the age was scarcely ripe for its general reception” (Buckland, 125) Therefore, when one witty lady said that “everybody will read her, everybody admire her, and nobody mind her” (qtd. in Buckland, 125), she is probably hitting the nail on the head.<sup>358</sup>

The biographies of Knight (1851), Yonge (1880), and Harland (1900), (the latter appeared an entire century after the publication of the *Strictures*), took the stance that time had not really changed much because the same

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<sup>357</sup> This matter is dealt with in the chapter *Estimate*.

<sup>358</sup> Buckland is echoing Hester Chapone (qtd. in Roberts II, 37). See above in this chapter.

problems were still or again a topic, as, for instance, filial obedience, the independence of young people, and the regrettable invention of baby balls. A wise man's statement that "[t]o everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven [...] [must have been] said [...] before the invention of baby balls," Yonge reasoned, and characterized "[t]his modern device [...] [as] a sort of triple conspiracy against the health, the innocence, and the happiness of childhood." (Yonge, 127) Harland's comment on how the *Strictures* were received is possibly closest to reality:

warmly, if not rapturously, [...] by those whose opinions she valued most highly, and met with many amusing comments in the higher walks of life where dwelt those for whose edification it was written." (Harland, 189)

Hannah More's *Strictures* also found entrance in *Life and Times of the Reverend John Wightman, DD* (1762-1847), published in 1873 by the Reverend David Hogg, late minister of Kirkmahoe. This memoir was written by Wightman's successor and was intended as "a tribute of regard to the memory of one whom [...] [he] was associated in the ministry for a period of nearly three years" (Hogg, preface, i). It was based on Dr. Wightman's diary till close to his death, which freely recorded his opinions on what was going on, not only in the ecclesiastical, but also in the political world, in a time of considerable changes and the disappearance of many customs. Many of these entries were clearly intended for publication, the Reverend Hogg was convinced, who, therefore, felt that he was not intruding upon "forbidden ground" (Hogg, preface, ii), but keeping to the truth even in the face of the leading controversies of the day, his only object being "to recall certain phrases of the times of old in connection with the life of a good man" (Hogg, preface, ii) and popular preacher. After the labours of the pulpit he was rather interested in what was going on in the field of literature. When Hannah More's *Strictures on Female Education*, which caused quite a stir and provoked a variety of opinions from all sides, appeared, he procured them without delay, taking much interest in them, as his following criticism shows: Even if his estimate of the *Strictures* was one of high appreciation with regard to the "very excellent advice" given to "the heart and understanding", and even though highly praising her "bold and energetic" manner "to fight the battles of virtue and religion", he took

slight offence at “the air of smartness and irony she assumed”, which he found to be rather injurious to the “great cause” she so skilfully advocated (qtd. in Hogg, 189). He picked up the Bishop of London’s claim that More wrote “in a strain of high-toned morality” (qtd. in Hogg, 189), not holding back his criticism of Peter Pindar for being witty on the subject and making fun of Beilby Porteus’ excitement over More’s *Strictures*. The Reverend Wightman also noted that a good deal of the readers found the *Strictures* “too strict” (qtd. in Hogg, 189), and that More herself did not really refrain from committing the faults she admonished; thus, for instance, when More was speaking euphemistically, like the clergy was in the habit of, instead of clearly expressing what she meant. Wightman summed up:

In a word, she writes with all the elegance of a delicate novelist, while she is treating on religious and moral subjects, and affecting to rescue the age from a weak compliance with the tide of custom in avoiding words which may offend the ears of the falsely refined, as the prophet says, speaking smooth things. (qtd. in Hogg, 189/90)

The tenth chapter of the first volume of More’s *Strictures* was of particular interest to the Reverend John Wightman as a clergyman. It deals with the question whether the path of “early instilling religious knowledge into the minds of children” (*Strictures I*, 206) ought to be followed-up or not. On the one hand there was the opinion advocated by some modern “innovators” (*Strictures I*, 206) that the minds of children ought to be kept free from prepossessions so that they could judge for themselves in more mature years; on the other hand, there was the opinion of those who feared that this method might lead to what was allegedly intended by it: the destruction of Christianity. The latter camp then, for very good reasons, regarded it as their duty

while [...] instilling principles into tender mind, to take peculiar care that those principles be sound and just; that the religion [...] [taught] be the religion of the Bible, and not the inventions of human error or superstition [...] and not the result of our credulity or bigotry; nor the mere hereditary, unexamined prejudices of our own undiscerning childhood. (*Strictures I*, 207)

Logically, it was Hannah More’s Evangelical inclination for Biblicism that made her caution her readers “against sending their children to any other source than the Gospel for their Christianity”, which Dr. Wightman interpreted as “smartness” (qtd. in Hogg, 190). Her Evangelical zeal for

conversion could not warm her up for death-bed conversions; in fact she thought them, so Dr. Wightman, to be a “folly” (qtd. in Hogg, 190); nor could she see anything positive in “becom[ing] Christians by accident ? or rather [...] on that very principle of Dogberry<sup>359</sup> [...] that reading and writing, comes by Nature?” (*Strictures I*, 220). The Reverend Wightman called such comparisons “a combination of the serious and ludicrous” (qtd. in Hogg, 190) Hannah More frequently availed herself of. The Reverend Wightman also scrutinized that in More’s *Strictures* he could often not help the feeling that

she [...] [was] more skilful in the faults and weaknesses of others, and able to expose and blazon them forth to view, than earnest in her wish to reform them or to take the beam out of her own eye. (qtd. in Hogg, 190-191)

A ‘trifle’ the Reverend found fault with was Hannah More’s habit of pleading for “the strict and appropriate use of terms”<sup>360</sup> (qtd. in Hogg, 191), giving several examples. Since More was inconsistent herself, the whole thing turned really out to be nothing but arguing about terms. Another inconsistency according to the Reverend was that Hannah More unsaid many things she had said, which made it sometimes difficult then, and the more so today, to follow her statements.

What makes the Reverend Dr. Wightman’s diary so particularly interesting is the attention he pays to the religious aspect. Finding More’s *Strictures* “useful [...] especially with regard to politics and domestic economy”, and also in view of some “excellent things” she says against the Antinomian scheme<sup>361</sup>, “one cannot help thinking she is verging that way herself” (qtd. in Hogg, 194). He feels that for all the charity she is doing for the weak brethren and sisters, she is leaving much to the readers’ inference, for instance whether she was persecuted for supposed Methodism, or

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<sup>359</sup> The foolish constable in Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*, illustrative for any foolish, blundering, or stupid official.

<sup>360</sup> Hogg is referring to chapter ix (‘On Definitions’) of *Strictures I*.

<sup>361</sup> The word *antinomianism* comes from two Greek words, *anti*, meaning “against”; and *nomos*, meaning “law”. *Antinomianism* means “against the law”. Theologically, antinomianism is the belief that there are no moral laws God expects Christians to obey. Antinomianism takes a biblical teaching to an unbiblical conclusion. The biblical teaching is that Christians are not required to observe the Old Testament Law as a means of salvation. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He fulfilled the Old Testament Law. The



whether she had a leaning that way after all. Certainly, the Reverend conceded that “for a female theologian [it was difficult] to steer that manly course between the Scylla of self-confidence and the Charybdis<sup>362</sup> of Antinomianism.” (qtd. in Hogg, 194)

These minor critical points aside, the Reverend Wightman deemed the *Strictures* to comprise “a great many beauties and excellencies” (qtd. in Hogg, 191), and Hannah More’s power of cutting satire was not lost upon him. He even mentioned some funny examples, when, in connection with the then raging frenzy for novel writing, a female reader, feeling within herself the stirring impulse of corresponding genius, triumphantly exclaimed: “And I, too, am an author!”<sup>363</sup> That the Reverend should side with Hannah More in her criticism of German novelists seems logical in view of the new philosophy of freedom of love their novels held. He seems not to have known that this philosophy was initiated just as much by an English novelist, namely James Lawrence.<sup>364</sup>

The Reverend Wightman, having “received both pleasure and instruction from this production” was hopeful to gain some profit from More’s writings. It seemed justified to him to use Lord Halifax’s motto when summing up on Hannah More: “She has raised her character that she may help to make the next age better, and leave posterity in her debt for the advantage it has received by her writings.” (qtd. in Hogg, 192) Not unsurprisingly, Wightman, even in view of “several little blemishes in the tone and morality of the work“ he mentioned, would prefer to hand over the *Strictures* to his daughter if he had one, “rather to read this than ‘Clarissa Harlowe’.” (qtd. in Hogg, 194)

William Shaw alias the Reverend Sir Archibald Mac Sarcasm, Bart. contributed his estimate of Hannah More’s *Strictures* in his *Life of Hannah More* (1802) by saying that her aim was

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unbiblical conclusion is that there is no moral law God expects Christians to obey. 20 June 2011 <<http://www.gotquestions.org/antinomianism.html>>. Source: Elmer L. Towns.

<sup>362</sup> Being between Scylla and Charybdis is an idiom deriving from Greek mythology. Several other idioms, such as "on the horns of a dilemma" and "between the devil and the deep blue sea" express the same meaning of "having to choose between two evils".

<sup>363</sup> Wightman is quoting Hannah More (*Strictures I*, p. 170) in Hogg, p. 191.

<sup>364</sup> Please read more about the topic ‘free love’ below.

[t]o correct the taste, to reform the manners, to revive the dormant religion of a nation, by endeavouring to “stir up the gift of God which was in them,” is not only patriotic, but benevolent. But the question is, *how* to do this, by *what* means, and by *whom*; and whether that which is proposed, be a reformation or deformation of taste [emphasis added]. (Shaw, 125)

William Shaw was apparently in some doubt as to whether this held-out prospect of reforming was going to be done the *right way*, by the *right person*, and by following the *right motives*.<sup>365</sup>

By and large, the reception of *Strictures* in various nineteenth century biographies and memoirs was still positive, though writers occasionally questioned the appropriateness of her style and the soundness of all her religious principles. In retrospect, however, later biographers at the end of the century were perhaps less sure that More's writings had indeed had the lasting effect as her contemporaries had hoped.

### **The Hierarchical Unit of the Family and the Nuptial State as a Moral Stronghold**

The hierarchical order as a significant part of Hannah More's thinking permeates the *Strictures*; and her fear that this order might be jeopardized by immoral, infidel, and atheistic influences from both inside and outside England can be felt throughout. Therefore, not surprisingly, Hannah More even in the small hierarchical unit of the family, traces a rising “revolutionary spirit”, pointing out

that not only sons but daughters [too] have adopted something of that spirit of independence, and disdain of control, which characterise the time. (*Strictures I*, 135)

And she fears that a youth “not armed with Christian principles” (*Strictures I*, 182) will feel invited to defy both the justice and even the sheer existence of a “superintending Providence” (*Strictures I*, 183).

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<sup>365</sup> For Shaw's more comprehensive criticism of More's *Strictures* see in this chapter below.

To hold against this new spirit, she strongly suggests that the unit of the family be regulated with filial obedience, discipline and restraint as its guiding principles, on the part of the children, in particular of the girls, but also on that of their mothers. Particularly addressing the females, Hannah More fervently recommends to “early acquire a submissive temper and a forbearing spirit” (*Strictures I*, 143). Since the controlling hand of Providence had endowed women with the highly responsible task of instructing their children, girls in particular but also infant sons, for the benefit of their present life and the life to come thereafter, it was imperative that women should become aware of the implications of this divine obligation. The mission Hannah More herewith entrusts to women is to educate their children in a deeply Christian manner; hopefully, they would serve their purpose as a means of being anchor and supporter of good morals, which she saw heavily endangered not only by the notoriously licentious moral standard swapping over from France but also by that of German philosophers and writers. Referring to her work *The Wrongs of Woman*, Hannah More took offence at Mary Wollstonecraft’s view that adultery was justifiable under certain conditions. She saw in Wollstonecraft a “professed admirer and imitator of the German suicide Werter [sic], as she [...] [was] styled by her [husband and] biographer” William Godwin (*Strictures I*, 45).<sup>366</sup> A sound standard of morals had to be maintained, respectively regained at all events, for, as Hannah More reasons, “religion and morals will stand or fall together” (*Strictures I*, 40).

Her trust in the sacrosanct institutions was firm. She never distrusted and questioned their divine ordinances. Therefore, ‘rights’ were not a suitable subject to be discussed even in the limited realm of the family. As for women, Sir William Blackstone<sup>367</sup> had regulated the rest of what had been left over of ‘female rights’ in marriage decades ago. In 1753 Blackstone wrote that

by marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being, or legal existence of the woman is suspended

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<sup>366</sup> In the edition of her *Works I* of 1843 More even further elaborated on this, to her most disdainful, subject.

<sup>367</sup> Sir William Blackstone (1723-1780): Barrister, Member of Parliament, solicitor general to the Queen, Justice of the Common Pleas. Best remembered for his *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 1765.

during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband. (Blackstone, *Commentaries*, Vol. I, 441)

From this followed that a married woman was placed alongside with underage children, “in the same legal category as wards, lunatics, idiots and outlaws” (Greenberg, 172). From this followed also that a married woman could “legally hold no property in her own right, nor enter into any legal contract, nor for that matter claim any rights over her children” (Brody qtd. in Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 31). It was the legalization of woman’s complete economic dependency on her husband, and the manifestation of this spirit of woman’s entire subordination. Her subordination under the husband, however, agreed with More’s idea of woman’s place in the providential hierarchy, which had its beginnings in the small unit of the family, and which seemed to many to perfectly comply with the interpretation of the Bible. More, not unexpectedly thus, found women “richly endowed with the bounties of Providence” (*Strictures I*, 3), living in a country

where our sex enjoys the blessings of liberal instruction, of reasonable laws, of a pure religion<sup>368</sup>, and all the endearing pleasures of an equal, social, virtuous, and delightful intercourse. (*Strictures I*, 3)<sup>369</sup>

Hannah More’s stance with regard to woman’s position was very different from Mary Wollstonecraft’s. A year after Mary Wollstonecraft had published her *Vindication* in 1792, Hannah More in a letter to the Earl of Orford, the former Horace Walpole, indignantly remarked with regard to the “Rights of Women [sic]”:

How many ways there are of being ridiculous! I am sure I have as much liberty as I can make a use of, now I am an old maid; and when I was a young one, I had, I dare say, more than was good for me. (qtd. in Roberts I, 427)

In later years, Hannah More even complained of too much liberty women enjoyed. She wrote to Sir W. W. Pepys:

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<sup>368</sup> Hannah More means the Evangelical creed.

<sup>369</sup> Hannah More is painting a notably agreeable position of the women of rank of her days. Maybe her field of vision was so darkened by her experience with the poor Mendip women (see the *Mendip Annals*) that she no longer saw the confined lives of the well-to-do females she addressed in the *Strictures*.

I am so sick of that liberty which I used so to prize. [...] I have more [of it] than I can make use of, and *many have more than does them good* [emphasis added]. (qtd. in Roberts II, 329)<sup>370</sup>

Confronted with statements of this kind, the question ought to be permitted whether Hannah More in her celebrated position was truly the right person to deal with the position of the majority of women of her time who were confined to their private sphere. It is clear that it was this very sphere where she wanted them to become exemplary moral beings.

Unsurprisingly then, she rather disdainfully dismissed the necessity of further discussing any *rights*: the “*rights of man*”<sup>371</sup> (unmistakably alluding to Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man*), as they had already been given more than appropriate attention; the “*rights of woman*”<sup>372</sup> (alluding to Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*), which had already been demanded “with more presumption than prudence”; ironically anticipating as the next stage a discussion of the “*rights of children*”, since enlightenment had begun to assail the sheltering hierarchical unit of the family. (*Strictures I*, 135) Hannah More tried to dismiss ‘female rights’ as an “imposing term” which triggered “presumptuous vanity” and “impious discontent” (*Strictures II*, 20), and seems to have understood them as an antithesis to God’s Providence.

Similarly, it was “[t]he principle of respect,” John Bowles<sup>373</sup> claimed, “that necessary bulwark of social order, [which] became weakened in a most alarming degree” (Bowles, *A View of the Moral State*, 21); and “a [new] spirit of insubordination [was] endangering the security of property, and the existence of social order.” (Bowles, *Moral State*, 53) He thought that

[r]eligion is the main pillar of society; [and] that, without the belief of a Supreme Being, who will recompence [sic] every one according to his works, without the expectation of a future state of rewards and punishments - the motives to virtue would be so languid, the force of conscience would be so feeble, and the state of morals so

<sup>370</sup> That Hannah More should have “prized” liberty at any time could not be traced in any of her writings or correspondence.

<sup>371</sup> See Hannah More’s letter to the Earl of Orford (Horace Walpole) in 1793, (qtd. in Roberts I, p. 419).

<sup>372</sup> In another letter to the Earl of Orford in 1793, Hannah More pertained to Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), disregarding in it any rights for women with the remark that even the very title of the *Vindication* was “fantastic and absurd” (qtd. in Roberts I, p. 427).

<sup>373</sup> For John Bowles see also the chapter on *Thoughts* of this thesis.

corrupt, that Government would be unequal to the preservation of social order, and laws would be incapable of restraining the unruly passions of mankind. (Bowles, *Moral State*, 82)

Watchfulness was necessary so that the state of morals would not sink to a level where the government was no longer able to preserve social order. John Bowles thus joined in Hannah More's worry over devastating influences from all sides and at all levels of society, with their undermining effects on the foundations of the existing hierarchical order of king, government and church. He was only one of those who shared More's prevalent anxiety.

In Hannah More's opinion it was one of women's foremost duties to contribute their share to the survival of the hierarchy of the unit of the family as the foundation of society as a whole, as the *Strictures* throughout suggest. But as this aim was conditional upon the respect of their families, which in turn was triggered by wives, respectively mothers, being rational and moral creatures, it followed that the education women had received so far had to be fundamentally changed into one which raised their Christian morality. Therefore, the moral education Hannah More meant to give to women was again a means to an end: no longer an education to merely serve the marriage market, it was now to keep up the hierarchical order of a country deeply assailed by social, economical and political insecurities.<sup>374</sup> Women's increasing influence on men (or the "power of female elegance", as More puts it in *Strictures I*, 2) could be employed for the purpose of raising the morals of their husbands, too, More insinuates.

If "filial obedience" was no longer "the character of the age", as Charles Burney<sup>375</sup> reasoned in a letter to More dated April 1799 (qtd. in Roberts II, 40), this was certainly one of the causes why things were going wrong in England, with

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<sup>374</sup> For more about the purpose of female learning see below in the chapter *Strictures*.

<sup>375</sup> Charles Burney (1726 –1814) was an English music historian and father of authors Frances Burney and Sarah Burney. The University of Oxford honoured Burney 1769 with the degrees of Bachelor and Doctor of Music. Burney never lost sight of his main project, his *History of Music* for which he travelled widely on the continent. In 1773 he was chosen as a fellow of the Royal Society. Source: *Wikipedia*. 28<sup>th</sup> July 2011 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles\\_Burney#Cultural\\_references](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Burney#Cultural_references)>.

parents [...] now afraid of their children – masters of their servants – and in state trials, judges of the prisoners [...] in these topsy-turvy times (qtd. in Roberts II, 40).

Mary Wollstonecraft's attitude in this question was less strained. She pleaded for "parental affection", which would produce "filial duty" (*Vindication*, 272) without enforcing "submission" (*Vindication*, 280), whereas the parents' "good example" would quite naturally produce "filial respect" (*Vindication*, 276). It was a respect which ought not to become "filial esteem", however, because it always had "a dash of fear mixed with it" (*Vindication*, 280). This is a good example showing how Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft often seemed to agree on an issue at first sight, but had different ends in mind at second sight. In this case, Wollstonecraft went in for the well-being of the child, whereas More was eager to rescue the hierarchical unit of the family.

The end of the eighteenth century indeed saw a broad debate on women's position, rights and duties, which More and Wollstonecraft had joined from different ideological vantage-points. Mary Wollstonecraft was greatly supported by Mary Robinson in her idea of changing women's hierarchical position in which they were trapped. In her *Letter to the Women of England* (1799) she pleaded:

Let your daughters be liberally, classically, philosophically, and usefully educated; let them speak and write their opinions freely; let them read and think like rational creatures; adapt their studies to their strength of intellect; expand their minds, and purify their hearts, by teaching them to feel their mental equality with their imperious rulers. (*Letter*, 94)

In times of growing antifeminist tendencies at the end of the eighteenth century, Mary Robinson's plea was courageous and daring and followed Mary Hays' *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798) of the same mood.

Rather surprisingly, however, is that James Lawrence, the author of the notorious novel *Empire of the Nairs* (*Paradies der Liebe*), published in 1793, in which he went in for more freedom for women, had nothing more specific to say with respect to their education than:

There are many things which a woman need not study, but there is nothing that she should be hindered from knowing. There are sights to which she need not be conducted, but should the objects occur she need not turn her head aside. (*Empire* Vol. I, p. xxix, Introd.)<sup>376</sup>

Mary Robinson and James Lawrence were joint by one particular line of thought, namely the question of inheritance through the female line, an important aspect to facilitate women's position in marriage, which had already been picked up by Mary Wollstonecraft. Without ever naming Blackstone as the founder of the fatal Marriage Act, it was clear that they were in opposition to him. The 'Nair system'<sup>377</sup> underlined the importance of inheritance through the female line; and Robinson deplored that

[hence] woman is destined to be the passive creature; she is to yield obedience, and to depend for support upon a being who is perpetually authorised to deceive her. If a woman be married, her property becomes her husband's; and yet she is amenable to the laws, if she contracts debts beyond what that husband and those laws pronounce the necessaries of existence.  
(Robinson, *Letter*, 78)

Wollstonecraft wrote in the same apprehensive tenor that in the case of the death of the father with a large family

[a] double duty devolves on her [the widow]; to educate them [the children] in the character of both father and mother; to form their principles and secure their property. But, alas ! she has never thought, much less acted for herself. She has only learned to please men, to depend gracefully on them; yet, encumbered with children, how is she to obtain another protector a husband to supply the place of reason? (*Vindication*, 137-38)

Mary Wollstonecraft's worry was that such a woman would easily become prey to a fortune-hunter, "who defrauds her children of their paternal inheritance, and renders her miserable" (*Vindication*, 138). Her progressive view was much opposed by the conservative camp to which Hester Chapone belonged. Her opinion about women's capacities may serve as a very good example in this respect, for she wrote that only

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<sup>376</sup> For more about James Lawrence's novel *Empire of the Nairs* see below in this chapter.

<sup>377</sup> The 'Nair system' (or the 'System of the Nairs') was one of gallantry and inheritance, designed for a nation to reach the highest civilization without marriage, a state which resulted in the liberty and happiness of both sexes. It was also one of inheritance through the female line, meaning that when a woman dies her property went to her children. Boys and girls were educated together in public schools of the sort proposed by Mary



[f]ew possess[ed] the skill to unite authority with kindness, or are capable of that steady and uniformly reasonable conduct, which alone can maintain true dignity, and command a willing and attentive obedience." (Chapone, *Letters*, 134)<sup>378</sup>

Even if Hester Chapone may sound progressive to some readers, this is deceptive, for her concept of female education was that it had to begin with religion and the study of the Bible. This was also the position much cherished by Hannah More, a position that hindered women from getting away from the existing conservative social structure. It was a structure which even denied women "the first privilege of nature, [namely] the power of SELF-DEFENCE", as Mary Robinson plainly wrote. (*Letter*, 73) To her, a woman was "a thinking and a discriminating helpmate" and not man's "bondswoman", subjected "to his power", and subdued "to his convenience". "By the laws of nature and religion [she was] to participate in all the various vicissitudes of fortune." (*Letter*, 66).

The above opinions expressed with regard to woman's position show a close connection between her legal position in the family, her neglected and wrong education (and consequently her often neglected morals), and obvious efforts to (mis)use this subjected position as a means of supporting hierarchy also within the family. It was truly a social order made by men for men, using religion and its defenders in the church as an instrument of keeping up the status quo.

In the hierarchical unit of the family even baby-balls could be a means of undermining parental authority, was Mr. Burney's apprehension. This "topsy-turvy" time, he said in his letter to Hannah More, was one when music and dancing were being much abused, which found its blameworthy expression in the invention of "children's balls" and "the time and importance given to new-fashioned hops" (qtd. in Roberts II, 39).

Even fifty years later, baby-balls and lacking filial obedience were reacted to in much the same way:

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Wollstonecraft and superintended by women. See Walter Graham, p. 884; also *Empire of the Nairs I*, p. xvii, Introd.

<sup>378</sup> In this question of filial obedience and paternal authority Chapone became even engaged in a debate with Richardson, whose "notions of paternal authority almost degenerated into tyranny", so the author of the unnamed introduction (qtd. in Chapone, X).

The tendencies then, as now, were towards amusement rather than sobriety, fashionable accomplishments instead of valuable knowledge and practical industry, filial independence in place of filial obedience. (Knight, 190-91)

From this we may gather that baby-balls remained an attraction despite More's Evangelical warnings, and filial obedience probably a sore problem. However, from to-day's standpoint and despite Mr. Burney's apprehension, it is difficult to comprehend how baby-balls should have influenced parental authority and disturbed the hierarchy of the family.

Alongside with her concern for the functioning of the family as a hierarchical unit went Hannah More's anxiety for the nuptial state as the moral stronghold of a functioning society, especially for the upper-class, with its exemplary mission. With this mission in mind, Hannah More grew very upset in the *Strictures* over adultery having come to be treated in literature as a

sin [...] so filtered and purged of its pollutions [...] that the innocent and impressive young reader is brought to lose all horror of the awful crime in question, in the complacency she feels for the engaging virtues of the criminal. (*Strictures I*, 37)

She must have felt that the gospel can have nothing to do with a system in which sin was reduced to a little human imperfection. Hannah More regarded adultery to be one of those sins which were now belittled even by the jurisdiction as a mere weakness. Moreover, quite obviously pointing to Mary Wollstonecraft, More sarcastically claimed that a strict condemnation of adultery, which refused to take into consideration any mitigating circumstances whatsoever, was regarded of late "as an unjust infringement on liberty, and a tyrannical deduction from general happiness" (*Strictures I*, 36).

Hannah More seems to have been less interested in the emotional side of marriage than in the utilitarian aspect, since she regarded the maintenance of the married state as a guarantee for the hierarchical order, which in turn guaranteed the social order of the state. Since the Bible was the main source of her moral doctrines, she was certainly familiar with Saint Paul, who said in his Epistle to the Ephesians about matrimony,

teache thyou [sic] thus; Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord; for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. And again he saith, Let the wife see that she reverence her husband.

(qtd. in *The Book of Common Prayer*, 231)

However, Saint Paul also said when writing to the Colossians, speaking “thus to all men that are married; Husbands, *love* [emphasis added] your wives, and be not bitter against them.” (qtd. in *The Book of Common Prayer*, 230/231) Love itself was to Hannah More only a transitory state in wedlock and rather on the same level as a short-lived infatuation. What she evidently expected from women in marriage was respect for the partner, endurance to meet the difficulties which would crop up with certainty, and feelings which were far from the misguided sensibility that could be found in most novels.

In her understanding, life was but “a state of probation and discipline” (*Strictures II*, 122), and marriage “only one certain modification of human life” (*Strictures II*, 121), the “only one condition, and often the best condition of that imperfect state of being which, though seldom very exquisite, is *often very tolerable* [emphasis added].” (*Strictures II*, 122) Marriage, therefore, so More, unlike it is mistakenly often presented by the poets, is neither “a state of exquisite happiness [...] [nor of] exquisite misery” (*Strictures II*, 121).

Hannah More criticises both the young ladies for being less ready to have their opinions formed by the divines than by the bad influence of the poets, and the poets themselves for doing much mischief in instilling in young women the vision of “unceasing rapture” in the state of marriage. When the young women were confronted with the reality of married life, More claimed, their hearts were filled with discontent for having to put up with “that moderate lot which Providence commonly bestows” (*Strictures II*, 122).

More thus blamed the lax morality of the eighteenth century women not only on their bad education, the flippant fashions of the time or the baleful influence of atheists and revolutionaries, but also on romantic literature,

which allegedly turned the heads of impressionable young girls - a charge frequently voiced by the moralists of the time.<sup>379</sup>

### **Female Learning as a Means to a Higher Attainment: the New Domestic Female**

*“All human learning should be taught not as an  
end but a means.”<sup>380</sup>*

Hannah More's postulate was that learning should not be passed on for its own sake and benefit, but, as a logical consequence of her strong Christian attitude, with a view to its “subserviency [sic] to higher things” (*Strictures I*, 175).<sup>381</sup> Learning should thus also serve as a means of “qualifying [...] [women] for religious pursuits” (*Strictures I*, 166).

But since in the Bible the kingdom of heaven is promised to believers having “poverty of spirit” but “purity of heart” (*Strictures I*, 243), of which wits often know little, wit and imagination, too, ought to be turned into the “service of religion” (*Strictures I*, 237). According to More, “wit is of all the qualities of the female mind that which requires the severest castigation” (*Strictures II*, 59), and only “a sound and genuine Christianity [...] can alone [...] chastise and regulate the imagination” and keep it away from erring. Her justification is that “the wit [vindicates] the rights of women” and “[fights] for a party” (*Strictures II*, 15)<sup>382</sup>, contending for “equality” with man, which, Hannah More complained, was striven for with “more warmth than wisdom” (*Strictures II*, 16). Her view is that “[e]ach sex has its proper excellencies” (*Strictures II*, 21), and she cannot detect any sense in doing away with the God-given distinctions. “Was it not better”, she reflects, “to be excellent women rather than indifferent men?” (*Strictures II*, 22)

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<sup>379</sup> For the evil of novel reading see also below in this thesis.

<sup>380</sup> *Strictures I*, p. 175.

<sup>381</sup> This subservience of learning to higher things is nowhere better put into practice than in Hannah More's schools for the poor in the Mendips, a subject paid close attention to in the following chapter. See also the *Mendip Annals*, edit. Arthur Roberts.

<sup>382</sup> It seems clear that Hannah More in a concealed manner is hinting at Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which she maintained throughout her life never to have read.

Hannah More certainly saw in any levelling tendencies interference in God's Creation.

In view of Hannah More's attitude to female "wits", she surprised with the statement that she did not wish to undervalue her own sex but intended "to cure [...] [women] of a feverish thirst for fame" (*Strictures II*, 23), for

while she who is vain of her genius [...] is jealous for the honour of her whole sex, and contends for the equality of their pretensions, in which she feels that her own are involved. The beauty vindicates her own rights, the wit the rights of women; the beauty fights for herself, the wit for a party; and while the more moderate beauty would but be Queen for life, the wit struggles to abrogate the Salique law of intellect, and to enthrone a whole sex of Queens. (*Strictures II*, 15)

This statement clearly shows that from More's point of view the 'woman of wit' represented more of a threat than the 'woman of beauty', because she agitated and was responsible for unrest in the matter of female rights. She reminds the reader that the controversy over equality of the sexes was brought to life again in the bygone centuries "with more warmth than wisdom" (see above), but, so More, the "imposing term of *rights*" (*Strictures II*, 20) was a mere product

to sanctify the claim of our female pretenders, [destined] [...] not only to rekindle in the minds of women a presumptuous vanity dishonourable to their sex, but [...] [also intended] to excite in their hearts an impious discontent with the post which God has assigned them in this world. (*Strictures II*, 20)

In spite of her attack on female wit and her conservative understanding of women's position in the social hierarchy, More was not an enemy of serious female education. On the contrary, she recommended an intellectual training for women, albeit with a strong view to their moral and religious edification.

"[I]f the great business of education be [...] a school to fit us for life, and life be a school to fit us for eternity," how could these "grand ends of education" (*Strictures I*, 56-57) be realized in view of the low moral standard, Hannah More resentfully reasons. One of the first things that ought to be taught should be knowledge for the "sober season of life", after the transient period of youth: "to grow old gracefully is perhaps one of the

rarest and most valuable arts which can be taught to woman". (*Strictures I*, 59) The term "*accomplishments*" had nothing to do with the original meaning of "*perfection*" any more. To her dismay, this "phrenzy of accomplishments" was no longer restricted to the upper ranks but had by way of "epidemical mania" reached the middle orders. Seized by this "revolution of manners" (*Strictures I*, 62), their "worth and virtues" (*Strictures I*, 63) were endangered. Women of the middle-class now seemed to fall short of the very high and the very low relating to "religious knowledge and to practical industry" (*Strictures I*, 63). As rational beings, women ought to exert their influence on men as a positive power instead of giving themselves to caprices and polishing of their outward appearance, when they are able to reform and awaken "powers of which the effects may be commensurate with eternity" (*Strictures I*, 4).

As Hannah More admittedly did not offer a clear-cut system of education, she preferred to remain rather vague as far as the subjects which ought to be taught to women are concerned. She cast more than one critical glance, however, on the state of education in general and on that of women in particular. Her aim was not, in her own words, "to make scholastic ladies or female dialecticians" (*Strictures I*, 168), but rather to improve their reasoning to enable them to read between the lines, and their intellectual power, both of which they were unaccustomed to, lacking exercise. Serious studies, so Hannah More, not only serve "to harden the mind", but lead the female reader away from worldly sensation and vanity to intellectual pursuits, correcting her "spirit of trifling" (*Strictures I*, 165), which is the consequence of "the frivolous turn of female conversation" (*Strictures I*, 165). Above all it will help to qualify her for "religious pursuits" (*Strictures I*, 166). However, More criticises that while women's lively imagination is even more stimulated by education, their capacity of judgement is neglected. She thus recommends reading which "exercise[s] the reasoning faculties" (*Strictures I*, 164) to get them "accustomed to close reasoning on any subject" (*Strictures I*, 166). If women's knowledge and education were below that of men, this defect should be compensated by unreproachable "conduct" and serve, as their "chief end", the "practical purposes of life" (*Strictures II*, 1).

If we want to pinpoint More's idea about the aim of female education, it can be maintained that it was predominantly to serve the pursuits of woman's "destination of life"; her talents were to be used only as "a means to a still higher attainment" (*Strictures II*, 11). If education were used only for the acquisition of fame, it would be "subversive of her delicacy as a woman" and not in agreement with "the spirit of a Christian" (*Strictures II*, 11). Knowledge, according to More, was only meant to qualify women for the performance of their duties and not to exonerate women from them. These "appropriate duties" are to be fulfilled by the moderately gifted women and the highly endowed ones alike, as even the humblest offices are "wholesome for the minds even of the most enlightened" (*Strictures II*, 4-5).

Any public display of female learning or accomplishments, however, would go against the restraint More expects from women:

I am persuaded the Christian female, whatever her talents, will renounce the desire of any celebrity when attached to impurity of character, with [...] noble indignation. (*Strictures I*, 74-75)<sup>383</sup>

Hannah More evasively and diplomatically resorts to Swift's remark when appraising women's general level of intellect of her time, namely that they "possess less of what is called learning than a common school-boy" (qtd. in *Strictures I*, 169). Even if More used Swift as a front, it seems quite obvious that her position was that the female power of intellect, learning aside, was providentially inferior to that of men, also because women were the victims of "a most defective Education" (*Strictures I*, Introd., ix) in the form of over-valued and more or less useless 'female accomplishments' which in due course found its completion in the form of knowledge acquired from reading sentimental novels offered by the circulating libraries. Wollstonecraft and More were united in their criticism of novel reading: both blame novel reading for infusing women with false ideas about real life, triggering overdone romantic expectations, and hence constituting a misuse of time. Wollstonecraft induces women to read "something superior" (*Vindication*, 315), but relativizes the bad effect of novel reading, saying that "[...] any kind of reading ... [is] better than

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<sup>383</sup> If Hannah More had vanity in mind, this seems a surprising demand from a woman who only some years earlier had enjoyed being a celebrity in London's literary scene.

leaving a blank still a blank.“ (*Vindication*, 314) More, on the other hand, distrusts any books suggesting “a female is superfluous” and without “real social influence“, but favours those which teach “how to fulfil her domestic role“. (Grogan, 107) <sup>384</sup> More, whose intention was to give the family unit more outward importance and moral support, promoted in her *Strictures* an education apt to bring forth a new domestic female. This female ought to be capable of performing the challenging duties of this life in preparation of the life to come. These duties were domestic duties dictated by the church, to be performed within the private sphere which, in More’s understanding, was explicitly feminine. The “chief end to be proposed in cultivating the understandings of women, is to qualify them for the practical purposes of life,” Hannah More states. (*Strictures II*, 1) That these purposes, such as household duties, the education of children, but also attending to the poor, to name a few, were ultimately for the benefit of the socially ordained hierarchy within the God-given institutions of King, government, church, and family, seems to be beyond doubt. In her strict adherence to the Christian dictates of a patriarchal society, More saw it as given that a “female’s value depend[ed] upon her chastity, purity and submission“. (Grogan, 106) Women’s role would, in compliance with Providence, remain an inferior one at any rate, but it could be filled with more moral worth with the help of devotion to “religious reading, reflection, or self-examination” (*Strictures I*, 168) as part of the indispensable Christian duties Hannah More envisaged.

Jane Nardin, in comparing Hannah More’s *Strictures* with Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*, remarks that

More never stated those ideas with the logical consistency that made Wollstonecraft’s formulations so frightening. Wollstonecraft, of course, was interested in the *truth*. More was interested in *results* [emphasizes added]. (Nardin, 225)

The *results* Hannah More was desperately interested in were the re-awakening of awareness for the preservation of the established hierarchical social order which seemed threatened by irreligious and amoral tendencies from abroad and within Britain and the dissemination of her Evangelical Christian principles.

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<sup>384</sup> As to the evil of novel reading see in this chapter below.



In Hannah More's understanding the importance of learning rested a great deal in the study of history because nowhere else could "the controlling hand of Providence" and its unexpected "hidden purpose" (*Strictures I*, 178) in apparently casual occurrences be met with such notable constancy. The French Revolution, then, can be perceived as "the rod of His wrath" for a nation which had fallen into God's disgrace for its immorality, with the purpose of "punish[ing] or [...] purify[ing]" (*Strictures I*, 179) it. This 'doctrine of Divine Providence' involves the inevitable question how much of man's doing is the outcome of his free will and how much of it is God's guidance, which Hannah More answered to the effect that Divine Providence works out its "own purposes through the sins of his creatures" (*Strictures I*, 179)<sup>385</sup>; and, although the sinner is "but a tool in the hands of the great artificer", the "woe" will certainly be his (*Strictures I*, 179). The "operations of Providence" (*Strictures I*, 179), even if they should fail to be understood by the enlightened reader who is proud of his "Wisdom", and thus likely to mock More's way of thinking, is explained by her as follows.

[T]here is not an event but has its commission; not a misfortune which breaks its allotted rank; not a trial which moves out of its appointed track. While calamities and crimes seem to fly in casual confusion, all is commanded or permitted; all is under control of a wisdom which cannot err, of a goodness which cannot do wrong. (*Strictures I*, 180)

History, which for comparative purposes had always played a significant role in Hannah More's assessment of her time, assumed even more importance when she figuratively related states and kings to the fates and actual lives of the social ranks below. History because of its unpredictability, she thought, teaches scepticism and hesitation, and is therefore in stark contrast to morals and religion, which alone offer assurance, decisiveness, and certainty.

That Hannah More's impression of women's mental power, their deficient education aside, was rather low-grade can be understood from several revealing statements (already referred to in this thesis). The question

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<sup>385</sup> In a far-fetched manner, More even maintains that "[e]very animal is endowed by Providence with the peculiar powers adapted to its nature and its wants." (*Strictures II*, p.129)

raised by Hannah More, in what way female delicacy and softness<sup>386</sup> played a role in the mental capacity of women, remains unanswered, but she recommends for the tempering of the female mind “dry tough reading” and “serious study” (*Strictures I*, 165), which could also correct “the frivolous turn of female conversation” (*Strictures I*, 165) and the bent for the trivial in women in general. In their “natural desire to please” (*Strictures II*, 131), More says, and paired with their inability to always choose the right means to comply with this desire, and also owing to their inborn weakness, women are easily prone to insincerity.

To mitigate this frivolous turn of female conversation Hannah More dedicated a whole chapter in the *Strictures* ‘On female conversation’. “A talent for conversation should be the result of education, not its precursor,” she maintained (*Strictures I*, 159), because, without having passed to “a higher strain of mind”, the possibility that “those who early begin with talking and writing like women, commonly end with thinking and acting like children” (*Strictures I*, 160), intimating that women often simulate precociousness in early years, giving way to silly squabble in later ones. More’s intention was to lead women away from “inconsiderate and unguarded chat” (*Strictures I*, 10), in compliance with the important “doctrine of consequences” (*Strictures I*, 11) and to be on guard against the “spirit of ridicule” (*Strictures I*, 18). In order to make this scheme of conversation a success, More thought it essential to add a chapter on the choice of the right definitions, which would facilitate comprehension of what women tried to truly communicate.<sup>387</sup> It is therefore a comic paradox that More should have been admonished herself for the incorrect use of terms and imprecision of language. When the Reverend Charles Daubeny, who had a very high opinion of Hannah More, found some contradictory passages in Chapter XX of *Strictures*, it was of such importance to him

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<sup>386</sup> Mental softness in a woman was something of which Hannah More expressed the strongest disapproval. In a long letter to her Charles Burney referring to this topic (in *Strictures I*, p.163) wrote: “What you have said of mental female softness [...] put me in mind of Johnson’s reply to Mrs. Thrale, who was defending a lady whom he had accused of several species of affectations, by saying, ‘but she is soft.’ – ‘Yes, madam,’ answered Johnson, ‘and so is a pillow.’” (qtd. in Roberts II, p. 40)

<sup>387</sup> The chapter “on definitions” did not always meet with the approval of the readers. As has been mentioned in his *Life and Times of the Reverend John Wightman, DD*, the Reverend David Hogg, for instance, quotes the Reverend Dr. Wightman as having termed More’s pleading for “the strict and appropriate use of terms” a “trifle” (qtd. in Hogg, 191), for she herself was rather inconsistent in making use of them.

that he felt they had to be publicly corrected for being unscriptural, which he did, albeit with the utmost consideration in order not to infringe upon More's reputation and the popularity of her *Strictures*. Her inaccurate diction led to misunderstanding in as much as it sapped "the very doctrines she was inculcating" (Thompson, 171). "[T]he *duties* of Christianity," so More, "may be seen to grow out of its *doctrines*." According to Daubeny, this could lead to the conclusion that, "belief once established, works would so necessarily ensue that any care upon the subject would be superfluous" (Thompson, 171). Hannah More seemed less upset by this negative feedback than many of her Evangelical brethren. Thompson himself felt that Daubeny's surmise also came from a greater context of More's ethical writings, and that her view was taking things too easy, in the face of the fact that her statement pertained to a subject of "supreme importance as religious truth" (Thompson, 175).<sup>388</sup>

As mentioned before, in *Strictures* Hannah More did not explicitly suggest a certain mode or method of educating women, but preferred to remain vague and general in this respect. She apparently appreciated the "improved methods" of imparting knowledge. Pointing to the "multiplied helps" (*Strictures I*, 155), however, now at the disposal for acquiring knowledge, she perceived at the same time in them the danger of superficiality and with it a certain "moral disadvantage". She states that a sound education could never be a "primrose path of dalliance" (*Strictures I*, 155), and that knowledge had to be acquired with some exertion and labour, otherwise it did not deserve this name. In Hannah More's logic, it was part of the "wise institutions of Providence" (*Strictures I*, 157) that large obstacles in connection with education were "but an initiation into that life of trial to which we are introduced on our entrance into this world." (*Strictures I*, 157) In More's opinion, we are born for "toil and labour", and in this sense, learning with its strain on the mind can be seen to be put "to higher uses" (*Strictures I*, 157), namely the unity of religion and morality. Of course, Hannah More stated, the price to be paid for knowledge was time and industry.

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<sup>388</sup> Apart from this lapsus, chapter XX profoundly engages with the corruption of human nature, arising from the fall of man, and its redemption, by way of Christian atonement – the foundation of the Christian religion.

When Hannah More was thinking positively of the new methods of imparting knowledge, she must also have been acquainted with Erasmus Darwin's<sup>389</sup> *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools, Private Families, and Public Seminaries* (1798). Although ambiguous sometimes, and also following a rather conservative strand in parts, it includes, contrary to Hannah More's *Strictures*, clear-cut suggestions for a fairly extensive and progressive curriculum. But since Darwin favoured public schools, More was either inconsistent in her views about these schools or she was unaware of Darwin's *Plan* after all. In contrast to Thomas Gisborne<sup>390</sup>, who wrote *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797), a conduct book widely read at the time, and recommended, among others, in the attached reading-list of Erasmus Darwin's *Plan*, Dr. Darwin might truly be called a pioneering man, from today's standpoint. He considered it necessary that girls, of course only in the upper classes, should be taught also mathematics and science (chemistry, applied sciences) and shorthand. As opposed to Gisborne, he favoured school education to home study for good reasons: it generated imitation, mutual help, emulation and social intercourse, features which could hardly play the same educative role in home instruction.<sup>391</sup>

At the end of the eighteenth century, not only the conservatives, who had a certain tendency for a withdrawal into the private sphere and, therefore, rather went in for education at home, were very active in their effort to dominate education. The progressives, who rather favoured education in public schools, were not inactive either in their effort to initiate a change for the better. Therefore, on the whole, it can be said that Erasmus Darwin's *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education* was a most useful

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<sup>389</sup> Erasmus Darwin (1731 – 1802) was an English physician who turned down George III's invitation to be a physician to the King. One of the key thinkers of the Midlands Enlightenment, he was also a natural philosopher, physiologist, abolitionist, inventor and poet. His poems included much natural history, including a statement of evolution and the relatedness of all forms of life. He was a member of the Darwin–Wedgwood family, which includes his grandsons Charles Darwin and Francis Galton. Darwin was also a founding member of the Lunar Society of Birmingham, a discussion group of pioneering industrialists and natural philosophers. Source: *Wikipedia*.

22 July 2011 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erasmus\\_Darwin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erasmus_Darwin)>. Erasmus Darwin was one of several who went in for a more progressive education, but the first to offer a much better curriculum.

<sup>390</sup> Thomas Gisborne (1758 –1846) was an Anglican divine, priest and poet. He was a member of the Clapham Sect, who fought for the abolition of the slave trade in England. He wrote several conduct books.

directory both for teachers and their pupils in every field of education, morals and advice on behaviour. It practically left no question unanswered and offered, contrary to Hannah More, who preferred to merely criticise the state of education, a complete curriculum for the lower and somewhat advanced level of studies. To this new curriculum, Anna Seward<sup>392</sup> in her *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Dr. Darwin*, did not agree at all. But for “[s]ome good rules for promoting the health of growing children”, she classified it as “a meagre work, of little interest” and the attached reading list “an odd recommendation of certain novels, of no eminence, to the perusal of young people.” (Seward, 287) This judgement, however, seems to be not appropriate, since the list contains such prominent authors as Hannah More, Mary Wollstonecraft, the bluestocking Mrs. Boscawen, Lady Wortley Montague, Hester Chapone, Edmund Burke and many others. As to novel reading, Dr. Darwin shared More’s anxiety, who was convinced of its negative influence. He, not unlike her, would have preferred a girl “wholly ignorant of the alphabet [...] [to one being] attached to that species of writing” (*Plan*, 226). In this preference, both Hannah More and Erasmus Darwin were in stark contrast to Mary Wollstonecraft, who thought that reading novels was better than reading nothing at all.<sup>393</sup> Of course, if Seward’s critical view was based on what she thought could have been Erasmus Darwin’s “conciser plan” (Seward, 287), his *Plan* was not worthy of his true abilities and did not clearly express his belief that it was wrong what most conduct books had in mind, namely “to make human angels, or to make practical philosophers of every boy and girl in the higher and middle classes of life” (Seward, 287).

An open combat against the “educating metaphysicians” (Seward, 287) would most likely have jeopardized the success of the boarding-school of the Miss Parkers, his relatives, and would have meant sacrificing the

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<sup>391</sup> See Hans, p. 202.

<sup>392</sup> Anna Seward (1747 –1809) was an English Romantic poet, often called the “Swan of Lichfield”. She was the elder daughter of Thomas Seward (1708–1790). Born at Eyam in Derbyshire, she passed nearly all her life in Lichfield, beginning at an early age to write poetry partly at the instigation of Erasmus Darwin. Horace Walpole said she had “no imagination, no novelty.” Sir Walter Scott, however, edited *Seward's Poetical Works* in three volumes (Edinburgh, 1810). Seward also wrote *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin* (1804). Source: *Wikipedia*.

22 July 2011 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna\\_Seward#Works](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Seward#Works)>

<sup>393</sup> As to the evil of novel reading see in this chapter above and below.

design of his tract, namely to be useful to these passionate teachers. Had the *Plan* been written in accordance with Erasmus Darwin's "exalted abilities" (Seward, 285), this "small tract on Female Education" could have been of more utility than all conduct books<sup>394</sup> together. What Anna Seward badly missed in Dr. Darwin's *Plan* was any reference to "the inspiration of religion by [...] expressed contempt for impiety, and daily example of grateful devotion", for it would have much better explained "the end of making wise and good men and women" (Seward, 286).

Hannah More entered into a controversy with Darwin as to the merit of the education he recommended. Thus in Hannah More's tract "The Two Wealthy Farmers" (*Works I*, 129-162), the Miss Bragwells were educated at a boarding-school, where ignorance was not lessened but vanity added instead; and "[o]f religion they could not possibly [have] learn[ed] anything, since none was taught, for at that place Christianity was considered as a part of education which belonged only to charity schools." (*Works I*, 131) More's statement was countered by William Shaw in his *Life of Hannah More* as being merely motivated by an intention to praise her own schools "at the expense of others". (Shaw, 64) Undoubtedly, Anna Seward shows much agreement with Hannah More's religious ideas, but her reproach seems unjustified, because, although it is true that Dr. Darwin's chapter on religion is the shortest in his *Plan*, in the adjoining chapter "Rudiments of Taste" in the form of seventeen letters of a mother to her daughters, dedicated to the older female students, his ethical and religious insights are profound. He explicates the "end and nature" of religion to be an "antidote to moral evil" (*Plan*, 218). He also says that "[n]othing is more talked of than religion - nothing less understood - without comprehending what it really is" (*Plan*, 294), and that "[t]he love of God is not a passion, but a rational principle [...] in reverence and gratitude [...] [for] one beneficent power." (*Plan*, 295) In many ways it becomes obvious that Erasmus Darwin's thoughts were as much conservative as they were progressive. His occasional closeness to Hannah More's thoughts, however, should mislead the reader, because Darwin was less critical of those he tried to instruct and far from being doctrinal. Although religious in

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<sup>394</sup> Conduct books, although universally read, were "seldom" put into practice, because of their "impracticability" for "the established habits of society". (Seward, p. 286)

his general outlook, Darwin was less so than Hannah More, but his ethics were more striking. Young women ought to become “truly useful members of society” and consider themselves “as citizen of the world” (*Plan*, 224), says Darwin, remotely echoing Mary Wollstonecraft, who had only died the year before. And when, as so often, Dr. Darwin seemingly wrote in the vein of Hannah More, for example when seeing in poverty some advantage, it was for very different reasons: namely in his case the profane beneficence of bodily health and in More’s the pious beneficence of God’s nearness. Providence, and in its trail the matter of hierarchical order, constantly present in Hannah More’s thoughts, did not seem to bother Erasmus Darwin but for their connection with the subject of history.

Interestingly, as regards female accomplishments, Darwin does not take such a rigid position as Hannah More: dancing, for instance, a total ‘no-go’ for More’s Evangelical attitude, seems to Darwin “an agreeable and innocent recreation” (*Plan*, 248) of the genteel kind. Darwin’s fervent praise and advocating of the importance of needle-work seems to be somewhat at odds with his rather progressive curriculum. Maybe he was doing the Miss Parkers a favour for their boarding-school. But in general, especially when set against Hannah More’s restraint in imparting knowledge to females when too much mental capacity was necessary, Dr. Darwin impresses modern readers by his modernity.

Darwin also must have been highly aware of the effect of poetry in general, because he raised a warning finger to be careful as to its contents. “If you are fond of poetry,” he wrote, “be careful to read only what is good of it.” His worry was that “there is a kind of versification that tends to debase the mind.” The “characteristics [of good poetry] are dignity of thought, purity of expression, and, above all, the best principles of piety and morality”, so Darwin. (*Plan*, 236) Darwin, not unsurprisingly, closed his *Plan* with Dr. Young<sup>395</sup>, who said: “A Christian is the highest style of man” (qtd. in *Plan*, 308).

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<sup>395</sup> Edward Young (1681 - 1765) was an English poet, best remembered for *Night Thoughts*, a long poem published in nine parts (or “nights”) between 1742 and 1745. Young was nearly fifty when he decided to take holy orders. Source: *Wikipedia*. 24 July 2011 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward\\_Young#Clerical\\_career](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Young#Clerical_career)>.

Hannah More published her *Strictures* when a range of authors had already crowded the educational literary scene with their conduct manuals. Conservative, even reactionary, and progressive, even revolutionary ideas were disseminated and competed with each other in gaining the day. Under the impression of the French Revolution and the pending War with France, conservative writers like, for instance, Hannah More, Jane West, Hester Chapone, Dr. Gisborne, Dr. Gregory, James Fordyce, Richard Polwhele<sup>396</sup>, and John Bowles, were trying to turn back the clock. Especially Jane West<sup>397</sup>, like Hannah More a patriot and staunch member of the Church of England, wrote in one of her *Letters to a Young Lady* in praise of John Gisborne that together with other “valuable moralists” he made efforts to “stem this torrent” of “alarming change” (*Letters I*, 2-3) women had undergone lately and therefore strongly suggested that “religion must be taught in youth” (*Letters I*, 336) to ward off the dreaded infidel maxims of philosophers aiming at turning their minds against religion in later years. Voices of the less conservative or more progressive kind, like, for instance, those of Catherine Macaulay, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, and Erasmus Darwin, went in for a later introduction to the Bible, respectively to religion. The fear of loss of religiosity had obviously seized a whole group of writers whose worldview strongly resembled Hannah More’s, but nowhere could it be found so closely bound up with the fear of loss of the old order and its God-given hierarchy as in More. She seemed obsessed with the thought of a world which was morally assailed from all sides. Given the climate of the time, it is unsurprising that a great many of the conduct-books of the second half of the eighteenth century were published within only a few years.

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<sup>396</sup> Richard Polwhele (1760 - 1838) contributed to the *Gentleman's Magazine* and to the *Anti-Jacobin Review*. He published sermons, theological essays for the Church Union Society, and attacks on Methodism. He is probably best remembered for his poem *The Unsex'd Females* (1798), a defensive reaction to women's literary self-assertion, representative of the strategic conflation of women writers with revolutionary ideals during this period, and a British backlash against the ideals of the French Revolution. (Source: *Wikipedia*)

<sup>397</sup> Jane West's *Letters to a Young Lady* (1806) appeared not before 1811, but the tenor fits so perfectly into this ideological squabble at the end of the eighteenth century that they found entrance into this chapter.



### The Evil of Novels and the Bad Influence From the ‘Continent’

In *Strictures* Hannah More dedicated much room to the raging epidemic of novel reading, a development which was greatly influenced by the new fashion of the circulating libraries.<sup>398</sup> She felt that the growing popularity of the sentimental novel represented a menace especially to young women by mediating a rather unrealistic picture of the life they were going to lead in their future married state. In order to counteract this unfavourable development or even to try to turn the wheel efforts were made for the moral improvement of females by producing a profusion of “‘how-to’ manuals” as Valenze (149) puts it, especially with regard to Hannah More’s *Tracts*. In their case it seems obvious to Valenze that More’s interest rested mainly in cultivating middle-class women into a “national army of philanthropists” (Valenze, 147), which was evident everywhere in her writings. The literary critic Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace maintains in this context that in her works More patronized female characters far from progressive, suggesting that the female is celebrated by resorting to a “problematic biological determination” (Kowaleski-Wallace, 84), and, it must be added, also one of deep piety and support of the hierarchy. Naturally, with respect to the latter, novels were not helpful for reaching such elevated goals. Claire Grogan is certainly right when she maintains that More distrusted any books which suggested that “a female is superfluous” and without “real social influence”, but favoured those which taught “how to fulfil her domestic role” (Grogan, 107).

In addition to the literary efforts made in favour of women by both male and female authors, lists were published by, for instance, Priscilla Wakefield and Erasmus Darwin, suggesting ‘appropriate’ reading material. But novels, much to Hannah More’s dismay, were “becoming mischievous in a thousand” (*Strictures I*, 31) and steadily gained in popularity. These “little, amusing, sentimental books with which the youthful library overflows” (*Strictures I*, 157), were apt to develop “self-complacency” as well as a hankering after “popularity” and “praise” (*Strictures I*, 158), More laments. She strongly recommends “dry tough reading” (*Strictures I*, 165),

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<sup>398</sup> As to the evil of novel reading see also in this chapter above.

which ought to harden the mind in a body in which “delicacy is the disease” (*Strictures I*, 163). She thus hoped to edify both women's mental and physical state alike, thereby proving that women's alleged mental inferiority had to be ascribed to their poor education rather than to a “natural make”. (*Strictures II*, 28).<sup>399</sup> She justly fears that especially young women, in whom feeling might be “indulged to the exclusion of reason”, may be extremely liable to becoming the “dupes of prejudice, rash decision, and false judgement” (*Strictures II*, 115).

The problem of novel-reading gave rise to a vivid debate at the end of the eighteenth century. Mary Wollstonecraft, who in principle agreed with Hannah More with respect to the negative influence of novel reading and its implanting in young girls too many romantic ideas, and its keeping women away from their daily duties (in the case of Wollstonecraft the fulfilment of their duties as mothers; in the case of More, religious pursuit), recommends women “to read something superior” (*Vindication*, 314), a recommendation she relativizes, however, to a certain extent by insinuating that it was better to read something of poor level than to read nothing at all.<sup>400</sup> In this, Catherine Macaulay supported Mary Wollstonecraft, saying that

As long as it [novel reading] is not done excessively, and only after completing the education, it seems not to distract from domestic life. If it thus gives pleasure and relaxation, there will be no harm in doing it, she says. But reading limited exclusively to novels will evoke wrong romantic ideas and a perversion of reason and common sense. (*Letters*, 148).

It was to be expected that Mary Hays, who in the blaze of the French Revolution had written several essays which were infused with a sense of enthusiasm, took the same stance as Macaulay, taking away from novel reading some of its dangerous appearance. Such an attitude, however, was in stark contrast to Erasmus Darwin who, convinced of the negative influence of novels, would have preferred a girl “wholly ignorant of the alphabet [...] [to one being] attached to that species of writing” (Darwin, *Plan*, 226).<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> See also above in the Introduction of this chapter.

<sup>400</sup> See also above in this chapter under 'Female learning'.

<sup>401</sup> See also above in this chapter under 'Female learning'.

According to Claire Grogan, Wollstonecraft's and More's criticism of novels "raise[s] three aspects of the female character [...] her duties, her sensibility, and her conversational abilities". While both regard these aspects as being interfered with by novel reading, they do so for different reasons and "suggest widely different courses of remedial action". (Grogan, 101) Both wish reading to be understood not as another accomplishment, and thus comment in a rather similar vein:

Novels, music, poetry, and gallantry, all tend to make women the creatures of sensation, and their character is thus formed in the mould of folly during the time they are acquiring accomplishments (*Vindication*, 154)

[Novels] [...] by their very nature and constitution [...] excite a spirit of relaxation, by exhibiting scenes and ideas which soften the mind and let the fancy at work; they impair its general powers of resistance, and at best feed habits of improper indulgence, and nourish a vain and visionary indolence, which lays the mind open to error and the heart to seduction. (*Strictures I*, 166)

Again, as so often with More and Wollstonecraft, they agree on an issue at first sight. But in reality the reasons behind their criticism of novel reading are far apart, as Grogan pinpoints:

More promotes the new domestic female while Wollstonecraft promotes a new political one. The former despises novels because they do not educate a female about her domestic duties, while the latter despises them for the seductive but disempowering lifestyle they suggest to the reader. (Grogan, 101)

But it was not only the growing habit of novel reading the young ladies had taken to Hannah More worried over; they had also developed a fancy for "writing a novel" (*Strictures I*, 172) quite independent of their talents, education and knowledge. These novels were greedily read by the lower ranks. More comments this development as follows:

Capacity and cultivation are so little taken into account, that writing a book seems to be now considered as the only sure resource which the idle and the illiterate have always in their power. (*Strictures I*, 172)

Another dire result of excessive novel reading which bothered Hannah More was poor conversation. As has been mentioned, she says that "[a] talent for conversation should be the result of education not its precursor"

(*Strictures I*, 159). Frivolous reading at an early stage would trigger superficial conversation and negatively influence the development of females. Hannah More feared that the worldliness of the language could lead to wrong conclusions as to the chastity of a woman in a society in which the display of wit and learning might be understood as internal corruption. Mary Wollstonecraft's opinion on poor conversation took a very different turn; she remarks:

Reading of novels makes women, and particularly ladies of fashion, very fond of using strong expressions and superlatives in conversation; and, though the dissipated artificial life which they lead prevents their cherishing any strong legitimate passion, the language of passion in affected tones slips forever from their glib tongues, and every trifle produces those phosphoric bursts which only mimic in the dark the flame of passion. (*Vindication*, 317)

What unites the two critical observations about female 'forwardness' is their focusing of their readers' attention on the obvious absence of any real-life experience of women, a state Hannah More, however, pleads for, whereas Mary Wollstonecraft resents it.

But More and Wollstonecraft were also united in their criticism of Jean Jacques Rousseau. Hannah More directs her critique at Rousseau as "the first popular dispenser of [...] [the] complicated drug" (*Strictures I*, 31) of the novel, with fatal effects. She accuses him of seducing "through the medium of principles" and "elevating a crime into principle", claiming that with

mischievous refinement, he annihilates the value of chastity [...] making his heroine appear almost more amiable without it [...] exhibiting a virtuous woman [...] as victim not of temptation but of reason. (*Strictures I*, 32)

By doing so, More criticized, Rousseau "debauches the heart of woman, by cherishing her vanity in the erection of a system of male virtues". She concludes that

seducing by falsehood [...] and giv[ing] to vice so natural an air of virtue [...] perhaps there never was a net of such exquisite art and inextricable workmanship, spread to entangle innocence and ensnare inexperience, as the writings of Rousseau. (*Strictures I*, 33)

Mary Wollstonecraft pays even more attention to Rousseau in her *Vindication* than Hannah More in her *Strictures*. Wollstonecraft is

completely at odds with Rousseau's ethics, namely his teaching women a shallow "sexual virtue" pertaining only to reputation and confining their attention to a single virtue – chastity:

If the honour of a woman as it is absurdly called, be safe, she may neglect every social duty; nay, ruin her family by gaming and extravagance; yet still present a shameless front – for truly she is an honourable woman! (*Vindication*, 252)

According to Wollstonecraft, Rousseau's ideal woman is not only "a mindless coquette but [...] [also] a cheerfully submissive one" (*Vindication*, 50). To suffer injustice, and to bear the insults of a husband without complaint to prove a mild disposition, is criticized by her as follows:

Of what materials can that heart be composed, which can melt when insulted, and instead of revolting at injustice, kiss the rod? Is it unfair to infer that her virtue is built on narrow views and selfishness, who can caress a man, with true feminine softness, the very moment when he treats her tyrannically? Nature never dictated such insincerity; and though prudence of this sort be termed a virtue, morality becomes vague when any part is supposed to rest on falsehood. (*Vindication*, 183)

Rousseau's Sophia in *Émile* is the "antithesis of Wollstonecraft's rational woman" (*Vindication*, Introd., 49). Her character, although according to Wollstonecraft "a captivating one", appears to her as "grossly unnatural" (*Vindication*, 107), and arouses her deeply-felt indignation.

Much to More's dismay, these mischievous principles of the "school of Rousseau" had been adopted by his followers and had found entrance in recent publications, "exhibit[ing virtues][...][ which were] almost more dangerous than the vices" (*Strictures I*, 34).

Hannah More saw additional reason for lamenting over the novelists in general in their praising in their narratives such feminine follies as "feebleness", namely to be "[f]ine by defect and delicately weak!" - a state which rather called for correction instead - and to cherish "smiles and tears [...] [as] irresistible arms which Nature has furnished them for conquering the strong." (*Strictures II*, 129) Because of their representation women as

artificial creatures, Hannah More took a critical view of the *poets*<sup>402</sup> and a pitiless stance against their corruptive influence.<sup>403</sup>

But More criticised not only French novelists like Rousseau, she also saw in the German writers their legitimate descendants. In this, Charles Burney totally agreed with her. In a letter he expressed at some length his belief - very much in accordance with More's - that religion alone was able to "humanize us" and that "without it all morality, benevolence, and social affection would be annihilated in this world, and all hope and fear of the next" (qtd. in Roberts II, 38).

That it was an English novel, written by a "female Werter [sic]"<sup>404</sup> (*Strictures I*, 45), entitled *The Wrongs of Woman*, which, in More's opinion, was exemplary of female frivolity, must have angered Hannah More. Her negative allusion to Goethe's *Die Leiden des Jungen Werther* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*), published in 1774, gives rise to astonishment to the modern reader, but since suicide was one of the cardinal sins to Hannah More, her attitude in this respect certainly met with her readers' understanding. However, to condemn German literature of the Classical and Romantic Period as amoral in general, and Goethe's *Werther* in particular, seems exaggerated on her side. Either she did not know, which is rather unlikely, or she was still severely under the impression of the fatal Blagdon Controversy, or she simply hushed up for good reasons, out of patriotism, the fact that there was an extremely well developed tie between the English Chevalier James Henry Lawrence<sup>405</sup> and the German epic poet Christoph Martin Wieland.<sup>406</sup> In 1793 James Lawrence contributed an

<sup>402</sup> Hannah More spoke of 'poets' in the first place, but also of 'writers', but never of 'novelists', even if this is what she really meant.

<sup>403</sup> All this artillery Hannah More shot in the direction of the poets furnished the notorious satirist John Wolcott [Peter Pindar] with ample ammunition: he soon used to bring her into his line of fire in his *Nil Admirari or a Smile at a Bishop* (1799); but it also induced William Shaw [Archibald MacSarcasm] to write his *Life of Hannah More* (1802); and John Black's [Sappho Search] *A Poetical Review of Miss Hannah More's Strictures on Female Education in a Series of Anapaestic Epistles* (1800).

<sup>404</sup> William Godwin, although with best intentions, in his biography on his diseased wife Mary Wollstonecraft, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798), mentioned the attempted suicides in the course of her unhappy affair with the father of her daughter Fanny, Gilbert Imlay.

<sup>405</sup> James Henry Lawrence (1773-1840) was the writer of several novels and poems. At the time of the publication of *The Paradise of Love* he was living on the continent.

<sup>406</sup> Christoph Martin Wieland (1773-1813) was one of the most important authors of the classic period of German literature, and editor of *Der neue Teutsche Merkur* (1790-1810) [the *German Mercury*].

essay with the title the “Nair System of gallantry and inheritance”<sup>407</sup> to the *German Mercury*, which was critically but benevolently commented on by the editor, Wieland himself, who seemed to be rather interested in the paper, as his added footnotes betray. In 1800 this essay, due to its reputation, in condensed and abridged form was to become the introduction to a utopian novel, *Das Paradies der Liebe* (afterwards *Das Reich der Nairen*), in which Lawrence introduced and developed the “System of the Nairs”<sup>408</sup>, a utopian system of free love on a morally high level, a system which would render the tyranny of the males and the sacrifices of the females equally unnecessary:

It is the privilege of the Nair lady to choose her lover and change her lover as often as she pleases .... The Nairs recognize that every pleasure ceases when it becomes a duty; and they maintain that there is no more reason for enacting that a man should love a woman tomorrow because he loves her to-day than there would be in compelling a man to dance at the next ball with his partner at the last. (qtd. in Graham, 883)

As Lawrence's ideas about man-woman relationships are so radically different from More's and show the breadth of the contemporary debate, his system will be described in more detail. The English edition of the “Romance” appeared in 1811 as *The Empire of the Nairs or The Rights of Women*. In this edition as well as that of 1813, Lawrence refers in the Advertisement<sup>409</sup> to the “immortal Schiller” as having spoken of the early manuscript so “favourably” that it was also accepted in the *Journal der Romane* for 1801 under the title *Das Paradies der Liebe*, which later was changed into *Das Reich der Nairen*. The French version appeared in 1803 under the title *L'Empire des Nairs*.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> This essay appeared in two parts under the title “Ueber die Vortheile des Systems der Galanterie und Erbfolge bey den Nayren” (aus einer englischen Handschrift) in *Der Neue Teutsche Merkur*, 1790-1810. 2. Band 1793, June 1793, pp. 160-199 and July 1793, pp. 242-275.

<sup>408</sup> The “System of the Nairs” is explained in short above in this chapter. See also Graham, “Shelley and the Empire of the Nairs”, *PMLA*, Vol. 40, no. 4 (1925), p.881.

<sup>409</sup> In his essay, “Shelley and the Empire of the Nairs”, Walter Graham is most likely drawing on an earlier preface than that of 1793 because in the latter the Nair lady no longer had “the privilege to choose and change her lover *as often as she pleases* [emphasis added]”, but simply had “the privilege to choose and change her lover.” This may be one of many changes, for Lawrence himself says in the preface to his novel that he was “continually revising” his work. (Preface p.vi)

<sup>410</sup> See James Lawrence, *The Empire of the Nairs*, pp. 2-3.

That Lawrence's romance also made its round in the private sphere of the German writers can be substantiated and exemplified. Friedrich Schiller, for instance, wrote to Gottfried Körner from Weimar on 7 January, 1803:

Hat Minna<sup>411</sup> das Paradies der Liebe gelesen, das in Ungers Journal der Romane steht? Es ist ein possierliches Produkt; ich kann es Euch schicken. Der Verfasser ist ein Engländer, der sich jetzt hier aufhält, und der das Werk zuerst in's Deutsche übersetzt herausgab, eh er das Original wollte drucken lassen. Er kündigt der Ehe den Krieg an, und trägt Alles auf einen Haufen, was sich dagegen sagen lässt. Sein eigenes persönliches Interesse, weil er ein Maltheserritter und dabei ein häßlicher Affe ist, giebt den Schlüssel zu der Sache. Das Sujet, in der Form des Candide bearbeitet, hätte sehr glücklich ausfallen können; und auch so ist es, bei aller Rohheit, nicht ohne Interesse und Verdienst.<sup>412</sup>

Christiane Vulpius' alias Christiane von Goethe's diary of 1816<sup>413</sup> may serve as another proof that *Das Paradies der Liebe* had found entrance in the highest private circles of Germany's elite authors. At least four entries pertain to James Lawrence. In one of the commentaries reference is made to the preface of *Das Paradies der Liebe* in which the auditor mentions Mary Wollstonecraft-Godwin's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* as the book which in 1792 claimed "die Rechte der Weiber". (qtd. in Damm, 43)

The reception of Lawrence's *Empire of the Nairs*, as his novel was finally named, in Germany's magazines was flattering. Examples added in the advertisement of it show that they had grasped the essence of the "System of the Nairs", namely "a system of love which would render mortals happy as the gods"<sup>414</sup>, accusing "marriage of being a yoke for life" and "show[ing] the possibility of a nation attaining the highest civilization without marriage"<sup>415</sup>. Although there was no desire to overthrow the institution of marriage, the advantage of thinking things over and to dismiss those which were only the result of custom and prejudice was clearly expressed. Being "essentially different from a novel", Lawrence's

<sup>411</sup> Schiller referred to Christian Gottfried Körner's wife Minna Stock.

<sup>412</sup> See *Friedrich Schiller @ www.Wissen-im-Netz.info*. 30 May 2011

<<http://www.wissen-im-netz.info/literature/schiller/briefe/koerner/1803/647.htm>>

<sup>413</sup> This singular document was edited 1999 by Sigrid Damm who also provided its preface and elaborate commentaries.

<sup>414</sup> *Hamburg Review*, November 1801, qtd. in the advertisement to *Empire of the Nairs*, p. vii.

<sup>415</sup> *Gotha Review*, October 1802, qtd. in *Empire of the Nairs*, advertisement, p. vii.



deliberations are made “in a spirited and heroic manner” and are found to be free from anything “offensive in the author’s principles” and nearly free from exaggerations, a magazine summarized.<sup>416</sup>

The early essay of Lawrence (1793) on the Nairs’ system of free love at a morally high level and the introduction to the novel itself (editions from 1800 onward) are of particular interest, the former also for the interesting footnotes added by the editor Wieland<sup>417</sup>, both, however, for stressing another kind of morality and a liberty free from abuse in the nuptial state. The essay frequently reverts to the ambiguous role the Church played in the development of the lawful state of matrimony. “[I]t is remarkable,” Lawrence, critically focusing on the indissolubility of marriage for also rather practical reasons<sup>418</sup>, wrote

that the Anglican church, which originated in the obstinacy of the pope in prohibiting the divorce of its faith-defender, is the only protestant church that still groans under this vestige of papal tyranny.” (*Empire*, Introd., viii)<sup>419</sup>

James Lawrence’s opinion was that

Love without marriage is so happy as love with marriage, but marriage without love is a state of indifference or vexation. (*Empire*, Introd., xxxviii)

From this point of view, wedlock could not only be “a cruel, but [also] a partial yoke”, a prison in which one of the two, man or wife, in most cases the wife, took over the function of a “turnkey”. (*Empire*, Introd., viii) In Lawrence’s opinion it would only be fair if both of them could escape together, which often turns out to be but a tyranny, in which the ‘divine rights of husbands’ are exercised like the ‘divine rights of kings’. Even Saint Paul, much revered by Hannah More<sup>420</sup>, knew about this problem

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<sup>416</sup> *Göttingen Review*, March 1803, qtd. in *Empire of the Nairs*, advertisement, p. viii.

<sup>417</sup> For instance, when Lawrence maintained that female chastity was more common in England than in any European country, Wieland’s protest in his footnote read, “[i]ch protestiere im Namen der ganzen Teutschen Nation. W.” (N.T.M., 2. Band, 1793, p. 245)

<sup>418</sup> Being rather costly, women on the ground of the necessary causes and money required, saw little chance of obtaining a divorce. Divorce, thus, remained a legal procedure reserved for men and affluent citizens. (See Hill, *Sexual Politics*, 196-220)

<sup>419</sup> Not only that the Roman Catholic Church forbade divorce and remarriage; in order that they might direct their entire attention to the interests of the church, the policy of the Vatican also forbade Roman Catholic priests to marry. Even as a menial servant one prefers an unmarried person. (*Empire*, Introd., p. xxxviii)

<sup>420</sup> See Hannah More’s “Essay on the Character and Practical Writings of St. Paul”. *The Works of Hannah More*, Vol. II.

and wisely uttered the words, “Art though free from the yoke of matrimony, take no wife.” (qtd. in *Empire*, Introd. xxxvi)

Lawrence’s essay answers and contradicts many of Hannah More’s views on the nuptial state. To her there was no room for equality in marriage of the partners which the Nair system propagated, because it was hostile to the hierarchical order of the family as envisaged by Hannah More. According to Mary Wollstonecraft, and against the prevailing assumption, “woman was not created merely to gratify the appetite of man, or to be [...] [his] upper servant” (*Vindication*, 127). One good reason, then, *not* to marry was that marriage seemed to assure man’s comfort in the first place. Whereas, when entering the married state in order to please her husband, the woman had to part with many of her habits she had taken a liking to, the husband just carried on making but little allowance for the married state, supported by the presumption “that marriage could not exist unless one of the parties were invested with authority” (*Empire*, Introd., xi). That this authority should rest with the husband was a matter of course, since for all their useless accomplishments women were still kept very ignorant and for that “less free than a boy in his tenth year” (*Empire*, Introd., xxix): they were not free to make decisions for themselves, even if these decisions were of inferior importance and of little consequence. With a profound education which was no longer orientated to serving the marriage market, at least some rights for women would become customary and promote woman’s new worth, progressive women like Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays anticipated; a prediction Hannah More eyed with suspicion and even contempt throughout her life.

James Lawrence saw no cause for fearing that a newly gained liberty on women’s part should be abused by them. For, if things turned out the right way, chastity was to become a general virtue. It was a revolutionary new morality James Lawrence advocated, very much in the sense of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, as well as, some years later, of Shelley, to whom the ‘system of the Nairs’ possibly was an important source for his ideas regarding marriage.<sup>421</sup> On the one hand there was the

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<sup>421</sup> For further reference, see Daniel J. MacDonald. *The Radicalism of Shelley and its Sources*, 1912; Iain McCalman. “Females, Feminism and Free Love in an Early

ethical theory of free-thinkers, on the other hand Hannah More's moral principles of deeply Christian origin based on an immovable hierarchical order created by Providence. In their divergent outlook on morals, they represented two very different schools of thought. The supposedly 'evil' utopian system of free love, however, did not originate in the head of Germans, as More seems to insinuate, but in the head of an English writer.

### **Critics of Hannah More's Moral Precepts**

The Reverend William Shaw, Bart. alias Archibald Mc Sarcasm in his biography of Hannah More (1802) criticised her for condemning British novels "wholesale" (Shaw, 128), although according to him, she had produced one or two novels herself with the help of her own sisters.<sup>422</sup> The Reverend Shaw was one of several bitter opponents of More's in the Blagdon Controversy, which raged from 1800 until 1803. Certainly, for this very reason, his attitude towards her was more than dismissive and thus most likely anything but impartial. But for the sake of completeness, and also to give the reader of this thesis an idea of the state of affairs shortly after the *Strictures* had been published, it seemed worth the while to relate to it.

In his biography, William Shaw wondered that if Hannah More had read such an enormous number of novels without feeling guilty, why other women should not do the same. It is curious that Hannah More was allegedly of the opinion that "innocence and much knowledge do not go together" (Shaw, 128). Shaw quickly surmised that "H. More, therefore, is either innocent and ignorant, or knowing and wicked." (Shaw, 128) Shaw was also convinced that More's ban on reading novels might have a contrary effect and even animate girls to read them; and went even so far as to suggest that the *Strictures* "seem to be calculated rather to corrupt than improve the [fair] sex," and are "not worded in a courtly way" (Brown,

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Nineteenth Century", 1980; Robertson, J. M. *A History of Free Thought in the Nineteenth Century*. Vol I and II. Kessinger Pub. Co., 2007.

<sup>422</sup> Obviously, William Shaw had More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* in mind because her only novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* was not written by the time of his biography.

218). He even suggested that “her strictures [sic] ought to be publicly burnt” (Shaw, 130), herewith joining the league of those who made depreciative remarks about Hannah More, culminating in Augustine Birrell’s statement in an essay on her, that in his opinion she was “one of the most detestable writers that ever held a pen”. (“Hannah More”, *Essays*, 71) Curiously, some ten years later, Birrell hinted at Harland’s reminiscences of Hannah More in her biography, and, in an apparent fit of irony, pretended to apologize for having been rude to Hannah More in print before. Badly in need of space on his book-shelves, he had buried her nineteen volumes of full calf in his garden, hoping this action would not be “haunt[ing] [...] [his] pillow” (“Hannah More Once More”, *In the Name of the Bodleian*, 118). Of the more serious kind was Augustine Birrell’s remark that

at no time did it ever come home to [...] [Hannah More] that she needed repentance herself. She seems always thinking of the sins and shortcomings of her neighbours, rich and poor.  
 (“Hannah More Once More”, 122)

Even if the majority of William Shaw’s attacks could be dispensed with, some of his observations certainly deserve the attention of the reader of the *Strictures*. Hannah More’s stance towards adultery is made very clear in them. The growth of this “crime” is seen by her as “the most irrefragable proof of the public manners [...] cutt[ing] up order and virtue by the roots, and violat[ing] the sanctity of vows (*Strictures I*, 45-46). Several things were, according to More, holding out against this vice: a holy religion, virtuous laws, integrity, and “a standard or morals which continues in force, when the principles which sanctioned it are no more” (*Strictures I*, 46). The following advice Hanna More gives in the event of an adulteress being deserted by her betrayer and now venturing to return to society again with the assistance of a relative or friend, is one of her most disturbing utterances:

...if, through the Divine blessing [...] she should ever be awakened to remorse, be not anxious to restore the forlorn penitent to that society against whose laws she has so grievously offended; and remember, that her soliciting such a restoration, furnishes but too plain a proof that she is not the penitent your partiality would believe; since penitence is more anxious to make its peace with heaven, than with the world. Joyfully would a truly contrite spirit

commute an earthly for an everlasting reprobation! To restore a criminal to public society, is perhaps to tempt her to repeat her crime, or to deaden her repentance for having committed it; while to restore a strayed soul to God will add lustre to your Christian character, and brighten your eternal crown. (*Strictures I*, 48-49)

It seems bewildering that this can truly be the opinion of a Christian, even more so of an Evangelical Christian woman who propagated the 'religion of the heart'<sup>423</sup>. Most irritating is the fact that she is more interested in not contaminating any female who lent a helping hand in restoring an adulteress to society again, than in offering the repenting sinner a charitable hand. She treats an adulteress like an outcast, leaving the penitent woman to the forgiveness of God and the next life, but not to that of society. Hannah More, contrary to Christian charity, erects artificial walls between the 'rank' of the socially and morally worthy women and the morally inferior ones. This example gives rise to the suspicion that she not only kept the poor at the doors of the rich and in their providential state of poverty, but that she also turned on misery which, to her mind, was the outcome of moral misbehaviour. If anything like 'snobbery' exists in the name of the Divine, this example may serve as a typically illustrative one. It is only one of several ambivalences in the *Strictures*. What was Hannah More aiming at by taking such a rigid stance? Maybe, she hoped for it to be a means of discouraging adultery. Augustine Birrell ironically said in an essay that "Miss More never forgot to lecture the rich or to patronize the poor" ("Hannah More Once More", 123). He could have added that she did not forget to tread on a downtrodden woman with an uncertain future.

We should not wonder, then, that William Shaw exclaimed "Reader! let me address thee! Is this the spirit of the religion of Jesus, which H. professes? [...] Did Jesus condemn the woman taken in adultery?" Jesus, instead of condemning her, said "neither do I condemn thee – go and sin no more." Shaw says that Hannah More had still to learn Christianity, because although seeing in "[a]dultery [...] a great sin; [...] [he himself is sure] there are greater". (Shaw, 132) There is a certain justification for Shaw's reproaching More for her intolerance. He reasons that a former adulteress may very well become a useful member of society, wife and mother

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<sup>423</sup> See the chapter *Estimate* of this thesis.

inclusive. And he also ponders over the possibility that adultery was not always brought about by the woman; and that no woman deserves being plunged into misery for the rest of this life. Shaw's arguments thus seem to rest on more solid pillars of genuine Christianity, namely forgiveness, charity, and love.

## Conclusion

In *Strictures*, a work of many moods, contradictions and inconsistencies, Hannah More tried to ward off the total moral undermining of British religion and morals of the time by raising the standard of female religiosity and conduct and thus preventing that the women, as the last moral bastion, would also be irretrievably infected by the general deplorable state of morality.

She made clear that women's foremost duty was to care for the survival of the hierarchy of the unit of the family as the basis of the providential social hierarchy of Christian society per se. By raising their Christian moral standards, so More hoped, women, in turn, would raise the morals of their husbands, and thus foster the nuptial state as a moral stronghold. Both women's subordination to their husband and filial obedience to their parents, the importance of which seemed in decline, were the ingredients to guarantee the survival of the family. As filial obedience presupposed the respect for their parents, obviously women, too, had to inspire respect in their children by their improved reasoning and power of judgement. This, however, could only be achieved by an education which promoted serious reading replacing the frenzy for novels, by the correction of women's turn for trifling and frivolity and by the use of their talents for higher attainments such as the preparation for the life to come.

Women should be 'trained' for their domestic duties, the education of their children and for attending to the poor, the new philanthropic rage among women of *ton* at the end of the eighteenth century, with the end of being exemplary creatures within their private sphere. By devoting themselves to religious pursuits they could also overcome the inferior state they were in and come out as new domestic females with more moral worth, who perfectly served the dictates of the Church.

Together with More's rejection of novel reading as a growing disease, she not only depreciated Britain's novelists wholesale, but also thought to have found the roots for this deplorable craze in the bad influence from the 'continent', France and Germany. She could not put up with works of

literature treating adultery as a sin which was purged of its pollution to an extent that it was no longer felt to be a crime by young and innocent readers and even triggered their sympathy for the delinquents instead. Hannah More seemed unaware of the fact that it was an English chevalier, James Lawrence, who in 1793 published an essay about free love, albeit on a morally high level, which later became his novel *The Empire of the Nairs or the Rights of Women. An Utopian Romance*, a novel encouraged and welcomed by German epic poets of the classical/romantic period, who agreed with the sentiment of progressive English writers like William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft.

Hannah More did in no way serve women's 'liberation'. She not only felt that women had plenty of freedom, she even found the very term *rights* for women out of place and the mere clamouring for them as but *one* way of being ridiculous. More's call for more female learning was thus paradoxical in the light of her condemning female *wit* as contending for equality and rights, for which More had no sympathy, and giving preference to *beauty* before *wit*.

Even if Hannah More's *Strictures* were received by the majority with enthusiasm, there were also voices which stressed the imprecision of some of her religious arguments and the inconsistency of her moral views as well as the impracticability of many of her ethical goals. But she must be given the benefit of the doubt that her efforts were sincere; they were undoubtedly motivated by a religious end.



#### 4. *Sunday Schools and Tracts for the Poor of the Mendips*

Sunday schools were one product of the deep-rooted religious and philanthropic revival of the late eighteenth century; they were part of a movement to transform society, to change its sensibilities and moral perceptions, which had its roots in the middling classes but found expression in the classes above and below.<sup>424</sup>

##### Introduction

After Hannah More's intention to moralize the higher ranks with *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great* (1788) and *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* (1790), in retrospect it seems logical to suppose that *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) was originally intended to follow these moralizing pamphlets as her third effort in succession to raise the morals of the rich by means of a kind of trilogy. However, *Strictures*, addressed foremost to the ladies of *ton*, had to be postponed for years because of a scheme which was going to occupy Hannah More and her sister for the years to come: the setting up of schools.

Hannah More had published *Thoughts* only the year before<sup>425</sup> and begun to complete her work on *Estimate*, when her thinking, which was still occupied with the moral betterment of the rich, was suddenly called to the attention of the poor, opening up to her the new world of philanthropic work. For Hannah More it was to turn out to be the vocation Providence held in store for her and for which she had been so badly in need after

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<sup>424</sup> Th. W. Laqueur, Introduction to *Religion and Respectability* (1976), p. 1.

<sup>425</sup> One of the ideas of *Thoughts* was that to get good and loyal dependents presupposed good and taintless superiors. Hannah More who perceived these superiors to be far from being moral instances, and even often saw in them negative examples, had in an effort to initiate a moral rearmament from above, published *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great* in 1788, shortly before her school-scheme had come to life. Even if there was no immediate connection between the school-scheme and the publication of *Thoughts*, the latter happened to be the right measure at the right time, for it was an effort for the improvement of the morals of those who were destined to be good examples to

taking leave of her 'Greeks', as she called her bluestocking coterie, and after turning her back on London's life style of a society she more and more deemed to be one of mere nominal Christians without true religious depth and mere superficial attitudes in their giving to the poor. Of course, the confrontation with poverty and misery opened to her not only a possibility to help to alleviate them, it also offered a wide field of partaking in the spreading of Evangelical ideas she had become very familiar with thanks to her intensive contacts to the élite of the Evangelicals, the Clapham Sect. The Evangelicals, a movement within the Anglican Church which was inspired by the religious revival, were trying to give new impulses to the drowsy, if not dormant, clergy of the Established Church. Hannah More's tutorial aims and her caring for the poor, therefore, were pervaded with her vocation of spreading Evangelical doctrines, which were guided by *conversionism*, *activism*, *biblicism* and *crucicentrism*. As they constituted the "basis of Evangelicalism" (Bebbington, 2-3), the Bible became the centre of More's instruction, and spreading the Gospel and converting the unbelievers her declared target. When Hannah More and her sister Martha, called "Petty", started their school scheme in the Mendips, they had found the place where they not only could continue with their teaching experience made in their own boarding school, from which they had retired, but where they could also practice their doctrinal Evangelical tenets as missionaries in a place which, although situated within the boundaries of their own country, seemed to them to be enveloped by more darkness than the inner parts of Africa, and was regarded by them as *their* "Sierra Leone"<sup>426</sup>. It was a place where the More sisters "saw but one Bible in the whole parish, and that was used to prop a flower-pot." (qtd. in *Annals*, 50) Hannah More divided the *poor* of the Mendips into the group of the *very poor* and the so-called *gentleman farmers*, the latter wealthy, unfeeling and hard; both groups alike were

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those who depended on them and of whom they expected the observance of those laws and rules they often helped to push through in Parliament.

<sup>426</sup> The Sierra Leone colony was conceived as a haven for free Africans from Europe and the Americas. It was established in 1787 as a 'Province of Freedom'. Poor preparation and administration led to a disaster, so that between 1791 and 1793 fresh attempts were made to replenish the nascent colony with new immigrants from Nova Scotia. The Clapham Evangelicals like Z. Macaulay, H. Thornton and W. Wilberforce made the Sierra Leone venture the symbol of abolition when they founded the Sierra Leone Company to run the settlement there.

distant from any Christianity, and badly in need of a Christian mission. In a letter of Hannah More's to Mrs. Kennicott, written around that time, she expressed her surprise that while missionaries were sent "to our distant colonies, our own villages are perishing for lack of instruction." (qtd. in *Annals*, 31) In another letter to the Reverend John Newton she criticized once more the "sending [of] missionaries to our colonies, while our villages are perishing for lack of instruction". (qtd. in *Annals*, 45)

What makes the school scheme so very particular in retrospect is its historical and social background: the More sisters' efforts in the Mendips were made at the time of the beginning Industrial Revolution and the formation of the working class, a time of tremendous increase in population, new technologies and counter-revolutionary tendencies. Nowhere else did the Evangelical doctrines seem to be so extensively blended with their practical application to human lives. The More sisters' work in the Mendips was the outward expression of a Christian movement during an age when *benevolence*, very much the product of the general Religious Revival, came to be regarded as one of the highest values on the one hand, and *exploitation* became a synonym for Industrial Revolution (and vice versa) on the other hand.<sup>427</sup> What makes the school scheme also interesting is to learn what happened in its trail: namely that it became the focus of deliberations whether the children of the poor ought to be educated *at all*, and if yes, to what *extent* and by *whom*. It was a subject which had been of little interest so far, but which, when brought into play by the poor of the Mendip area, suddenly triggered the interest of the rich farmers and the clergy. The former feared that religion would jeopardize the poor people's willingness to labour; the latter suspected that knowledge which was not imparted by the parochial clergy but by lay tuition might lead to misinterpretations of the Bible. Hannah More and her sister had to disperse these fears with much diplomacy and verve in order to convince the farmers that their orchards would be safer and the clergy that the churches and chapels were likely to be crowded.

But when the More sisters canvassed for their schools they intended to establish, they were not without a plan. In her letter to William Wilberforce

dated 1789 Hannah More wrote about a rather comic procedure to win over the rich farmers:

Miss Wilberforce would have been shocked had she seen the petty tyrants whose insolence we stroked and tamed, the ugly children we fondled, the pointers and spaniels we caressed, the cider we commended, and the wine we swallowed. After these irresistible flatteries, we inquired of each if he could recommend us to a house, and said that we had *a little plan* [emphasis added] which we hoped would secure their orchards from being robbed, their rabbits from being shot, their game from being stolen, and which might lower the poor-rates. (qtd. in *Annals*, 17)

As is handed down to posterity in the same letter, the announcement of a “little plan” and More’s eloquence won over the farmers who consequently promised to make the poor send their children to school. It was this quality of endurance and purposefulness which made Martha, when asked how the sisters reacted to slow progress in Bible reading in some schools, explain that they followed the “best rules”, namely “*perseverance*, and not *despair*”, and if the children, at long last, seemed to understand the “fall” and the “*redemption*”, “Patty” hoped that in time these Christian doctrines would also “reach their hearts” (*Annals*, 93).

The schools were the project which addressed ‘the reform of manners’ Hannah More had begun to impose on the higher ranks with her pamphlets *Thoughts* (1788) and *Estimate* (1790) to people of the lowest social level by the opening of Sunday schools to begin with, by Bible reading for grown-ups and even family prayers later on, and lastly by the foundation of women’s clubs. It is interesting to watch how Hannah More and her sister Martha, although supporting hierarchy and establishment both in religion and society, were suspected of having a Methodist leaning, a suspicion which found its expression in the notorious Blagdon controversy later on. Although the More sisters’ educational efforts in the Mendips were welcomed by such divines as, for instance, George Horne (Dean of Canterbury) and Beilby Porteus (Bishop of London) and hosted by Members of Parliament like William Wilberforce and Zachary Macaulay, it is important to know that Sunday schools were still controversial: they were said to give “the poor ideas above their station, unfitted them for their

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<sup>427</sup> E. P. Thompson dedicates the chapter ‘Exploitation’ to this problematic state of affairs. See *The Making of the Working Class* (1966), pp.189-212.

lowly occupations, and enabled them to read seditious literature” (Stott, 106). It was a fight against “much opposition, vice, poverty, and ignorance” in a place “almost pagan” (qtd. in *Annals*, 31). Hannah More could hardly believe that “[s]o much ignorance existed out of Africa” (qtd. in *Annals*, 51).

There had been no clergyman in the parish of Cheddar for forty years, wherefore criticism was addressed to the dormant clergy of the Established Church, a clergy that had “good Tory principles” in mind but failed to consider the “Divine right of the King of the kings” (qtd. in *Annals*, 23) Besides the hardship of talking wealthy but ignorant farmers into the necessity of setting up schools for the poor, the two sisters gradually even succeeded in convincing one of these farmers of the necessity of teaching, who subsequently supported the sisters with hitherto unknown generosity.

Martha More’s *Mendip Annals*, supplemented by diary entries of both Hannah and Martha, paint a very clear picture of their courageous efforts from the early beginnings until the Blagdon controversy, which brought some schools to a sudden end. It would be inaccurate to attribute the massive toil connected with the schools mainly to Hannah More. The *Mendip Annals* give ample evidence that the school scheme was a joint venture of *two* deeply Christian women and their financial mentor and friend, William Wilberforce.

It is necessary to see More's school project in the context of the contemporaneous debate about the education of the poor and the keeping of the Sabbath - which will be done in the next chapters.

### **The Debate About the Sunday-School Scheme**

“Miss Hannah More, something must be done for Cheddar,” (qtd. in *Annals*, 13). These are the memorable words William Wilberforce exclaimed in August 1789 after his chance visit to the Cliffs of Cheddar while staying a few days with the More sisters at Cowslip Green. The renowned beauty of the Cliffs had impressed him much less than the appalling poverty and distress of the people who lived there had upset him. This exclamation sparked off not only the famous school scheme in the Mendip area but also an educational joint venture between More and Wilberforce. The following remark proves that it was foremost Wilberforce’s initiative to do something for the poor in that area: “If *you* will be at the trouble, *I* will be at the expense,” (qtd. in *Annals*, 13) Wilberforce suggested. Thus, William Wilberforce offered the necessary resources for engaging in schemes for the benefit of the poor, and Hannah and Martha More after much deliberation deemed it most urgent to set up schools for the children of the poor. That this endeavour was finally to become a most prodigious scheme in the Mendip area was considered a matter of Providence.

Robert Raikes’ school scheme, too, was the outcome of an ‘accident’. Business had led him into one of the most poverty-stricken suburbs of Gloucester, where ragged and wretched looking children played in the streets, apparently idling away time. He was told that this situation would be multiplied on Sundays when all children were off from employment and spent their time “in noise and riot” (*Gentleman’s Magazine* June 1784, 411). Raikes soon developed a plan to put a stop to this “deplorable profanation of the sabbath [sic]” (*GM*, 411). The responsible clergyman, to whom he imparted his plan, was satisfied enough to lend his assistance by inspecting the Sunday tuition as to its progress, but his engagement was that of a minor figure instead of an initiator, as was rather typical of the Established Church.

These two incidences, handed down to posterity as ‘accidents’, are evidence how poorly the higher ranks were informed about the rapidly growing social misery especially among the children of the working class.

Although in origin most Sunday schools were non-denominational before “the bitter struggles for control of Sunday Schools” (David Hempton, 89) began in some parts of England by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Evangelicals, thanks to their prominent promoters, soon took over a big share of them; and what had begun as Wilberforce’s harmless visit to the home of the Mores and Raikes’ calling on somebody in the suburbs of Gloucester was finally to end up as “the most successful of the agencies which the Evangelicals devised to convert the working classes” (I. Bradley, 40). It was the pitiable state of the poor children which triggered a sense of accountability in people of philanthropic and religious disposition at a time when England with accelerating speed turned from an agricultural country into an industrial one in the second half of the eighteenth century. Robert Raikes, Sarah Trimmer, William Wilberforce and Hannah More are exemplary for a range of philanthropists whose outstanding efforts left a lasting impression on posterity and stand for all the others who were not lucky enough to enter the history books.

By the time the More sisters entered the new school project in the Mendips, the question of educating the poor had already come of some modest age. Mrs. Sarah Trimmer and Robert Raikes were the actual pioneers in this sphere. Although the origins of Sunday schools have not been fully investigated to this day and still are an issue for debate<sup>428</sup>, it is Robert Raikes who has come to be generally regarded as their founder<sup>429</sup>.

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<sup>428</sup> Two books can be regarded as main publications on this issue: Th. W. Laqueur’s *Religion and Respectability. Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture 1780-1850* (1976); and Ph. B. Cliff’s *The Rise and Development of the Sunday School Movement in England 1780-1980* (1986) in recent decades.

<sup>429</sup> The *Christian Reformer*, Vol. VIII (1841) published an extensive correspondence dealing with speculations upon whom the honour of being the founder of the Sunday schools should be bestowed. There were certainly many who thought it right that the Rev. Thomas Stock, who closely worked together with Robert Raikes, was their *founder* and Robert Raikes their *zealous advocate*. But what also came to light was the fact that there was also a *third person who suggested the idea of Sunday schools*. It was in fact Mr. William King who laid the plan, but being a Dissenter “Mr. Raikes threw cold water on the subject” (*Christian Reformer* 1841, p. 667), only to open Sunday schools on his own accord a very short while after, which insinuates that Raikes gave himself all the credit.

He opened his first Sunday school in July 1780.<sup>430</sup> In fact, however, Robert Raikes was not the originator of the Sunday school. But his distinctive role lies in the fact that, unlike others, he did not content himself with establishing schools in his own neighbourhood, but that by means of his newspaper, the *Gloucester Journal*, which he had inherited from his father, and other media, as for instance the *Gentleman's Magazine*, he recommended the practice far and wide and never ceased his advocacy till the scheme was generally adopted throughout the land. He raised Sunday teaching from a "fortuitous rarity into a universal system"<sup>431</sup>, and turned a local matter into a national one. Seen from this point of view, all other arguments questioning Raikes' merits as founder must fall short, even if counter-arguments were offered in the most sincere manner. By virtue of this achievement Robert Raikes is rightly regarded as the founder of the English Sunday school. Mrs. Sarah Trimmer, another Sunday school pioneer and prolific writer, opened her first Sunday school in Brentford in 1786.<sup>432</sup> Hannah More and her sister Martha were to follow in October 1789, opening a Sunday school and a school of industry in Cheddar, an area inhabited by poor peasantry, workers for the growing spinning mills and colliers. The school of industry faced a great many disappointments at its beginning. Avarice on the part of the employers did not procure the expected wages promised for the children's spinning labour. But there was also bad management of the employer and idleness of the children, which in sum made this experiment a failure. Another venture of this kind, again involving both a Sunday school and a day school (which in the case of the latter must have meant a school of industry) was tried out the following year in Rowberrow and Shipham, apparently with more success in the case of the school of industry.<sup>433</sup>

What these proponents of Sunday schools had in common was their effort to impart at least *some kind of education* to children of the lowest order, who mainly belonged to the developing working class in industrial areas. In this function it can be said that the Sunday schools took over a not

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<sup>430</sup> See K. D. M. Snell. "The Sunday-School Movement in England and Wales": *Past & Present*, No.164, pp. 122 - 168.

<sup>431</sup> See Th. B. Walters, *Robert Raikes*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>432</sup> See Frank Smith, *A History of English Elementary Education*, p. 58.

<sup>433</sup> See *Annals*, pp. 23 and 29.



negligible share of the curriculum of the charity schools, which, as a consequence, experienced a decline. The basic curriculum of the charity schools consisted in religious instruction, the singing of psalms, and the *three R's* at the utmost. It was a modest education intended for the humble requirements of an unassuming future life as God-fearing servants and workers.

Mrs. Trimmer made an effort in categorizing the schools for the poor with their separate and different functions into charity schools, schools of industry and Sunday schools.<sup>434</sup> The charity schools served as “first degree among the lower orders” (qtd. in F. Smith, 59), qualifying to become teachers in schools supported by charity or domestic servants in well-to-do families; the day schools of industry were a mixture of labour and learning intended for employment in manufactures and other inferior tasks such as common servants<sup>435</sup>; and the Sunday schools were intended for those who either had jobs in factories, or whose labour at the plough or other occupations made the partaking in any school type on weekdays impossible. The relevant school-type which was set up had in the first place to meet the regional requirements. So, for instance, “the factories of the north made schools of industry unnecessary, and left available only the Sunday Schools” (F. Smith, 59). The Sunday schools were thus a very specific form of schools<sup>436</sup>, which developed as a branch of the charity schools, when children of the working class became integrated in factory work for twelve hours a day, six days a week. The only day off was used for their predominantly religious instruction and for being taught cleanliness, discipline and morals. In a way, the Sunday schools were the perfect solution. They did not interfere with the children’s earnings as their contribution to the scarce family income, nor did they trespass upon the factory owners’ concern to increasingly rely on children

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<sup>434</sup> See Mrs. Trimmer. *Reflections upon the Education of Children in Charity Schools* (1792), pp. 11-12, qtd. in F. Smith, p. 59.

<sup>435</sup> The schools of industry, although working schools, were given much preference to children working in factories by Mr. Trimmer, because, “the health and morals of the children were cared for by the teachers” (M. G. Jones, p.156), even if the time devoted to learning to read was very limited and learning had to be relegated to Sunday schools.

<sup>436</sup> In John Bowles’ opinion, this specific form also pertained to the intense religiosity in which the Sunday schools distinguished themselves from the public schools whose tuition seemed increasingly lamentable and ineffective in this respect, profanation of the Sabbath and indifference to religious matters included. (See J. Bowles, *A View*, pp. 101-102)

as a workforce. The Sunday schools also took care of the number of children, which was on the increase as a result of the reduction in the children's death rate. Thanks to better health care and hygiene "from the eighties onwards death could no longer be *relied upon* [emphasis added] to remove with celerity the unwanted infants" (Jones, *The Charity School Movement*, 145).

To a certain extent the Sunday schools became the reforming means of reform against corruption, if we may interpret George Horne's<sup>437</sup> famous sermon, which he delivered in 1786, this way. He warmly welcomed the Sunday schools as an institution which would help the present evil generation to be succeeded by a better one. He saw in the poor the God-ordained majority whose labour kept things going. The rich, instead of contributing their share "to keep[ing] the poor honest, virtuous and religious" (*Sermon*, 6) by giving a good example, exerted an ill influence on them, so that it was to be feared that in case the religious principle was gone in the poor, "human laws [would] lose their effect, and be set at naught" (*Sermon*, 6). There was enough evidence that emulating the manners of the higher orders resulted in the lower orders' being infected by the formers' general corruption of faith and morals. George Horne quite obviously preached on the necessity of a *reform from the bottom* when he said,

[w]e must now therefore take up the matter at the other hand, and try, if, by reforming the poor, we cannot shame the rich into better manners, and better principles. (*Sermon*, 7)<sup>438</sup>

Seen in context with the Sunday schools, we may infer that Bishop Horne was confident to effect with them a new moral rearmament, namely from

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<sup>437</sup> George Horne D.D., (1730–1792) was an English high-churchman, writer, and university administrator. Horne became a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, of which college he was elected President. As a preacher, Horne attained great popularity, and was suspected, though inaccurately, of Methodism. In 1781 he was made Dean of Canterbury. George Horne's publications included a satirical pamphlet entitled *The Theology and Philosophy of Cicero's Somnium Scipionis*, a defense of the Hutchinsonians, and critiques on William Law and Benjamin Kennicott. (Source: *Wikipedia*)

<sup>438</sup> Sermons of this kind, even if they carried only the faintest air of liberalism, as was done in this case by elevating the working poor to some importance, and attributing to them the capacity of giving good examples to their superiors, were certainly apt to raise the question as to their writers' religious conviction. Bishop Horne came, as did Hannah More years later, unduly under the suspicion of sympathizing with Methodism.

bottom to top, since it seemed clear by that time that the moral uplift from top to bottom so far striven for was of poor effect.

In the same year and much in the same tenor as Bishop Horne, Beilby Porteus, then Lord Bishop of Chester, wrote a letter to his "*Reverend Brethren*",<sup>439</sup> the clergy of his diocese, expounding the reasons which, to his mind, recommended the foundation of Sunday schools. By this time, he had already formed his judgment as to their value and possible effects.<sup>440</sup> He saw the Sunday schools, six years after Robert Raikes' first venture, as a very useful "*appendage*" (*Letter* 1786, 7) to the Charity Schools, "an enlargement of that benevolent system of *gratuitous* education of the poor" (*Letter* 1786, 8). Porteus, too, did not fail in making an effort to disperse the omnipresent anxiety of society in general that the educated poor would fall short with their laborious assignments, because the degree of learning would be very small and, so Bishop Porteus felt, "not either indispose or disqualify them" (*Letter* 1786, 10) for low work. This stock serviceableness of the poor thus secured by limited instructions, the children would be additionally trained in "habits of industry" (*Letter* 1786,11). The possibility to labour on weekdays and to receive instruction on Sundays thus was an ideal combination, which spoke in favour of the Sunday schools in general, and Beilby Porteus was very well aware of their utility also for the Church. By catechizing the children, the Bishop surmised great potential for their morally and religiously reforming their parents in turn as a "blessed reverse" (*Letter* 1786, 18), namely a reform from the bottom. He made this perfectly clear in the "plan" added to his letter and intended for those who were interested in establishing Sunday schools that the parents of the children attending Sunday schools ought to be obliged to attend the church services regularly as well. It is of some interest to read in Porteus' letter to his clergy about his cherished idea to instil in the children of the Sunday schools "sound evangelical principles" (*Letter* 1786, 17), because it gives rise to the assumption that Porteus' imputed affinity with the Evangelicals within the

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<sup>439</sup> See Beilby Porteus. *A Letter to the Clergy of the Diocese of Chester Concerning Sunday Schools*, 1786.

<sup>440</sup> We may take it for granted that his wait-and-see-attitude has nothing in common with the Reverend William Shaw's attitude (see later in this thesis), but it cannot be denied that the Church of England was not exactly in haste to follow Robert Raikes' example.

Anglican Church was no mere idle talk. It would certainly explain to a certain extent Hannah More's friendship with the Bishop. As it is known that the two exchanged letters over decades and also met several times, the probability that they also exchanged thoughts about Sunday schools in these early years is most probable, especially in view of the fact that "Sunday-schools were a pet hobby of Dr. Porteus", as G. Lacey May claims.<sup>441</sup>

Beilby Porteus, known for his humanitarian attitude, warned his clergy not to exert too much stress on the pupils, lest they should inspire the children not with euphoria but despondency, and to keep up the cheerful aspect of the Lord's Day at all events, for he believed that "[i]t is the discipline of the heart more than the instruction of the head, for which the Sunday Schools are chiefly valuable" (*Letter* 1786, 22). That Porteus warned against any "corporal punishment" as "*severe correction*" (*Letter* 1786, 23) followed quite naturally. Instead, Beilby Porteus suggested kindness combined with a *system of reward*, a method to be picked up by Hannah More and her Mendip schools, however much criticized by Bishop Horsley (see in this thesis below) some years later.

More than a decade later Sydney Smith<sup>442</sup>, an Anglican clergyman, in one of his famous sermons preached much in the same vein as George Horne and Beilby Porteus about the necessity of educating the poor. He did so without explicitly mentioning the merits of Sunday schools, despite the fact that as a young clergyman he was one of the initiators of a Sunday school in a rural nook. In this sermon (*Sermons I*, IV, 'On the Education of the Poor'), Sydney Smith made quite an effort to disperse the most common objection to the education of the poor, which was the fear that it would

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<sup>441</sup> See G. Lacey May, *Some Eighteenth Century Church-Men*, p. 134.

<sup>442</sup> Sydney Smith (1771–1845) was an English writer and Anglican cleric. Educated at Winchester and Oxford, took orders 1794, becoming curate of Amesbury. He came to Edinburgh as tutor to a gentleman's son, was introduced to the circle of brilliant young Whigs there, and assisted in founding the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802. He then went to London as a time preacher at the Foundling Hospital, and lectured on moral philosophy at the Royal Institution. His brilliant wit and general ability made him a favorite in society, while by his power of clear and cogent argument he exercised a strong influence on the course of politics. His *Plymley Letters* did much to advance the cause of Catholic emancipation. He received various preferments, and became a canon of St. Paul's. In politics he was a Whig, in his Church views an Erastian; and in the defense of his principles he was honest and courageous. Though not remarkable for religious devotion

alienate the poor from performing low work. The argument he offered against this fear was that "the fabric of human happiness " was placed by God "upon much stronger foundations", namely the fact that the poor "cannot live without labour" (*Sermons I*, 58), and that the end of their toil was, by fulfilling their laborious duties, *to ward off the dread of want*. For the modern reader it must be rather upsetting that Townsend in his *Dissertation on the Poor Law* deemed hunger necessary to keep the poor labouring, or that for Sydney Smith in his sermon *On the Education of the Poor* hunger was the scarcely hidden driving force to keep the world (reigned by the affluent) going. If *want* was the *driving force* in Sydney Smith's opinion, it was *hunger as necessity* in Townsend's. Whereas the argument in the case of Smith is the *natural (God-given) hierarchy*, it is an *economic reality* in the case of Townsend. Without doubt, Townsend's much criticized concept of the inherent improvidence of the poor served the purpose of the rich as well. Although, he wrote, "[i]t seems to be a law of nature that the poor should be to a certain degree improvident, that there may always be some to fulfil the most servile, the most sordid, and the most ignoble offices in the community," (Townsend, 415) it is not without interest to notice that Providence was much less a question to him and Sydney Smith (both Anglican clergymen) than it was one to Hannah More (an Anglican Evangelical lay woman). Whatever arguments were offered by Hannah More, Sydney Smith, and Joseph Townsend, but also William Pepys (see later in this thesis) and others with regard to poverty as a (semi-) natural state, they all came up with the theory of a higher authority beyond human reach.

This providential 'fact' together with the "inestimable object" (*Sermons I*, IV., 61) that educating the poor was to trigger in the children the desire to become "a better subject, a better servant, a better Christian" (*Sermons I*, IV., 61), was a clear hint at the utility of the education of the poor, which was to better serve those who were their superiors by Providence. Sydney Smith also assumed that education would render the poor more righteous and furnish them with stability and "permanence of opinion" (*Sermons I*, IV., 60), especially as far as the knowledge of the Gospel was concerned.

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he was a hard-working and, according to his lights, useful country parson.(qtd. from A

The point remains that his sermon, when seen as an endeavour to warn against "the extreme division of labor [sic]" (*Sermons I*, IV., 67), which, although invaluable to commerce and industry, had to be counteracted by "the corrective of education" (*Sermons I*, IV., 67), possibly also sprang from the hope that if exploited human beings began to rise up against their "state of a brute" (*Sermons I*, IV., 67), less was to be feared from people educated in the knowledge of the Scriptures. Sydney Smith was convinced that if their hearts were softened this way, it would make the poor "respect wisdom more than strength" (*Sermons I*, IV., 68).

Sydney Smith was aware that books as the instrument of acquiring knowledge were a power which could be used "either for a good, or a bad purpose" (*Sermons I*, IV., 60), apparently insinuating that education could be dangerous if not accompanied by the teaching of the "proper method" (*Sermons I*, IV., 60) of using it.

Remarkably, Sydney Smith, who is still known for his liberal outlooks, failed to mention in his sermon also the poors' right to growing self-esteem, and brought Providence into play with regard to the toiling poor, which makes us wonder whether he tried, without risking to offend the higher ranks, to bring about betterment for the poor discreetly. The question forces itself on us whether for good reasons he may have been forced to speak with a cautious tongue, as Hannah More was presumably forced to do (see in this thesis below), in order not to risk the success of his hope to help the poor out of their educational misery.

There was one more important reason why Sydney Smith thought the education of the poor to be of immense importance: his fear of rapidly spreading Methodism, which he bluntly addressed in an article in the *Edinburgh Review*, 1808.<sup>443</sup> He felt that "the greatest and best of all remedies, [was] perhaps the education of the poor", expressing his astonishment at the fact "that the Established Church in England [was] not awake to this means of arresting the progress of Methodism".<sup>444</sup> This

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*Short Biographical Dictionary of English Literature* by John William Cousin).

<sup>443</sup> Qtd. in Sydney Smith, *Works* 1869, p.114.

<sup>444</sup> In another article in the *Edinburgh Review* 1808 Sydney Smith made it once more clear that to him the Methodists (both of Arminian and Calvinistic sentiment) and the Evangelicals in the Church of England belonged to the same "three classes of fanatics",

opinion was shared also by E. P. Thompson, who claimed that "if the Church of England had not been ineffective, then Methodism 'would have been neither necessary nor possible'."<sup>445</sup>

Sydney Smith's apprehension in view of the growing number of Methodists, which "has [also] sprang [sic] up among the rich, and the great" (*Sermon I*, XVII, 284), is the topic of a sermon he preached. His criticism is not aimed at their "speculative tenets" (*Sermon I*, XVII, 284), but at "the general spirit they display" (*Sermon I*, XVII, 284) and their "eager, and overheated imagination" (*Sermon I*, XVII, 292). It is the Methodists' "zeal without knowledge" (*Sermon I*, XVII, 294) Sydney Smith found most dangerous and damaging for the Anglican Church, which was quite in line with James Bean's apprehension in *Zeal Without Innovation*.<sup>446</sup> It is easy to see that Sydney Smith also subversively hinted at the Evangelicals in the Church of England, with their great many lay people spreading the new *vital Christianity*, whom he did not really discriminate from the Methodists.<sup>447</sup>

The scepticism about educating the poor would last. In a letter to Hannah More, Sir William Pepys<sup>448</sup> doubted the utility of education for them. He assumed that the new extravagance of learning would not even "stop short of science" or history. To Pepys the "absurdity" of such ideas rested less in the lack of money for buying books than to a high degree in the lack of time. How would the poor find time to read without neglecting their work,

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not troubling himself with "the finer shades and nicer discriminations of lunacy". Instead, he sensed in them "one general conspiracy against common sense, and rational orthodox Christianity". (qtd. in *Works* 1869, p. 97)

<sup>445</sup> See E. P. Thompson. *Customs in Common* (New York, 1991), p. 49, qtd. by Susan Staves, "Church of England Clergy and Women Writers", p. 83.

<sup>446</sup> James Bean's book *Zeal Without Innovation* (1808) appeared one year before Sydney Smith's *Sermon* (1809), which most likely had an impact on S. Smith.

<sup>447</sup> See *Sermons Vol. I*, XVII, 'On Methodism', pp. 283 - 300.

<sup>448</sup> Sir William Pepys (1740–1825), writer and literary scholar, taught at Eton College, matriculated on 20 November 1758 from Christ Church, Oxford, where he became known as 'the Old Gentleman'. He took the degrees of BA in 1763 and MA in 1766. He had been admitted to Lincoln's Inn on 23 April 1760 and was called to the bar on 16 June 1766. In 1775 he became a master in chancery. He was a well-known member of the Streatham and Blue Stocking circles, and had most enduring friendships with women, especially Hannah More and Fanny Burney. On 23 June 1801 Pepys was created baronet. He was vice-president of the Literary Fund Society. He died on 2 June 1825 at his house in Gloucester Place. Selections from his correspondence were published in *A Later Pepys* (2 vols., 1904); the most interesting exchanges are those on literary and political subjects with Hannah More. (qtd from the *Oxford DNB*. 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2013  
<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/templates>>)

was Pepys' apprehension. "And where [was] this all to terminate?"<sup>449</sup> This letter is proof that Pepys' attitude towards the education of the poor was unaltered. In an earlier letter to Hannah More dated 31 March 1813, he wrote in the same vein:

I hope the great exertions which are now made to diffuse Education among the Poor have met with your approbation, and that you feel no apprehension lest all the Ploughmen shou'd desert their ploughs, as soon as they are able to read: if they followed them merely for amusement, I shou'd indeed be alarmed lest they might prefer the superior entertainment of reading the 'Arabian Nights'; but as *hunger* is equally formidable to the best Poet, as to the lowest Thrasher, I am in no fear that the Proportion of those who are hang'd, and cannot read, to the Literati who undergo that punishment is enormously great. [...] I am so persuaded that whatever tends to improve the understanding, and give Mind an ascendancy over Matter is beneficial to Morality, that a few glaring instances of great talents being perverted to bad purpose, do not shake my Faith on that subject [emphasis added]. (Gaussen, *Pepys II*, 310-311)

Hunger as a driving force for the poor to stick to their low work and fear on the side of the affluent that low work would no longer be done by the *educated poor* certainly rendered weak arguments for educating the poor. The existing interest in their education thus remained at a low level for practical reasons, and more or less only existed if education was to meet a function, as was the case with the religious aims of Hannah More. Such aims, however, were very much unlike the universal education Mary Wollstonecraft, for instance, suggested, with the intention to cultivate reason and not restrict it to specific skills and reading material.<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>449</sup> Letter Sir William Pepys to Hannah More dated October 1821, qtd. in Yonge, p.180-181.



### Sunday Writing – ‘Theological Impropriety’ or ‘Prejudice’?

It was clear from the beginning that for this kind of limited instruction and also in view of the short time at the disposal, teaching to write would be an ambivalent matter. Mrs. Trimmer and Robert Raikes as well as Hannah More principally shared the opinion that writing was actually superfluous, even if they offered slightly different arguments. It is not without interest, however, that Mrs. Trimmer, a devoted high-church woman, although not in favour of writing either, conceded that even in view of the fact that for lack of time Sundays were not the right time to teach writing, the acquirement of it “one could [only] wish all the poor might obtain”<sup>451</sup>. Even if the two spheres of ‘religious tuition’ and ‘secular tuition’ were so closely interwoven that a differentiation was neither possible nor intended, opinions about the necessity of tuition to be tied up with writing was at least a matter of deliberating, even if the opinions differed, as Trimmer’s regret may imply.

The argument of ‘lack of time’ brought forward for the withholding of writing tuition must certainly remain a threadbare excuse in the case of Hannah More. As she had both Sunday schools and schools of industry, which were week-day schools, under her direction, the latter would have given a good chance to impart writing. Not even More’s alleged fear of a possible infringement of the Sabbath can therefore excuse her notorious statement: “I *allow* [emphasis added] of no writing for the poor. My object is [...] to train up the lower classes in habits of industry and piety.”<sup>452</sup> With this most revealing and explanatory sentence she unmistakably declared her stout belief in and her absolute devotion to the existing social hierarchical order, because this attitude had but little to do with the hysterical Sabbatarianism of that time. From Hannah More’s stance we may thus reluctantly infer that her intention to help the poor creatures she was teaching was not to facilitate their escape from their social strata.

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<sup>450</sup> See Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*, chapt. 12, ‘On National Education’.

<sup>451</sup> Mrs. Trimmer, *Reflections upon the Education of Children in Charity Schools*, pp. 11-12, qtd. in Frank Smith, p. 59.

<sup>452</sup> Letter to Dr. Beadon, Bishop of Bath and Wells, dated August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1802. Qtd. in H. Thompson, p. 213.

Rather, it was her intention, in perfect agreement with her belief in God's Providence, to help them to fill their predestined place in this world with the utmost moral and spiritual zeal in preparation for the life to come. The poor ought to fill their place in becoming good workmen and dependents. In her new vocation, Hannah More could therefore indulge in the realization of her visions of a well-kept and unchanging social order within a God-given hierarchy.

In fact, although writing on Sundays could still be a very controversial issue, most of those who were opposed to writing on Sundays, alleging that it was a means of counteracting "the proper use of Sunday" (Rosman, 160), did not object to writing on week-days. And it should not be forgotten to mention that "a great many Sunday schools between 1785 and the late 1820s did in fact teach writing on the sabbath" (Laqueur, 128). On the other hand, and across all denominations, the still existing puritan Sabbatarianism perceived the teaching to write in Sunday schools as "an awful abuse of the Sabbath" (qtd. in E. P. Thompson, 389); especially the Methodists were full of indignation. The Methodist T. P. Bunting, for instance, saw in the teaching to write on the Sabbath a "theological impropriety – for children to learn to read the Scripture was a 'spiritual good', whereas writing was a 'secular art' from which 'temporal advantage' might accrue".<sup>453</sup> The *Methodist Magazine* even went so far as to stress that "to teach writing on the Sabbath was to legitimise the teaching of trade on the Sabbath".<sup>454</sup>

This serious question of writing on the Sabbath aside, the Sabbatherian 'excesses' had also an amusing side for today's reader. The Evangelical tendency for self-denial made William Wilberforce, whose rigid Sabbatherianism is sufficiently known, take his bride on a tour of Hannah More's Sunday schools, instead of enjoying his honeymoon. This story is amusing also because Wilberforce was, no matter for what good reason, in fact infringing on one of his own strict Sabbatherian principles, which was not to travel on the Sabbath. The other story pertains to Henry Thornton, who made the fatal mistake of proposing marriage to his future

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<sup>453</sup> See E.P. Thompson, 389.

<sup>454</sup> See the *Methodist Magazine* xlvii (1824), pp. 262-64, qtd. in Rosman, p. 160.

wife Marianne on a Saturday; the proposal in writing arrived on Sunday. It ended, not surprisingly, with Marianne's declining and rebuking Thornton via a note for using such a sacred day for the important issue of proposing when everyone's thoughts ought to be occupied with spirituality. Anyway, Marianne thought it proper to accept the proposal two days later.<sup>455</sup> As the writing of letters on Sundays was another declared infringement on the Sabbatherian principles, we may infer that writing as a whole, whether teaching or being taught, was a forbidden occupation on that day. Whether Wilberforce, who even declared writing letters on a Sunday as "unhallow[ing]" (Wilberforce, *A Practical View*, 208) that day, really saw writing in the Sunday schools in the same light, is not known. It may be suspected, however, that he took Hannah More's stance, who argued the superfluity of the children of the very poor being taught to write altogether.

In consequence and in pursuit of Hannah More's goal to give the poor the amount and kind of tuition which alone seemed purposeful for their spiritual welfare, her instruction was "of a very simple character" (qtd. in *Annals*, 5). But even these limited educational endeavours afforded the "highest sense of duty" and "Christian heroism" (*Annals*, 3) in view of the conditions which reminded her of the darkest places of Africa and made the necessity for Hannah and Martha More to overcome the difficulties they not only had to face from the farmers but also from the parochial ministers in the parishes. But what was all the hardship in the light of "fight[ing] the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life" (*Annals* 75), Martha wrote in her diary at the end of 1792, and at the beginning of 1793 she remarked : "[I]et everything that hath breath praise the Lord" (*Annals*, 76). There was good news from all sides, with the hope that mere "decency" might eventually be elevated to "spirituality" (*Annals*, 76). There was hope in the air both in the weekly school and the Sunday-school and ample evidence that there was a tendency of "turning from a life of wickedness to a life of righteousness – in short, from sin to holiness" (*Annals*, 78), and turning rough boys into civil creatures, who stopped swearing, were able to "say their Catechism", able to "read the Bible", and were able to give a general "outline of the Christian religion" (*Annals*, 79).

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<sup>455</sup> See I. Bradley, p. 25.

Even if Robert Raikes was officially an Evangelical like Hannah More, his religious views are not quite clear. In a letter to the *Christian Reformer* dated March 20, 1786, for instance, he was referred to as "an ornament to the cause of virtue and religion"<sup>456</sup>; in another letter to the *Christian Reformer* he was referred to as "pretend[ing] to no religion"<sup>457</sup>. In a letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine* dated July 20, 1786, he deeply concerned himself with the issue of the infringement of the Sabbath. Like Hannah More, he was hopeful "to check [...] [the] deplorable profanation of the sabbath"<sup>458</sup>, a zeal which even brought him under the occasional suspicion of being a Methodist sympathizer. But unlike Hannah More, Raikes made it a point that the Sabbath should not become a "prejudice" (*Gentleman's Magazine*, 412) that nothing should be done on that sacred day, which had the character of labour both of the body and the mind. The aim of "rooting out" this "prejudice" was, as Raikes put it, his "favourite object" (*Gentleman's Magazine*, 412).<sup>459</sup> Writing, to carry the matter even further, could be seen as 'labour' and thus as unfit for being taught on Sundays. However, since the Evangelicals' and Hannah More's primary object was the saving of as many souls as possible, teaching to read instead of writing was a matter of course, since for the conversion of souls the skill of *reading* the Bible, the most important requisite of the Evangelicals, was at the forefront and not that of writing.<sup>460</sup>

Bishop Horne was one who, although strongly opposed to the imputation of Sabbath-breaking in general, pardoned those who taught on that day "for hire", reminding his listeners in his sermon that *all* "ministers of religion throughout the Christian world [would be] verily guilty of sabbath-breaking; since they [were] paid for teaching" (*Sermon*, 14), and excusing their Sabbath teaching with the argument that otherwise the majority of them would have to starve. Horne was quite obviously siding with Robert Raikes, whose activities triggered his admiration or even enthusiasm for a

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<sup>456</sup> *Christian Reformer*, Sept. 1841, p. 533.

<sup>457</sup> *Christian Reformer*, Sept. 1841, p. 534.

<sup>458</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. LIV, 1784, p. 411.

<sup>459</sup> Raikes' patriotism made him appeal to the "patriots" of the country to "employ themselves in rescuing their countrymen from [the] despotism [of the Sabbatarian prejudice]". (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1784, p. 412)

<sup>460</sup> To reach the capability of reading the Bible would become More's intention not only for the schools for children but also for the adults of the Mendip area with a special focus on the poor women in newly founded clubs.

man whose Sunday school project had dispersed the darkness with “a ray of light” (*Sermon*, 3) and was presumably a means designed to “saving a great [many] people from impending ruin” (*Sermon*, 4).

### **Aims, Rules, Plans and Principles: The Organization of the Sunday Schools**

If we take Hannah More as an example, the education as it was performed by the Evangelicals had as its central aim the moral rescue of the children of the poor. Her aim was “[t]o make [them] good members of society [...] by making [them] good Christians” (qtd. in *Annals*, 9) first. However, if we take a close look at Robert Raikes’ letter addressed to Richard Townley, a squire and magistrate of Rochdale, in 1783,<sup>461</sup> we perceive a fairly different disposition from Hannah More’s with regard to educating the very poor. Raikes’ credo for the abolition of a “prejudice” which forbade writing on the Sabbath (although Raikes did not mention *writing* with a single word) and which would not even allow for activities promoting health and happiness on that day, and which he therefore regarded as “despotism, which tyrannical passions and vicious inclinations” (*Gentleman’s Magazine* 1784, 412) exercised over his countrymen, reveals a man of inclinations for true liberty and national welfare. He saw his calling as an “effort at civilization” from which “society must reap some benefit”, if the “glory of God be promot[ed] in any, even the smallest degree” (*Gentleman’s Magazine* 1784, 411). His concept of “reformation in society” puts forward the establishment of “notices of duty, and practical habits of order and decorum, *at an early stage*<sup>462</sup> [emphasis added]”, in order to bring forth “a plentiful harvest” (*Gentleman’s Magazine* 1784, 412), which sounds rather down-to-earth and feasible:

The great principle [he] inculcated, [was] to be kind and good-natured to each other; not to provoke one another; to be dutiful to their parents; not to offend God by cursing and swearing, and such

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<sup>461</sup> Published in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, Vol. LIV (June 1784), pp.410-412; and in Cliff, pp.325-327 (Appendix A1).

<sup>462</sup> Raikes was here in tune with Hannah More, who in turn shared this opinion with, for instance, John Bowles, and propagated it in *Estimate* (1790) and *Strictures* (1799).

little plain precepts as all may comprehend. (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1784, 411)

Just as modest was his *rule* to “come to the school on Sunday as clean as possible [...] with clean hands, clean face, and the hair combed,” (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1784, 412) keeping in mind the fact that any dress code would detain the poor children, ragged as they were, from coming to school. When he named them “little ragga-muffins” [sic] (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1784, 411), it sounds tender. Even his frequent “kind admonitions” (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1784, 411) trigger the picture of a much respected fatherly figure who rejoiced in the children’s *discipline* when “walk[ing] before [the mistress] to church, two and two, in as much order as a company of soldiers.” (*Gentleman's Magazine* 1784, 411)

Robert Raikes’ unpretentious world was contrasted by Hannah More’s world of principles and doctrines. “Principles, and not opinions, are what I labour to give [the children],” she is quoted in the *Annals* (9). She saw her mission not merely in getting the children off the roads on Sundays, but being devastated at their irreligion, resolved her mission to be the rescue of the souls of these little “savages” (*Annals*, 23). Hannah More’s strong view was that it was “a fundamental error to consider children as innocent beings”; rather they were “beings who bring into the world a corrupt nature and evil dispositions,”<sup>463</sup> and hence the great end of education was to rectify this nature. The most important quality in an instructor of youth, according to More, thus was to be convinced of this corruption to an extent

*as should insure a disposition to counteract it; together with such a deep view and thorough knowledge of the human heart, as should be necessary for developing and controlling its most secret and complicated workings [More's emphasis]. (Strictures 1799, Vol. I, 57)*

Good teachers, especially with this anticipated ideological qualification, were extremely difficult to find. Occasionally the More sisters were forced to turn a blind eye to accepting a teacher who was suspected by them to be a Methodist. Hannah More in a letter to William Wilberforce wrote about such a difficulty: “I hope Miss Wilberforce [Wilberforce’s sister] will not be

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<sup>463</sup> Hannah More was deeply convinced of the innate corrupt nature of human beings, also of children, and dedicated an entire chapter in *Strictures* to this topic, stressing it again in *Coelebs*, p. 205.

frightened, but I am afraid she [Mrs. Easterbrook, the mistress for the *religious part* of the Sunday school in Cheddar] must be called a Methodist.” (qtd. in *Annals*, 18) Hannah More, strict as she was in general and in particular in the way she handled the Methodist issue, was open to compromise if the end justified the means. Even if we are not told what caused More’s suspicion, her decision in favour of Mrs. Easterbrook was grounded on the fact that she had a good opinion of the latter’s judgement. This rather insignificant occurrence, however, makes us wonder whether Hannah More’s sporadic disparagement of the Methodists was not more a matter of diplomacy in order to steer free from any suspicion of Methodist leanings than a question of religious conviction. To accept a teacher of religion who was suspected of being a Methodist, certainly proves no anxiety on More’s end that her pupils were in danger. And it also gives rise to the bold assumption that Hannah More occasionally may have felt closer to evangelical Dissenters and Nonconformists than to Anglicans.

As children were to be seen in such an ambivalent light, it will not surprise that More’s way of teaching and imposing her moral standards, which became more or less a general Evangelical trade mark towards the end of the eighteenth century, was patronizing, condescending, even authoritative and dictatorial at times. Hannah More’s ostentatious piety made her and her brethren highly critical of the erring of others, which also found its expression in the so-called “*charge*”, as, according to Martha More, “[s]omeone has wittily called it”<sup>464</sup>, and which is particularly telling in this respect.

If it is said that the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were “obsessed with rule-making” (Cliff, 51), this is possibly exaggerating the practice itself by far. But the Appendix to George Horne’s *Sermon* (1786) includes several letters from clergymen in which they offer practical guidelines for the setting up of Sunday schools, together with comprehensive “rules and orders” for both teachers and children, which seems to be evidence that the organization of Sunday schools was already in an advanced state.<sup>465</sup> Maybe this alleged “obsession” with rule-

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<sup>464</sup> Qtd. in *Annals*, p. 82. For more with respect to “charges” see later in this thesis.

<sup>465</sup> See Horne, *Sermon 1786*, pp. 28-32.

making was true of Hannah More to a certain extent, but rather not true of Robert Raikes, because in the latter's case the rules he introduced began with his request for "clean hands" and developed as his Sunday schools were growing. Hannah More, in contrast, was exacting in this respect. As a believer in authorities, rules to her were a matter of fact and had to be adhered to, just as, in analogy, the hierarchical order had to be taken for granted. Her thinking in exact patterns was backed by a religious mission whose rules were clear right from the beginning: tuition was centring on the Bible. That there was no room for "[s]peculative doctrines" (*Annals*, 9) will not surprise, as More said in a letter to the Earl of Orford (Horace Walpole) in 1792: "Of all jargon, I hate metaphysical jargon." (qtd. in Roberts I, 427). The doctrines Hannah More intended to inculcate were the "plain leading doctrines of Scripture" (*Annals*, 9) with a view to better informing the children about Liturgy and Church Establishment.

When the More sisters opened the first school at Cheddar on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1789 with one hundred and forty children, named the "School of Industry" (*Annals*, 23), it was to be followed by a Sunday and a day-school for the united parishes of Rowberrow and Shipham in September 1790. Soon Hannah More's was concerned with the idea to also instruct the grown-ups in "the very elements of Christianity" (qtd. in *Annals*, 25). To this effect she wrote to "Patty" on March 4, 1790, that the aim was to enable them "to better understand the clergyman's sermon at church" and also to "bring more people there." (*Annals*, 25) Hanna More's utilitarian bent was omnipresent from the very beginning.

At the end of the year 1791 the diary of "Patty" More notes: "We have now taken in hand ten parishes, and have the care of near one thousand children" (qtd. in *Annals*, 48), adding: "[m]ay our prayers reach the throne of grace for the Divine blessing upon all our undertakings; and may the favour of God descend on all who assist us in any way!" (qtd. in *Annals*, 48)

A side effect, after their leaving the Mendips for the winter season, was the introduction of "family prayer" by the Cheddar school master, Samuel. Hopefully it would extend to the houses of the participants themselves. The rise and progress of the Cheddar school is a typical example of how



these schools were conducted. Hannah More in a letter to Wilberforce described at length how the Cheddar school, which represented the starting point of all endeavours to follow, was conducted.<sup>466</sup> When many refused to send their children to school unless they were paid, this represented a minor problem owing the generous funds William Wilberforce was willing to invest in the school scheme, as compared to the finding of “proper teachers” (*Annals*, 51), because on them depended the success or the failure of the school. “More might be done had we better teachers” (*Annals*, 70), “Patty” wrote in her diary. Besides all the opposition the More sisters had to face, they had to struggle against frequent suspicions of having Methodist leanings, grounded for instance on the circumstance that sermons were sometimes read *after* the regular school hours. The fear of Methodism eventually became general. In one particular case, a woman even refused to come to the family prayer because she thought they (Hannah and Martha) were “*Wesleying*” (*Annals*, 55). This little incident shows how a deeply-felt and serious outlook on religion like Hannah More's was reason enough to give rise to the suspicion of Methodism. On the other hand, a certain analogy between Methodism and Anglican Evangelicalism could not be denied. More during her Mendip time never grew tired of ascertaining her dislike of Methodism, although, had Methodism remained in its *original* form as proposed by Wesley – which was not unlike that of the Anglican Evangelicals a “*methodical* improvement of the provisions already made by the Church” (H. Thompson, 353) which was devoid of fanaticism and free from Wesley's known later errors pertaining to doctrines and discipline – an analogy of More's schools with those of the Methodists could be freely admitted. Wilberforce even recommended a teacher of the Methodist creed for Hannah More's Sunday schools once, whom the latter refused, however.<sup>467</sup> Whatever sympathies Hannah More may have felt for Methodism, she was shrewd enough to keep them to herself, and remained an orthodox Evangelical throughout her life.

Hannah and Martha always and with much creditability refuted these Methodist leanings. But “Patty” confided to her diary, as Hannah had

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<sup>466</sup> See Hannah More's letter to William Wilberforce, qtd. in the *Annals*, pp. 49–53.

<sup>467</sup> See Henry Thompson, p. 355.

confided to Wilberforce in a letter before (see in this thesis above), that Mrs. Easterbrook, the teacher for religion in their Sunday school, probably was a Methodist, a fact Hannah and Martha More closed their eyes to, however, because of the lack of spiritual teachers. The schools of Cheddar, Shipham and Rowberrow were directed “on mere morality” (*Annals*, 55), but the sisters were hopeful that Providence would comply and provide spiritual teachers, even if the success of these schools, it can be supposed, was grounded on this “mere morality”.<sup>468</sup>

### **Elevating the State of Poverty**

When Hannah More started her moral and social crusade in the Mendip area, charity and poor relief had begun to be at variance with economical deliberations, which had gained importance since Townsend’s *A Dissertation on the Poor Laws* (1786). Townsend’s *Dissertation*, a most ambivalent work, was a critique of the *Poor Laws*, because, according to him, they not only gave “occasion to much injustice” (Townsend, 402), but also killed the motive for working. Townsend here voiced the “frustration [of the upper-classes] with the Poor Laws and their effect on the economy,” because of “the ever-growing financial burden of the poor rates.” (Scheuermann, 3) Subsidising the poor meant to him to deprive the poor of both the incentive and the driving force for working – namely hunger! Ambivalently, however, maybe either in order to take the sting out of his harsh criticism of the Poor Laws, or to avoid infringing on the reputation of the affluent as generous givers, which was at stake, Townsend called for “pity, compassion, and benevolence in the rich” and “love, reverence, and gratitude in the poor” (Townsend, 449). Gratefulness and subservience on the side of the poor towards the better ranks was desirable, so that “people in this walk of life [...] [pursued] their calling,

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<sup>468</sup> Richard A. Soloway writes that “[b]oth Paley and Horsley believed that morality was merely social law, and as such was far beneath religious law,” referring for the relevant arguments to *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, Vol. I (ed. Robert Wilberforce), London 1840. (See Soloway, “Reform or Ruin”, p. 111, FN. 4)

without shewing [sic] any signs that its avocations were irksome to them." (Bean, 285)

When Gary Kelly hints at the *Cheap Repository Tracts* as "consistently argue[ing] that the poverty and misery of the labouring poor are caused not by 'things as they are' but by *their own idleness, folly, bad management, and mistaken attempts to emulate their betters* [emphasis added]" (Kelly, 7), this is reminiscent of Townsend's question "are not poverty and wretchedness increasing daily, in exact proportion with our efforts to restrain them?" (Townsend, 421); and of Hannah More's complaint in *Estimate* that it was a pity that benevolence was thwarted by the increase of baseness in the same measure.<sup>469</sup> The tenor of these statements is much the same and was apparently a common one among the elite at that time.

But Hannah More's Evangelical sense of mission and activism nevertheless made her counteract Townsend's harsh criticism of the Poor Laws by not only preparing the poor for a Christian life, but also by alleviating their worldly wants and by helping them to become more efficient in coping with their state. Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795 - 1798) were to a large extent composed to provide this skill of coping with poverty, not by trying to evade it, but by making it bearable and respectable. The other purpose the *Tracts* were intended for was providing Hannah More's Sunday schools with 'safe reading' and to meet the demand for new reading material away from the circulating libraries. For the *Tracts* More cleverly copied the outward appearance of the popular and often rather licentious chap books to further their sale. But, as so often with Hannah More's leaning to utility, the end justified the means, and the numbers sold were gigantic. Turning poverty into a virtue, and so creating a facilitated entrance to heaven, was a very appealing aspect of the *Tracts*. But it also laid open a doctrinal problem, because in the Evangelical doctrine redemption was granted through "faith alone"<sup>470</sup>. Unsurprisingly, Hannah More therefore turned many of her poverty-

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<sup>469</sup> See Hannah More, "Estimate", *Works I*, p. 280.

<sup>470</sup> "Grow[ing] in Grace", turning from wickedness to righteousness, from sin to holiness, and from morality to spirituality are current topics in the *Annals*. See for instance pp. 55, 78, 96.

stricken poor into semi-saints. The best example is possibly rendered by *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, the *Tract* which comprises practically all guidelines for leading a happy and God-pleasing life in poverty.

More's endeavours to make poverty to be perceived as a chance to be accepted by God was her share to meet also the spiritual wants of the poor. A great many of More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* thus show how to cope with the problem of poverty and how to overcome it with noble-mindedness and God's goodwill, in the certainty that theirs was the kingdom of heaven. The hierarchical social order played a major part in More's *Tracts*, and whoever made an effort at challenging or even jeopardizing it was materially wrong to her mind. Poverty was God-given and as such a matter of course. Thus, interfering with it was a balancing act between violating God's will without pulling down the natural social barriers. The alleviation of poverty was conditioned by the spiritual welfare of becoming good Christians and by the physical welfare of accepting charity to an extent which made life just about bearable, allowing for no *surplus*.

In several instances Hannah More in her attitude towards poverty is in line with the reactionary defenders of the status quo who were unwilling to concede that poverty might be blamed on the social order, though her hedging allows room for putting at least part of the blame on social injustice. For instance she maintains that "want and misery" are mistakenly considered as "arising solely from the defects of human governments and not as making part of the dispensation of God [...] [and that] poverty is represented as merely a political evil and [...] painted as the most flagrant injustice." However, Hannah More strictly remains within her attested boundaries. "The gospel," she says,

can make no part of a system, in which the chimerical project of consummate earthly happiness, (founded on the mad pretence of *loving the poor better than God loves them*) would defeat the *Divine plan, which meant this world a scene of discipline, not of remuneration* [emphasis added].<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> See "Strictures", *Works I* (ed. 1843), p. 318.

This fits perfectly into Hannah More's idea of God's plan to keeping the poor in their, albeit honourable, state of poverty, because their providential lot was to be *disciplined* and not to accept, as the *Repository Tracts* teach us, any alms which would go beyond those absolutely necessary. This is reminiscent of Townsend's idea about the state of poverty: even if his and More's perspectives were the result of different outlooks, the outcome was not unlike.

But poverty was omnipresent. And natural shamefulness detained many Mendip people from going to church at all. A pew-rent-system made the social status additionally obvious; so did the pennies the poor were unable to afford for the offering; and they feared contempt for their inability of dressing adequately.<sup>472</sup> In *Hester Wilmot*, Hannah More makes the heroine turn up in the church in an old stuff gown, but, in an effort to let poverty be seen in a different light, makes the schoolmistress say that

meekness and an [sic] humble spirit is of more value in the sight of God and good men, than the gayest cotton gown, or the brightest pink riband [sic] in the parish. (*Works I*, 239)

This passage must be seen in the context of the question of social grading, which afforded different conditions with regard to dressing accordingly. It seemed deplorable, as the author of the essay "On Female Dress" phrases it, that through the

dissipation and extravagance of the times, the proper distinction [between the social strata] [...] [was] almost lost, and [that] it [...] [was] often not easy to distinguish [...] between a countess and a milliner.<sup>473</sup>

The author also underlined the divine will of the state of poverty, saying that

[t]he Providence of God has made an evident distinction of rank and subordination in civil life. There is a long gradation from the highest state of those whom we call the rich, to the *honest and industrious poor* [emphasis added].<sup>474</sup>

If we consider Hannah More's attempt in the *Tracts* to give less attention to clothing and more to piety quoted above, Kowaleski-Wallace's assertion

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<sup>472</sup> See Bebbington, p. 112.

<sup>473</sup> *The Evangelical Magazine 1795 (April)*, pp. 146-150.

that Hannah More and her sister forced the poor to dress and behave like middle-class members<sup>475</sup>, makes little sense. Hannah More was certainly not the person to blur the boundaries between the ranks.

The difficulty to glean from clothes against the cold whether they were *necessary* or rather *superfluous* made it a delicate business to determine whether the poor in question belonged to the species of the *deserving* or not. In Hannah More's *Tracts* the poor were continually told that 'ragged clothes' were a marker for *not* being a 'deserving poor', but anything beyond the absolutely necessary could be categorized as *surplus* (see above). The question of the 'worthy poor' was one of the central issues in the *Tracts*. Making both ends meet was challenge enough. There cannot have been any aspiration on the side of the poor as it cannot have been part of More's efforts to dress them like the middle-class, not to speak of the social inadequacy. Clothing aside, white bread, especially in periods of distress, was regarded as a luxury and as being immoral in the hands of the poor, because Jesus himself ate barley bread.<sup>476</sup> That a cake of barley meal could be the subject of discussion (in the context of the French Clergy in England) is shown in two articles in the *Evangelical Magazine* 1793, pp. 85 and 218. Stockings represented another 'luxury', as if the poor did not feel the cold in the same measure as the rich.<sup>477</sup> Hannah More was most likely aware of this 'extravagance' the poor could not afford. Notwithstanding, she began in the Mendips to regularly give stockings (of her own knitting!) as a wedding gift to young *deserving* women of blameless behaviour.

The poor of the Mendips certainly could not trouble themselves with questions about dress-codes or luxury. They were happy enough to afford decent clothes for the annual feasts Hannah and Martha More implemented. But they were grateful for any attempts at making their lot bearable and for being consoled by elevating their social status as God-given and by being promised better conditions in the life to come.

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<sup>474</sup> *The Evangelical Magazine* 1795 (April), p. 147. See also Chapter III. 'The changing face of the religious scene'.

<sup>475</sup> See Kowaleski-Wallace, p. 68.

<sup>476</sup> See Kevin Gilmartin's essay "Study to be Quiet", p. 497.

### Speaking With a 'Forked Tongue'?<sup>478</sup>

Several critical essays of recent date deal with the problem of poverty and its impact on morals towards the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>479</sup> Jane Nardin's essay seems to be of particular interest because it argues with respect to More's views on poverty and her commitment to the established social order that it has been misunderstood by most scholars and literary historians. Her thesis is grounded on the fact that the so-called *Teston letters*, written by Hannah More to the 'Testonites', Sir Charles and Lady Middleton and their friend Mrs. Bouverie, the wealthy owner of Teston Court and generous philanthropists, had not received the attention they deserved. She mentions M.G. Jones' biography (1952), E. Kowalewski-Wallace (1991), Mitzi Myers (1994), and P. Demers's biography (1996) in this respect.<sup>480</sup> The *Teston letters*, so Lady Chatterton<sup>481</sup>, their editor, were given "in their entirety", in the hope that they would "thus unprepared and unweeded [...] present the most faithful though perhaps not the most flattering portrait of the writer"<sup>482</sup>. No doubt, Lady Chatterton tried to set herself off from Roberts who, in an irresponsible manner, "improved" More's letters, enraging Marianne Thornton, who had lent them to him for publication in his *Memoirs*. The *Teston letters*, Nardin alleges, are proof that Hannah More's devotedness to church and state has been much overstated and that, as a matter of fact, her views were highly critical of these institutions. That she criticized the clergy for their drowsiness and their inefficiency on and off is known. Even Martha More's *Annals* are critical about the clergy for their forgetting to mention the "King of kings" (*Annals*, 23) in their sermons. In the *Teston letters*, which Jane Nardin re-

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<sup>477</sup> Scheuermann, referring to this question, says that "perhaps most people in the eighteenth century [...] [believed that] the poor man [did] not have the same feelings of needs as the rich", giving it particular attention on pp.30–31.

<sup>478</sup> Jane Nardin, "Hannah More and the Problem of Poverty", p. 279.

<sup>479</sup> For instance by Jane Nardin (fall 2001) and Mona Scheuermann (2002).

<sup>480</sup> See Jane Nardin, "Hannah More and the Problem of Poverty", p. 271.

<sup>481</sup> Lady Georgiana Chatterton (1806–1876) was a prolific British romantic novelist and travel writer. Her novel-writing style was pilloried by George Eliot, but her travel books were widely read. (Source: *Literary Heritage*, [www.literaryheritage.org.uk](http://www.literaryheritage.org.uk)).

<sup>482</sup> Lady Georgina Chatterton, ed. *Memorials, Personal and Historical of Admiral Lord Gambier, G.C.B.... etc.*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., vol.1, p.147, London, 1861, qtd. in Jane Nardin, p. 271.

examines for Hannah More's views about poverty, More, surprisingly, did speculate about the economic causes of poverty, pointing to the social responsibility of the Government and never "attribut[ing] poverty to the will of providence" (Nardin, 275).

If Jane Nardin had not relativized her thesis that Hannah More spoke with a forked tongue in her *Tracts* for the poor - constantly supporting the established order on the one hand and criticizing poverty as "not caused by the anger of Providence, but by the greed and indifference of man" (Nardin, 273) in the *Teston letters* on the other hand - by saying that she did not mean to imply that these letters "present[ed] More's "real" or "private" views in any simple sense" (Nardin, 283), but that they "were tailored for the particular audience to which they were addressed" (Nardin, 283), More's *vita* from the time of her social engagement in the Mendips onward would need to be written anew.<sup>483</sup> If Nardin's theory is correct, Hannah More must have felt very uneasy at times, which could have been an additional reason for ending the *Tracts* in 1798. Hannah More's efforts made her to be virtually in two places at once, namely to convince the rich to open their purse for benevolence, which necessitated giving the impression of holding the social order in high esteem, and to try making at least modest reforms, as the *Teston letters* seem to indicate. When Hannah More was badly shaken by the Blagdon Controversy she must have felt as if she had fallen between two stools, because her good associations with the rich and influential did not prevent her from being suspected of advocating dissenting and liberal ideas. Posterity in general, with very few exceptions, has regarded her as 'a reactionary'. Was she deep down in her innermost a revolutionary after all? Today we can only look on with bewilderment, because it is extremely difficult to appraise Hannah More's tactics, also because we cannot help suspecting that she was a little bit of a commuter across the social borders, very much aware

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<sup>483</sup> The implications of the *Teston letters* allow even for speculations as to whether Roberts also either tuned More's letters to Wilberforce to avoid damaging her picture as a convinced helpmate in procuring the established and God-ordained order, or whether she truly accommodated her correspondence like the sails to the wind. However, we should give Hannah More the benefit of the doubt that she did it for the purpose of opening the purses of those rich who were known for their philanthropic vein.



of her abilities as well as popularity and certainly not free from vanity and overestimation of her possibilities.

If Jane Nardin is giving Hannah More the benefit of the doubt that she was siding, however secretly, with the poor and regarded the existing hierarchical order with scepticism, Anna K. Mellor provokingly sees in Hannah More even a “revolutionary reformer”<sup>484</sup> who tried to reform “the working classes in a more systematic way” (Mellor, 23) by acquainting them with “the social world of Evangelical middle-class culture, a culture which they on the whole eagerly embraced” (Mellor, 24). She certainly advocates Thomas Laqueur’s estimate when she speaks of “a highly developed culture of self-help, self-improvement and respectability” (Laqueur, 155). But what Mellor does not mention in her attempt to turn Hannah More into a reformer is the possible motive behind her educational efforts, namely the realization of Evangelical “*activism*”, as “expression of the gospel in effort”, and “*biblicism*” (Bebbington, 3), the effort to integrate the Bible in social life, a special mark of the Evangelical religion. Mellor’s insinuation that the poor, if they made adequate efforts, could become-middle class, overestimates their chances, which certainly still rested on the goodwill of their social betters.

### **The Influence of the Counter- Revolution**

Hannah More as a rule has been seen quite differently from Mellor’s evaluation, namely as opposed to reform, also by E. P. Thompson and V. Kiernan, apparently for good reasons.<sup>485</sup> In the last decade of the eighteenth century, when the Sunday schools became popular, counter-revolution was in the air, caused by the French Revolution and its aftermath, but there were also massive social tensions, which found their

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<sup>484</sup> See Anne K. Mellor’s chapter “Hannah More, Revolutionary Reformer” in *Mothers of the Nation*, pp.13–38.

<sup>485</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963); V. Kiernan, “Evangelicalism and the French Revolution” (1952).

literary expression in the binary works of Burke and Paine,<sup>486</sup> now also read by those who had been taught to read in the Sunday schools. But when Godwin turned to the "petty institution of Sunday schools" (1793), he still deplored their curriculum for instilling a "superstitious veneration for the Church of England, and [the obligation] to bow to every man in a handsome coat" (Godwin, *Political Justice II*, 299), much in the tenor of William Blake.

Of course, with the effects of the French Revolution and the fear of war with France looming, patriotism was the order of the day. Urged by Bishop Beilby Porteus, Hannah More felt compelled to counteract Thomas Paine's revolutionary pamphlet *The Rights of Man* (1791) by answering with *Village Politics* (1793). From today's point of view, this pamphlet, with its urging and persuasive tone foreshadowing the later *Cheap Repository Tracts*, was a manifestation of the existing hierarchical order, a hymn on the status quo, and the fervent wish everything may stay as it is for all times. M. G. Jones, one of Hannah More's biographers (1952), termed *Village Politics* "Burke for beginners" (Jones, 134). Jones gives rise to the speculation that Burke's *Reflections*, addressed to the rich, were in principle what *Village Politics* were for the poor, namely a persuasive appeal for keeping up the *ancien régime*. For this very reason, it is unlikely that *Village Politics* and the *Tracts*, of which particularly the latter were said to be "exclusively [written] for the poor"<sup>487</sup>, were actually only read by them. The other reason being that Hannah More rarely did anything without bringing into play her foresight, intentions and questions of utility. The way some *Tracts* are written, often, maybe unintentionally, betrays their hidden end, namely to reach all ranks of society.<sup>488</sup>

"It was [also] in these counter-revolutionary decades that the humanitarian tradition became *warped* [emphasis added] beyond recognition", E. P. Thompson states (1966, 57), referring to an infuriated Blake, who deplored that the poor were first compelled "to live upon a

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<sup>486</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790); Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (1791).

<sup>487</sup> Yonge, qtd. in Myers, p. 5.

<sup>488</sup> For this appraisal see Kate Bethune. *Hannah More, Moral Reform and The Cheap Repository Tracts*. 29th June, 2008  
<<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/history/studentlife/e-journal/bethune.pdf>>.

crust of bread by soft mild arts [...] reducing the Man to want [and] then give[n] with pomp and ceremony.”<sup>489</sup> It seems not out of the way to believe that these “soft mild arts” governed Hannah More’s *Tracts* for the poor by romanticizing poverty. To trace reforming tendencies for the poor in More’s literary efforts thus seems problematic. Kiernan sounds very much like Thompson when he asserts: “Patriotic drums were beaten, reform was condemned as sedition. Loyalty, conservatism, Christianity, became identical.” (Kiernan, 45) In view of this development, before the background of the developing French Revolution and the War with France as well as the social unrest in her own country, Hannah More’s school scheme not only took on the role of imparting the skill to read but it also began to breathe that special atmosphere of patriotism and defence of the hierarchical order. The teaching strategy Hannah More eventually developed was based on her strong religious belief and her growing, marked patriotism, which were not mere blind and irrational or sentimental impulses but were motivated by her belief that religion and the love of one’s country are indivisible, a belief which later made her consent to the recruitment of young Mendip males for the oncoming war with France by frenetically praising the raising of “two hundred and ten volunteers in Cheddar”<sup>490</sup>. This attitude was only one of many ambivalences of the Evangelicals and of Hannah More: they sanctioned war and at the same time Evangelical Members of Parliament fiercely fought an emergency Bill for defending the country against Napoleon’s troops, because it included Sunday drillings, the authorization of which by law would have alarmed the Reverend John Newton much more than the landing of an army of French soldiers as Hannah More says in a letter to Wilberforce.<sup>491</sup>

As a consequence, these patriotic features became not only part of the tuition but found also entrance into the *Tracts* Hannah More produced with the prime (but not sole) intention of supplying the poor pupils with adequate reading material besides the Scriptures. Unsurprisingly, Hannah and Martha remained law-abiding patriots and perceived the burning of Tom Paine’s effigy by common people as an “excess of loyalty” (*Annals*, 94). Their understanding of “an important and striking revolution” (*Annals*,

<sup>489</sup> William Blake, qtd. in E. P. Thompson, p. 57.

<sup>490</sup> Hannah More qtd. from an unpublished letter in *Annals*, p. 189.

95) was, for instance, Mrs. Baber's rare chance and honour to go through the whole ceremony of a Sunday reading in the presence of a preacher and a "pious, humble, [and] grateful" (*Annals*, 96) assembly.

Much in tune with Jane Nardin, Samantha Webb argues in her essay in the *European Romantic Review* that the criticism directed at Hannah More for her reactionary social agenda arising from her dietary advice in *The Way to Plenty* and *The Cottage Cook* must fall short, because behind More's rhetoric of scarcity, as her letters betray, must have been hidden a much more radical woman than the readers of her *Tracts* were made to believe and that her rather insufficient pieces of dietary advice were More's effort to trigger more contribution to charities from the rich.<sup>492</sup>

While some writers ignore the religious dimension of Hannah More's philanthropic efforts, Kevin Gilmartin sums them up as her Evangelical project which in its entirety "interven[ed] in the life and literacy of the rural poor" (Gilmartin, 509), not exactly a flattering remark when he explains More's aim was "to discipline the irregular reading practices of the working poor by subjecting them to the direct supervision of Sunday schools" (Gilmartin, 509), which in consequence led to obligation and subordination, as the title of Gilmartin's essay unmistakably and ironically gives us to understand.<sup>493</sup>

Mona Scheuermann's "In Praise of Poverty" similarly makes clear that a minimum of education, namely the ability to read (the *Tracts*), made the 'praise of poverty' possible at all, so that More could drive home her didactic points with simplistic ideas, drawn in black and white. Scheuermann, too, perceives More to be inspired by an attitude of innate moral and intellectual superiority towards the poor.<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> See I. Bradley, p. 103.

<sup>492</sup> See Samantha Webb's essay "One Man's Trash is Another Man's Dinner: Food and the Poetics of Scarcity in the Cheap Repository Tracts". *European Romantic Review*, Vol. 17, issue 4.

## **Sunday Schools - A Place of Purposeful and Persuasive Teaching?**

Just as Gilmartin locates subordination of the poor as a prime motive, Lawrence Stone considers Sunday schools as places intended to inculcate order, regularity, more punctuality as well as more compliancy and obedience.<sup>495</sup> Such deep-dyed disciplinary measures are seen by Stone as “a system to break the will and to condition the child to routinized labour in the factory” (Stone, 92). Seen in this light, Sunday schools, for all their merits and advantages, were also a place where children were prepared for being more successfully exploited, which was certainly a crucial reason why the majority of factory owners warmly welcomed the Sunday schools.

To Hannah More with her understanding of a strict hierarchical order, submission was natural for the poor and, as E. P. Thompson puts it, “a psychic component” (E. P. Thompson, 355) of the work discipline the developing industry was badly in need of. Although E.P. Thompson has foremost the Methodists in mind when blaming them for “complicity in the fact of child labour by default” and for “weakening the poor from within” (E. P. Thompson, 354-355) with the purpose of making them submissive, there was little difference in this respect between the Methodists and the Evangelicals. It was that kind of utility which naturally evolved from the state of poverty. Child labour became an intrinsic part of the agricultural and industrial economy before 1780. The imputed closeness of the Evangelicals' fervour for morally rescuing the children of the poor to “religious terrorism” (qtd. by E. P. Thompson, 378) may not seem completely apart from today's standpoint.

At this point we are reminded of the ambivalence in educating respectively disciplining children in the eighteenth century, which can be demonstrated by two opposed examples: the nonconformist Reverend Phillip Doddridge recommended to educate children “plainly, - seriously, - tenderly, - and patiently”<sup>496</sup>, abhorring any bodily punishment, which was in stark

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<sup>493</sup> See Kevin Gilmartin's essay “Study to be Quiet”.

<sup>494</sup> See Mona Scheuermann, *In Praise of Poverty*, passim.

<sup>495</sup> See Lawrence Stone, “Literacy and Education in England 1640–1900”, p. 92.

<sup>496</sup> Phillip Doddridge (1702-1741), *Works* (1804), qtd. in Laqueur, p.17.

opposition to Susanna Wesley's<sup>497</sup> famous dictum to "break the wills of children"<sup>498</sup>. These two examples may still have represented to a certain measure the ambiguity in the treatment and education of children during Hannah More's Mendip time, although, to follow Laqueur's deliberations, there was a "new sensibility", expounded by "two traditions of thought": one, the growing belief in the "power of reason" and two, the ambivalent evangelical attitude towards the "nature of childhood". On the one hand they believed in the innate sinfulness of children and the necessity of severe "corrective discipline", on the other hand, they saw them capable of receiving God's grace and able to teach and convert adults. (Laqueur, 10) Hannah More obviously followed the middle-path, because we may assume that Hannah More was one of those Evangelicals who occasionally preached a certain severity towards children (as in *Strictures*), but nowhere in the *Annals* or her correspondence do we find hints at her encouraging a severe treatment of children. On the contrary, the famous and much loved head-mistress Mrs. Baber speaks very much against any harsh treatment. But in view of the specific circumstances in those days, that is, when society was unwilling or indifferent to the educational needs of the poor, the employment of a certain measure of religious dogmatism and zeal should generously be passed over. In a letter to Wilberforce, Hanna More referred to this matter, saying "I have never tried the system of terror, because I have found that kindness produces a better end by better means,"<sup>499</sup> thus indirectly confirming that something like terror existed.

When F. K. Brown asserts that Hannah More's *Tracts* are "wholly authentic in every part and respect [as a statement] of Evangelical views on all pertinent moral, social, political and religious topics" (Brown, 124), he is in perfect tune with More's statement that the success of the Sunday schools should "impress us with a full determination of making every scheme subservient to religious purposes" (qtd. in *Annals*, 232). Even if More's statement takes the sting out of Brown's criticism, the fact remains

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<sup>497</sup> Susanna Wesley (1669-1742) was the mother of John and Charles Wesley and wife of Samuel Wesley. She is also named as the "mother of Methodism", because she strongly influenced John and Charles Wesley with her education. (Source: *Wikipedia*)

<sup>498</sup> Paul Sangster, *Pity my Simplicity: The Evangelical Revival and the Religious Education of Children 1738-1800* (1963), pp. 29-30 (qtd. in Laqueur, p.18).

that the Sunday schools and their affiliated social schemes were depending on Evangelical activism, which in retrospect often became notorious for its intrusion and imposition. More's emphasis on religion in the Sunday schools, as part of the Evangelical activism, may have been her opening move to reforming society from the bottom, which certainly also meant to alleviate poverty and give it a new (religious) meaning before everything else. If we follow this line of thought, it can be argued that the Evangelicals subordinated all they did for the poor to Evangelical religious principles. The thought then is unavoidable that the Evangelicals were, seen from an agnostic standpoint, doing the *right thing* for the *wrong motive*, because their entire commitment was just a means to an end. However, when Hannah More writes in *Estimate* that to give, even out of the wrong motives, was better than not to give at all, because the misery of the poor did not allow to inquire into the motives of benevolence, this makes such ethical arguments irrelevant. On the other hand, when we look at the large amounts of money many Evangelicals gave away to the poor, and if we have particularly Wilberforce's generosity in mind, disinterested charity and philanthropy must also have played a dominant role. It seems rather obvious that most of the poor, both in the Sunday schools and their affiliated social amenities, the More sisters had taken under their supervision could not care less about the motives of charity, but obediently and meekly followed the Mores' critical remarks in the annual *charges*, lest they should run the risk of forfeiting their patrons' support.

To raise the question of expediency in Evangelical benevolence seems justified. But we may also ask with David Newsome what was wrong in "those who believe[d] spiritual blessings to be a greater gift than temporal [ones]", as Evangelicals like Hannah More did. He wonders why "acts of simple humanity" should have been "*despised* [emphasis added] by them", as F. K. Brown insinuates?<sup>500</sup> Hannah More very soon learnt her lesson that more spirituality could only be achieved by eventually going beyond "mere morality"<sup>501</sup>, and that in turn, as a first step, morality could only be

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<sup>499</sup> Letter of Hannah More to William Wilberforce, dated 21 July 1801 (qtd. in Stott, p.124).

<sup>500</sup> David Newsome, p. 299.

<sup>501</sup> See *Annals*, p. 55.

achieved if the lives of the poor were improved by philanthropic measures in order to overcome poverty and hunger and to transform the poor into 'deserving poor'.<sup>502</sup> It was possibly this chain of ideas that Hannah More soon became conscious of in her philanthropic work in the Mendips. It can be easily reconstructed in the *Annals* as during the initial phase of the Sunday schools her call for more spirituality was soon displaced, but *not* replaced, by the more profane question of how to alleviate poverty.

Motives and expediency of philanthropy aside, what impelled More to her labour, including the writing of her *Tracts* for the poor, could simply also have been "[her] womanly desire to ameliorate the lot of those less fortunate," even if it was "underwritten by her Christian social ethic," which followed "a strict Evangelical logic of causes and consequences [...] [by setting] improvident vice against tested virtue," as Mitzi Myers<sup>503</sup> points out. Maybe Myers is closer to a possible truth than many other critics of Hannah More before, which becomes even more obvious in the context of the mini social projects More ventured on along with the Sunday schools, such as the famous "box", the clubs for women, tea parties and also the annual Mendip feasts, which became exemplary for bringing rich and poor together.

### **Expanding the Scope of Activities: Mendip Feasts and Other Social Innovations -**

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<sup>502</sup> This, however, was a severe task in a society where, in reality, "poverty [was] more disgraceful than even vice [...] and morality cut to the quick", as Mary Wollstonecraft insinuated. (*Vindication*, p. 265)

In the higher echelons, for instance, it was "wit ...[which made] poverty honourable, and indigence, honour'd" (Mrs. Montagu to the Duchess of Portland, 1741, qtd. in *A Later Pepys*, p. 98); and Hester Chapone wrote to Pepys in 1784 that she would have found Johnson "a very *unsympathising* friend" as one "who fear[ed] pain [...] more than death, & pit[ied] many Sorrows [sic] more than poverty". (qtd. in *A Later Pepys*, p. 408)

<sup>503</sup> Mitzi Myers, "Hannah More's Tracts for the Times", in *Fetter'd or Free ?*, p. 274.



### **An Act of Welfare or Calculation?**

Hannah More's efforts of teaching the poor to read the Bible and in its trail her *Tracts*, thus elevating them to a certain level of moral standard and respectability, was also a well-considered act of fostering social harmony between the rich and the poor. The first "*Mendip Feast*", as it was "pompous[ly]" named<sup>504</sup>, took place in August 1791<sup>505</sup>. With 500 participating children it was a "manifestation of popular Anglicanism" (Stott, 114), and blazed the trail for further annual events of this sort as a kind of treat for exemplary good behaviour or constant attendance of her schools. In the years to follow, these activities were enlarged by annual *club feasts* with the design to entertain those women who had inscribed for the newly-founded clubs.

One of the features of these feasts was the arrangement that the farmers and their wives should be riding in the wagons together with their poor, and that the well-to-do ladies should be serving tea to their own servants. What Samantha Webb terms "class hybridization"<sup>506</sup> was a *symbolic* gesture rather, because in this way the More sisters contributed a not insignificant share to awakening in the gentlefolk of the Mendip area "the wonder of [...] [doing] good among strangers", as Martha More wrote in her diary (qtd. in *Annals*, 60), propagating the idea of philanthropy also among the gentlefolk of the Mendips.<sup>507</sup> But it is also possible that Hannah More, without infringing hierarchical borders, made an effort to lift the self-esteem of the poor, in the hope that the meeting of poor and affluent might trigger something like a dialogue, as was a standard policy in Hannah More's *Tracts*. Furthermore she may have hoped to trigger in the poor "a working class-consciousness that remain[ed] deferent to authority, virtuous and Godly, grateful to the rich for their patronage, and accepting

<sup>504</sup> Hannah More to Mrs. Kennicott, qtd. in Roberts I, p. 394.

<sup>505</sup> The first Mendip Feast took place either on 4th Aug. 1791 (diary entry Martha More qtd. in *Annals*, p. 36), or on 1st August 1792 (as reported in Hannah More's letter to Mrs. Kennicott on 2nd August, qtd. in Roberts I, p. 394). Since dates in William Roberts' work are very unreliable, the 4th Aug. 1791 is probably the correct date.

<sup>506</sup> Samantha Webb. "Narrative Space as Social Space". 28<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2010  
<<http://prometheus.cc.emory.edu/panels/4C/S.Webb.html>>, p. 2.

<sup>507</sup> By the time the More sisters decided to set up Sunday schools, the century was well under way to become the 'age of benevolence'. Both benevolence and philanthropy had become watchwords and female philanthropy, as the calling of the ladies of the higher ranks, fashionable. This issue is profoundly dealt with in Hannah More's novel *Coelebs*.

poverty." <sup>508</sup> Even if the mutual contact among the ranks may not have lasted, it was likely to awaken a modest amount of social responsibility in the affluent and, instead of envy in the poor, the feeling that poverty was respectable and God-given.

Certainly, these "dinner[s] of beef, and plum-pudding, and cider"<sup>509</sup>, as part of More's bribery-scheme, or "strategy of bribery", as Anne Stott more elegantly puts it (Stott, 115), became very popular and gained much ground among the poor. In addition with the "annual club feasts" (*Annals*, 83), which Hannah More also introduced to the Mendip area, social events of hitherto unknown dimension came to life. In a letter to Mrs. Kennicott dated July 18, 1793, she narrated how she and her sister "Patty" marched in front of the congregation of women up the highest hill in the country, accompanied by "the music of half- a-dozen villages" (qtd. in *Annals*, 83) and made tea for "hungry hundreds" who "drank twelve hundred dishes" (qtd. in *Annals*, 84). Hannah More prided herself on seeing the women tidily dressed despite their poverty. The presentation of the "marriage prizes", which "consisted of only five shillings, a new Bible, and a pair of white stockings of our own knitting" (qtd. in *Annals*, 84), solely to those brides who had gained a fair reputation for attending the instructions of the schools, followed.<sup>510</sup> Hannah More took precise stock of the expenditures entailed by the schools and the social events as much as she kept a keen eye on anything that was distributed to the deserving poor, as thriftiness was also a typical Evangelical virtue. Nothing was in fact squandered or given away without an end. Hannah More, in her practical and utilitarian way, handled her undertakings in perfect agreement with the Evangelical tenets of giving and taking.

One of the crowning experiences among the annual feasts must have been the *great Mendip feast* on the 16th August 1793, when all nine schools of nearly one thousand children, together with some eight thousand people, met on a hill and were fed beef and pudding, praised the

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<sup>508</sup> Samantha Webb. "Narrative Space as Social Space". 28<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2010 <<http://prometheus.cc.emory.edu/panels/4C/S.Webb.html>>, p. 6.

<sup>509</sup> Hannah More to Mrs. Kennicott, qtd. in Roberts I, p. 394.

<sup>510</sup> These tokens and other little gifts distributed on other occasions were critically eyed by the clergy of the Established Church, as for instance by Bishop Horsley. (See 'Critical Voices' in this chapter.)

lord by singing psalms and hymns and were watched over by the clergy of the surrounding parishes. For the poor the feast was the reward for a year's labour of intensively studying the Bible. The impression, however, that the feast was of "a gay nature", is misleading, for "[t]he meeting took its rise from religious institutions. The day passed in the exercise of duties, and closed with praise" (qtd. in *Annals*, 88/89); and instead of anything "of a gay nature, was introduced [...] loyalty to the king" which, so Martha More, "never interfered with higher duties to the King of kings" (qtd. in *Annals*, 89). It was *this* loyalty, Hannah More made quite clear to the participants of the feast, which she expected, and which "should [even] make a part of their religion".<sup>511</sup> "God save the King" was thus sung by everyone, and was "the only pleasure in the form of a song, *we ever allow*<sup>512</sup> [emphasis added]" (qtd. in *Annals*, 88), Martha remarked in her diary, paying tribute to the Evangelical maxim that

[a]ny activity not subordinated to a theocentric pattern of life must be constructed as disloyalty to God. The Evangelical must *live in the world*, where Providence had placed him, but must *not be of the world* [emphasizes added]. (Jay, 180)

It may seem that these poor creatures had to pay a high price for being entertained and fed, for the strictness of the Evangelical doctrines did not allow for much gaiety.<sup>513</sup> On the other hand, the Mores felt the critical eyes of the Established Church on them and tried to evade giving any offence in connection with their religious ambitions. Obviously undetained by such deliberations, the Reverend John Newton enthusiastically wrote in his letter pertaining to the Mendip feast: "Homer never dreamed of such a scene as was exhibited on the top of Mendip on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August last, the account of which in the newspapers gladdened my heart." (qtd. in *Annals*,

<sup>511</sup> Hannah More to Mrs. Kennicott, qtd. in Roberts I, p. 394.

<sup>512</sup> Hannah More's dictum can possibly be explained by E. P. Thompson, who says that singing was expressive of the "true purpose" of educational material in Sunday schools, giving as an example "Isaac Watts' *Divine Songs for Children*, or moralistic variants by later writers", replacing "Wesley's lurid hymns". (E. P. Thompson 1966, p. 376)

<sup>513</sup> The question is, was Hannah More, and with her the Evangelicals in general, in analogy with their handling of intellectual questions (Rosman 3, hinting at the *Edinburgh Review* lii, 1831, p. 449), also generating an "Evangelical system" in analogy with the Methodists as "killjoys" (Rosman 2, hinting at the *Edinburgh Review* xi, 1808, p. 357)? Sydney Smith's attack, never really discriminating between Methodists and Anglican Evangelicals, claimed that "[...] no dancing, no punchinello, no dancing dogs, no blind fiddlers ;—all the amusements of the rich and of the poor must disappear, wherever these gloomy people get a footing. It is not the abuse of pleasure which they attack, but the

89) In a letter dated the same year (1793), Newton encouraged the Mendip work, writing "Go on, ladies! God is with you." (qtd. in *Annals*, 90) Not all, however, shared the Reverend Newton's excitement. In 1794, the year of the "little Mendip feast" (qtd. in *Annals*, 119), revealed that "Satan himself" did not sleep after all and gave proof of his existence by their congregation being abused by the neighbours' "sneering epithets" (qtd. in *Annals*, 120). Martha More felt compelled to thinking over the *motives* of their doings<sup>514</sup>: whether they ought to be re-examined, and whether care was to be taken "that even simple pleasures might not interfere with strict principles" (qtd. in *Annals*, 120). The true background of this rather cryptic diary entry is not further commented on, and we are free from the occasional hostility Hannah and Martha experienced from the villagers, to attribute it to the fear of Methodism, or to the fear that educating the poor might alienate them from low work, a fear the affluent gentry and farmers of the Mendips regarded as well-founded, and influential persons like Sydney Smith still tried to disperse even more than a decade later.<sup>515</sup>

Certainly, these club feasts and school feasts, which soon became "a symbiosis of tradition, patriotism, and moralizing" (Stott, 117), represent but one example of how Hannah More ventured to penetrate into the lives of the poor in the Mendips. In a letter to Wilberforce Hannah More reported quite frankly about the *motives* which lay behind her philanthropic activities. Mrs. Barber, her favourite head-teacher, or her daughter, More wrote,

visited the sick, chiefly with a view to their *spiritual concerns*; but we concealed the *true motive* at first; and in order to procure them access to the houses and hearts of the people, they were furnished, not only with medicine, but with a little money, which they administered with great prudence. They soon gained their confidence, read and prayed to them; and in all respects did just what a good clergyman does in other parishes [emphasizes added]. (qtd. in Roberts I, 390)

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interspersed with pleasure, however much it is guarded by good sense and moderation. (*Works* 1869, p. 110.)

<sup>514</sup> The Evangelicals were in the habit of making explicit diary-entries about their activities with the aim to steadily alter them for the better, a habit Sydney Smith termed a "truly evangelical habit of self-examination". (*Sermons I*, p. 397)

<sup>515</sup> See Sydney Smith, *Sermons I*, IV, pp. 53 - 69.

We may give Hannah More the benefit of the doubt that the practiced charity was not a mere pretext to open the hearts of the poor for the Evangelical creed, because frequently Hannah More trimmed contents and language of her correspondence to purpose and addressee. This time she was reporting to the most prominent Evangelical and donor, and she gladly let him know her efforts of spreading the new Evangelical "activist philanthropy" (Laqueur, 1). After all, Hannah More seems to have acted like a true Christian philanthropist, who, seeking "the moral and spiritual benefit of the poor [...] by no means overlook[ed] their temporal interests" (Taylor, 162), as one of Hannah More's earliest biographers maintained. The explanation of this, however, may rest in his supposition that

it is when the objects of our benevolence discover in us a kind solicitude for their temporal welfare that they [the poor] will be most inclined to listen to our instruction, [...] [the more so] as they discover on the part of their benefactors, a concern to promote their spiritual welfare. (Taylor, 162)

This is not exactly the same how More dealt with the poor, but comes rather close to it. If we follow Taylor's appraisal, More's philanthropic activities for the poor may thus be summed up as being "so devised as to have a decided bearing on their spiritual as well as their temporal interests" (Taylor, 134), which can be underlined by Hannah More herself, confiding to her diary a prayer:

I thank thee, that by thus being enabled to assist the outward wants of the body, I have the better means of making myself heard and attended to in speaking to them of their spiritual wants. Let me never separate temporal from spiritual charity but act in humble imitation of my blessed Lord and his apostles. (qtd. in Taylor, 162),

This is apt to take the sting from More's letter to W. Wilberforce (see above). On another occasion, she wrote in the same vein that she was full of praise that God had given her a chance to mitigate some of the misery of the poor, to "assist the outward wants of the body" by means of which she got acquainted with their "spiritual wants" as well, for "healing the sick" was often made an instrument of "'healing" by the "apostles" (qtd. in *Annals*, 139). In all her compassion for the worldly wants of the poor, Hannah More's true interest, it may be summed up, was *lastly* directed

towards their spiritual wants, for, to her mind, "sin [...] [was] a greater evil than poverty" (qtd. in *Annals*, 139).

It seems easy to guess from this philanthropic labour<sup>516</sup> the rapidly growing resentment and mistrust on the side of the *regular* Anglican clergy, even if the area was actually without a resident priest and the Evangelicals, for this reason, were given the chance to take over some of the Anglican clergy's duties.

In this atmosphere of extreme pauperism, religious and moral neglect, Hannah More tried to ameliorate the wants of the poor both spiritual and moral, using means which practically offered themselves. One more example of how More tried to get access to the lives of the poor was visiting the sick in their homes, another to disseminate the message of damnation and salvation among the parents of the children who visited her Sunday schools. Hannah More realized that the bad examples her pupils saw at home from her parents, who were not acquainted with either the Bible or the catechism, would at least partly undo her work. To counteract this risk, she installed family prayers with the purpose that the adults, casting away their pride, should learn from their children what they had been taught at school, at the same time practicing an important Evangelical virtue, namely "humility", as "[t]he first great duty of a Christian". The parents of the children ought to be "content and thankful to learn from [their] children".<sup>517</sup> The effect was both social and religious. Hannah More, a fervent defender of the hierarchical order in all situations, was here apparently departing from this principle by making an effort at moralizing from the *very bottom*. In a society where a growing general lack of obedience towards institutions, including that of the family, and of children towards their parents, was much deplored, More, for the sake of moral and religious benefit, decided to invert the social hierarchy in her personal social world in the Mendips. Using the warlike language of More's time, the children thus became the "advance troops, leading an invasion of godliness into their parents' houses" (Laqueur, 8). Hannah More had

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<sup>516</sup> Today, in the opinion of Ann K. Mellor, we would call Hannah More a "social worker" (*Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 4), and refers to her own characterization, namely that "[t]he care of the poor is her profession" (qtd. from *Coelebs*, 1808).

<sup>517</sup> Quotes from the *charge* of 1794, *Annals*, p. 111.

finally and successfully managed to get access to the homes of the poor by taking and uniting children, adolescents and adults under her moralizing wing.

### **Women's Clubs and 'Charges'**

Hannah More's Evangelical activism for the social welfare and her strong sense of mission soon found additional expression in her founding of clubs for the poor Mendip women. Clubs were a tradition of long standing in Britain and existed already for men in other places. For the Mendips, however, they were an invention of the More sisters, dating back to 1793, which became gradually institutionalized, with exhortations at the end of meetings on “the vices or faults”, or the “neglect of sending the children sufficiently early [to school]”, or “goings to shops on Sundays”, or “not always telling the truth”. (*Annals*, 82) These "charges", a system of praise and criticism, with exhortation and rewards on the one hand and disparagement for the 'undeserving' on the other were also made use of to remind attending vicars and curates that prior to Hannah and Martha More's arrival to Cheddar, the church was empty; and they were also a good forum to critically mention the “self-righteousness in some new converts” (*Annals*, 86), which is characteristic of those who are convinced to be on the right track to godliness.

Hierarchical thinking with its consequences of submission, obedience, gratitude and dependence, were the basic elements Hannah More and her sister "Patty" used for their charges delivered to the women's clubs, and seen from today's standpoint, they were paternalistic and condescending. It was what Davidoff and Hall have termed the "dereliction of duty" (Davidoff, 169) in the higher orders that Hannah More had heavily scorned in *Thoughts* and *Estimate*. She now possibly tried to do the same with the poor women of the Mendips. Even if Hannah More had submerged in the totally new world of poverty, her sentiments cannot have changed so rapidly as not to discern even among the poor what women *were in reality*

and what they *ought to be*, as she would later make clear in *Strictures* and *Coelebs*. We must also keep in mind that Hannah More, when entering upon the Mendip enterprise, had been prevented from continuing to moralize the rich, at least for the time being. Her mind, after having published *Estimate* (1790), must have been still preoccupied with the *Strictures* (1799), where her attitude focused on women of *ton*. Maybe Hannah More never really departed from this urging, repetitive and persuasive tone originally intended for the rich ladies. Her efforts were aimed at gaining moral ground, teaching the rich how to use their affluence for Christian purposes, while in the case of the poor teaching them how to cope with their poverty in a God pleasing way. Even if these two groups of women were socially worlds apart, they were united by their subordinate status. If Blackstone's Marriage Act made sure that women upon marriage were deprived practically of all rights and means, this seemed to be of no consequence in the case of the poor. Unlike the rich women, the poor were deprived of their fair chances by Providence. But both groups of women were wanting morals and spirituality, Hannah More was convinced; and only a morally flawless life and a genuine devotion to God would secure women of all social groups a spiritual place equal if not even superior to that of men.<sup>518</sup>

The charges may also remind us of the annual charges the Anglican bishops were in the habit of delivering to their clergy, and it is likely that Hannah More derived the idea from this source. But in studying these annual charges we are also reminded of preaching - albeit without the pulpit. Hannah More's rank and Evangelical creed joined together apparently quite naturally justified such demeanour.

The charge rendered in 1794 was the second since their introduction and supposedly prepared by the More sisters in their winter-quarter Bath. It is contained in the *Annals* in full length (pp. 108-115), thus of particular interest, and bears witness to their activities during the previous year. The stock matters, like Sabbath infringement and not sending the children to

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<sup>518</sup> Or, as M. G. Jones summarized it in her biography *Hannah More*, 1952, p.116: "Miss More made the surprising statement that only in religion were women the equal, and indeed the superior, of men." For more on woman's deliberation with respect to her social inferiority see *Strictures*, 1799, Vol. I and II.



school in time aside, this charge pertains also to dancing as a winter amusement. But there was also praise for those women who had declined this dancing and “pretty strong exhortations to future good conduct” (*Annals*, 107). A great part of this charge was dedicated to Shipham dancing. The intelligence which reached Martha More in some instances spoke of “shocking scenes of vice” (*Annals*, 112), unbecoming to those who attended the religious instructions but also partook in these “licentious dancing-matches”, or the “lewd plays in a neighbouring town” (*Annals* 112/113). But there were also those “sober, worthy, modest, pious mistresses” (*Annals*, 13) who stayed away from these temptations, studying the Bible instead, Martha said. One point of particular interest Martha addressed to the mothers was to make sure that all that they were taught would not be counteracted by their behaviour at home, lest all their learning should be of no avail and their chance of being good examples to their children wasted. These instructions comprised such things as not telling lies; guarding their tongues when tempted to “taking God’s name in vain”; and keeping the Sabbath-day holy, the infringement of which, by for instance shopping on that holy day, Martha thought to be “a daring and a dreadful sin” (*Annals*, 114), because it not only involved the trespasser himself, who consequently ate the bread and drank the tea in sin, but also the child sent for it, and the shop-keeper who had to wait on him. Martha also turned to the comfort of “allowances from the box” women had received in sickness in, so she hoped, the appropriate spirit of “gratitude” (*Annals*, 115).

The charge ended with a prayer for God’s assistance that “no affliction [may] take place unaccompanied by a conviction of sin” and that His

unworthy instruments [may] be successful in impressing the truths of religion on the minds of both young and old, that so the Redeemer’s *name* and *power* may reach every heart, renew every nature, and finally bring every soul to God! (*Annals*, 115)

The initiation of the "box" was an outstanding idea. A very modest subscription, to which Hannah More herself regularly generously contributed,<sup>519</sup> secured the donation of a certain sum of money for lying-in

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<sup>519</sup> Hannah More must have had a déjà-vu when she realized that the women developed a certain amount of distrust and bewilderment towards her cleverly handling their modest

women, even if some women preferred “a handsome funeral” out of the stock to it, with the paradoxical argument, “[w]hat did a poor woman work hard for, but in hopes she should be put out of the world in a tidy way?” (qtd. in *Annals*, 65/66). This was probably less a “clash of values” as Stott suggests (Stott, 116) than a craving for a minimum of dignity at least in death. When social allowances from the “box” were increased by adding a guinea for a funeral, this was “rapturously” (*Annals*, 107) received. Additional relief in case of their sickness was quite obviously of less interest to the women of the Shipham Club.

### **Praise and Criticism**

The belief of fulfilling God's will, perseverance, diligence and devotion lent wings to Hannah More's and her sister "Patty's" educational and social work in the Mendips. However, their philanthropic efforts were often eyed with suspicion as to their true purpose, evoking praise and criticism alike.

The Reverend William Shaw, for instance, not exactly a well-wisher of Hannah More, edited his *Life of Hannah More* in 1802. He belonged to that fraction of Anglican clergymen who were presumably involved in or at least sympathized with the initiator of the Blagdon Controversy. Critical and even defamatory towards Hannah More, he surprised with a rather restrained opinion of Sunday schools. He explained that his deferred verdict about them would have to wait “until [he would] come to notice them under the article of the Blagdon controversy” (Shaw, 69), thus giving himself the chance of trimming his sails to the wind. His attention for the *Tracts of the Repository*, too, remained superficial, and Hannah More's efforts to counteract the influx of Jacobinical and atheistical pamphlets, and countering Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1791/92) with *Village Politics* and M. Dupont's atheistic speech<sup>520</sup>, held in the National Convention at Paris in 1792 (in a debate on the subject of establishing Public Schools for

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sum of money, because years before the poet Ann Yearsley, Hannah More's protégé, had no appreciation for More's well-meant (albeit unasked) supervision, which entailed a war of letters.

the education of youth) with *Remarks on the Speech of M. Dupont*<sup>521</sup>, were ignored by Shaw as if non-existent. As *Village Politics* must be seen as a very good example of this warding off infidel tendencies in the country, his ignoring the obvious purpose of Hannah More's *Village Politics* must have had system: the Blagdon Controversy was still raging, and Hannah More's schools were not free from the suspicion of Jacobinical and Methodistical tendencies. The Reverend Shaw declared Hester Wilmot's puritanical conversion in Hannah More's *Tract* of the same name<sup>522</sup> to be an example of extreme absurdity, which reminded him of stories told in Mr. Wesley's journal, thus insidiously linking More's school activities with Methodism. Conversions as the purpose of preaching, Shaw argued, were something different than those which happened by a "sudden paroxysm" (Shaw, 84). Such "convulsive" and "epileptic conversions", so Shaw, were exemplified by Hester Wilmot's puritanical conversion and were practised by More's teachers "with or without her approbation and countenance" (Shaw, 85). But, since Hannah More was not converted herself, as Shaw imputed on the ground of her accusatory correspondence to the Bishop of Bath and Wells, Dr. Beadon, in the course of the Blagdon Controversy,<sup>523</sup> she was supposedly unable to report such a puritanical conversion. Shaw thus concluded that conversions of such a kind were "but a system" (Shaw, 86). The story and "system of Hannah More" presented in *Hester Wilmot*, then, were, so Shaw, "the platform" (Shaw, 87) of the Sunday schools, with the object of inculcating puritanical ideas not only in children but in adults as well, with the "ultimate object" of "revolution" or "schism" (Shaw, 87) in the Established Church. Even if there was to be reform at all, so Shaw without further committing himself as to its nature, it "should be gradual, not upon non-descript principles", and it ought to come from "eminently learned and pious men", and "by the authority of the legislature, and [should] not [be]

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<sup>520</sup> For Dupont's Speech ("exact Translation") see "Speech of Mr. Dupont", Hannah More, *Works I*, pp. 302-303.

<sup>521</sup> See Hannah More's "Remarks on the Speech of M. Dupont" (1793), *Works I*, pp. 301-311.

<sup>522</sup> "The History of Hester Wilmot" (being the second part of the "Sunday Schools"), *Works I*, pp. 233-241.

<sup>523</sup> See Hannah More's famous letter dated 1802, qtd. in H. Thompson, pp. 200-222; also the relevant correspondence in *The Controversy Between Hannah More and the Curate of Blagdon* by Thomas Bere, 1801.

forced upon us by the blind zeal and violence of a "sect", whose principles are not yet known", except for their "cunning and hypocrisy" (Shaw, 87). Shaw, who underlined his orthodoxy, was a tough defender of hierarchy both in the state and the church and unable to understand the Evangelicals within the Church of England, with their ambitious activism. It was easier to stamp them as sectarians than to see in them Anglican brethren of a better kind. In all his efforts to degrade Hannah More and her schools and teaching, it becomes obvious how much it was at issue *how* and *by whom* the poor, if at all, ought to be instructed. It also shows how the drowsy Anglican clergy had begun to severely fear the omnipresence of Methodism or anything resembling it.

Even Bishop Horsley<sup>524</sup> in "various charges and sermons"<sup>525</sup> maintained that the dissenters and Methodists acted on "jacobinical" motives in order "to overthrow the Episcopalian form of church government", and that "sedition and atheism" were the true objects of the Sunday schools rather than religion, in which the Jacobins were improperly making Methodism their tool, "accomplices in a conspiracy against the Lord and against his Christ." (qtd. in Hall, *Works II*, 171) It had also come to Horsley's knowledge that little gifts were distributed to the poor in these schools, apparently as a kind of bribery to have their children sent to their schools rather than those of the Established Church. Of course, what Hannah and Martha More gave away were modest rewards and incentives, the former for regularly attending school or good behaviour, the latter with a view to a decent future conduct. The sisters perceived these little gifts as a kind of bribery themselves,<sup>526</sup> but there seemed to be nothing objectionable about them. It was in the hands of the Anglicans to do the same, which the poor certainly would have appreciated. Bishop Horsley, however, felt that these schools and Sunday schools "in the shape and disguise of charity" in

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<sup>524</sup> Samuel Horsley (1733 – 1806) was an Anglican churchman, and Bishop of Rochester from 1792, holding the deanery of Westminster. He entered Trinity Hall Cambridge in 1751, was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1767, and secretary in 1773. In 1781 he was installed as archdeacon of St. Albans. He entered on a fierce debate with Joseph Priestly who denied that the early Christians held the doctrine of the Trinity. (Source: *Wikipedia*)

<sup>525</sup> Extracts of his charge, published in 1800, are added as footnote to the "Note of the Editor" in *The Works of the Reverend Robert Hall*, Vol. II, 1833, p. 171.

<sup>526</sup> The *Mendip Annals* contain several good examples of these shrewd actions the More sisters were very well aware of.

reality “taught to despise religion, and the laws, and all subordination.” (qtd. in Hall, *Works II*, 171) Horsley strongly recommended Sunday schools, however, under the guidance and supervision of the parochial clergy with its hierarchical structures, in which he perfectly coincided with the Reverend William Shaw. Such allegations were certainly completely out of place with Hannah More, who herself was a tough defender of hierarchy both in church and social ranks and as such an adherent, above all, to obedience and subordination. These were important criteria of the Evangelicals. But in her absolute affinity to hierarchy in the church, too, More must have felt the criticism of a Baptist divine whom she much admired for his brilliant preaching: the Reverend Robert Hall.

The Reverend Robert Hall, a Baptist, criticised the hierarchy in the Established Church for good reasons. He found that the very nature of a hierarchy in the church fosters disagreement between the “public creed of the church and the private sentiments of its ministers”, which led to a “corrupt alliance between church and state” (Hall, *Works II*, 79). The consequence, so Hall, was that the “depression of religion” was proportional to the “elevation of the hierarchy” in the national church, a problem the dissenting groups, naturally, did not suffer from, and that piety thus was more explicit among dissenters. (Hall, *Works II*, 79) Robert Hall, the most popular and admired preacher of his time, was in clear opposition to Bishop Horsley, and fervently defended the Sunday schools against negative criticism and their placement under the control of the ecclesiastical establishment by “control[ing] movements of benevolence, and construe[ing] the impulse of compassion into a crime.”<sup>527</sup> One of these negative currents which came along in the attempted form of restrictions on “persons who wished to qualify as dissenting teachers” together with a proposal “to deprive lay-preachers of certain exemptions which had hitherto been granted” (Hall, *Works II*, 172), stemmed from Lord Sidmouth, Member of Parliament in the years 1810 and 1811, long after the Blagdon Controversy had ceased. Luckily for the Evangelicals, however, his proposals, which had caused a huge stir, were turned down after much prominent opposition.

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<sup>527</sup> R. Hall, “Fragment on Village Teaching”, *Works II*, p. 175.

That a slowly growing number of Evangelical clergy within the Church of England should be enthusiastic about Hannah More's activities in the Mendips seems logical. The Reverend J. Newton, for instance, after having attended one of the feasts in the Mendips organized by the More sisters, wrote an euphoric letter about what he had seen there and claimed that even "Homer had never dreamed of such a scene as was exhibited on the top of Mendip."<sup>528</sup> Others voiced their wait-and-see attitude or were plainly negative. But there were also those among the Anglican clergy who clearly had an affinity towards Hannah More's work. One of them was the Bishop of London, Beilby Porteus, who welcomed her "plan" to embark on writing little tracts of popular but morally uplifting character for the poor in order to channel the new knowledge of reading in a positive direction, away from seditious and licentious publications, which inundated the growing readers' market, to *safe reading*. In addition, he even suggested to make efforts in distributing More's *Tracts* in "[his] own diocese [sic]".<sup>529</sup>

With the examples given above, we may not only arrive at the conclusion that opinions and attitudes within the clergy of the Anglican Church were often of a very diverging stamp, and thus not always helpful as a moral support of Hannah More's Sunday schools, but we may also presume that the growing dissent and secularization were not insignificantly stimulated by the religious resentment thus provoked.

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<sup>528</sup> Letter to Hannah More, qtd. in *Annals*, p. 89.

<sup>529</sup> Letter Beilby Porteus to Hannah More dated 1794, qtd. in Roberts I, p. 456.

## Conclusion

What had been intended as a mere school venture for the very poor, soon became, due to Hannah More's philanthropic and religious efforts and also due to her personal relationships she cleverly put to use, the widespread Mendip scheme. This is not only an allusion to the extensive area but also to the variety it developed as a successful programme for moral and social change within the existing political and social order. With the changing success of the schools and the teaching of the Scriptures, one of the effects was that the congregation in the church in Cheddar grew to an extent that there were often not enough seats to hold it, the *Annals* (73) report.<sup>530</sup>

With the Sunday-school project Hannah More had invented herself anew. Her shift from the higher ranks to the poor corresponded with her hopes to teach those who would possibly accept her religious and moral concepts, unlike the higher ranks, who, although they read her writings, and still admired and flattered her, did not adhere to her moral principles, as Hester Chapone summed it up in a letter to Hannah More in 1799, quoting the prediction of a lady: "Everybody will read her, everybody admire her, and nobody mind her."<sup>531</sup>

Martha More, without doubt, was the driving force behind the school-project in the Mendips. She was the one who held the fort during Hannah's absences either because of her frequent headaches, or because of her visits to London and to Clapham<sup>532</sup>. William Wilberforce became aware of this fact and often referred to her as "general" in his letters.<sup>533</sup> Martha More's gift for writing had become conspicuous before, but when she rendered a perfect atmospheric picture of the funeral of Hannah More's head-mistress, the beloved Mrs. Barber, she had doubtless proven her great talent. It gives rise to the justified assumption that she has a

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<sup>530</sup> Hannah More for this obvious reason frequented a dissenting church as she openly admitted to the Bishop of Wells in her explanatory letter in the course of the Blagdon Controversy.

<sup>531</sup> See Roberts II, p. 37.

<sup>532</sup> The assembly of well-to-do Evangelicals like Wilberforce and Thornton in Clapham became known as the Clapham Sect.

significant share in the *Tracts*. But also Hannah More's sister Sarah contributed to the *Tracts*<sup>534</sup>, later termed *Cheap Repository Tracts*, which were written from 1795 to 1798.<sup>535</sup> It gives also rise to the assumption that some of the annual charges, if they were not joint ventures, may also have stemmed from Martha More's pen, especially those which were less severe and less carried by efforts to remind the audience of poor villagers of their providentially assigned humble place in a divinely ordained hierarchical order.

"The growth of Sunday schools [...] is a phenomenon in the history of education which is without a parallel" (F. Smith, 65) in spite of their often inadequate and crude methods of instruction. But the majority of the poor children got at least acquainted with some kind of discipline, rules of behaviour, morals and religion. Even if writing was off the curriculum, reading certainly must have served many as a means of self-education in later years. As the run on Sunday schools by pupils of all ages seemed to indicate a "drive for self-improvement among working people" (E. P. Thompson, 1968, 783), it may be assumed that "[t]he Sunday School was an idea whose hour had come," meeting "the needs of a socially disturbed people who were experiencing the trauma of transition" (Cliff, 69). The forgotten people of Cheddar became enlightened in as much as they grew aware of their "fallen nature" (*Annals*, 80) and that by Divine assistance redemption by way of repentance was possible for the sinners on account of the death and sufferings of Jesus Christ. Also, "book knowledge" and learning by heart became popular, although in general, Hannah More never fancied learning by rote.

According to Ian Bradley, the Sunday school was "the most successful of the agencies which the Evangelicals devised to convert the working classes". Two "specific factors" instilled in them the idea of setting up Sunday schools, namely "the work discipline" of the rising industry, which

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<sup>533</sup> In W. Wilberforce's letter to Hannah More dated July 18, 1801, he reverted to her sister even as "Lieutenant-General Martha". (*The Correspondence of Wilberforce*, Vol. I, p. 180).

<sup>534</sup> Two examples for *Tracts* which came from Sarah More: "The Cheapside apprentice; or, the history of Mr. Francis H\*\*\*\*" (1797) and "The hububb; or, the history of farmer Russel the hard-hearted overseer" (1797?).

<sup>535</sup> According to Hannah More's diary entry of September 22, 1798, they ceased in 1798. "Cheap Repository is closed", (qtd in Roberts II, 34) she wrote.



made Sunday the only day off for recreation; and the Evangelicals' "own concern to make the Sabbath a day of serious study and not a play for the people" (I. Bradley, 40). Two Evangelical men were at the forefront of the Sunday school movement, whose activities, although some years apart, were set into motion by similar shocking experiences: Robert Raikes, owner of the *Gloucester Journal*, in 1780 accidentally came across a group of children, loitering around aimlessly, depraved and ragged; and William Wilberforce in 1789 instead of admiring the Cliffs of Cheddar had only eyes for the poverty-stricken and distressed people he happened to stumble into. Both experiences led to the establishing of schools. Raikes got involved to an extent that, even though he was not the first to introduce Sunday schools, he became known as their founder; Wilberforce, M. P., and highly active in the abolition of the slave trade, delegated this activity to Hannah More and her sister Martha More.

Since Hannah More had started with her moralizing crusade for the rich, the idea of moralizing the low orders must have met her desire to save the souls of those who were in need of spiritual support more than any other social group. Nowhere else was there a possibility of putting into practice her Evangelical tenets, nowhere else was Providence showing her manifold face more clearly than in the world of poverty and scarcity, of thriftiness, even Godlessness and lawlessness, a world of no principles and rules except for those which secured their survival.

Humanizing the poor and giving them back their dignity before God was Hannah More's great vision. It was a fight for the Lord Jesus Christ, "not against Germany or France", but war "against the flesh and the devil" instead, when they collected sixteen new recruits from the glass-houses, in order to "bring these dark creatures into light (*Annals*, 91)." <sup>536</sup> Their charitable missionary work there was the outward expression of a Christian movement during an age which began to regard benevolence as one of the highest values, and Evangelical tenets as the ingredients of

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<sup>536</sup> To Hannah and Martha More the glass-house people, profligate poor creatures who "abound[ed] in sin and wickedness (qtd. in *Annals*, 42), stood for the spiritual darkness of the natives of the inner parts of Africa. Despite their Godlessness, however, the glass-house people were not insensible to the Gospel, the two charitable ladies were eager to spread. Hannah and Martha More felt compelled to awaken their self-esteem and to

converting the ignorant. And most important of all, the Bible became the centre of instructions.

## V. Epilogue

If Mrs. More's religion was moral,  
her morality was altogether religious.<sup>537</sup>

Two letters which Hannah More wrote in 1829 to a friend in short intervals are of particular interest: "We are all agitation and confusion about the Oxford business.<sup>538</sup> [...] The interest of our church and our country are at stake," she wrote in the first, animating her friend to send her supporting material for dispersal among those "who are likely to turn them to good account." She closed her letter by saying, "[m]y duty, as well as love, to the champion of Protestantism. God bless you all." In the second letter Hannah More enthusiastically cried out "[j]oy, joy, joy to you, to me! Joy to the individual victorious Protestant! Joy to the Protestant cause!"<sup>539</sup> She was carried away by the news about the Protestant success after the Oxford elections of 1829. The Roman Catholic question Robert Peel had courageously determined to cease opposing was deferred.

Once more, a woman of eighty-four, frail, and of poor health, felt safe and at ease in the old order of church and state, if only for a short while, as it would turn out very soon. England, contrary to Hannah More's ardent hope, was not to be exempted from the fall of the *ancien régime*; the reform process was inevitable. The old order of church and state she had so unswervingly served and clung to gave way to a new "political society", replacing "political theology" (Hole, *Hannah More*, XXXV). However, so Robert Hole, "luckily" for Hannah More, "the liberation of female sexuality, the destruction of Christian morality, of religion and of the social order had been avoided." (Hole, *Hannah More*, XXXV) Even if she was at her wits' end, things could have turned out worse for her after all. In fact, with her

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<sup>537</sup> Roberts II, p. 437.

<sup>538</sup> Sir Robert Peel, MP for the University of Oxford, originally against Roman Catholic emancipation, changed his mind and determined to cease opposing it for good reasons: There were no fewer than a hundred persons sitting in the House of Commons to the exclusion of others, "who [were] notoriously more intelligent, more eloquent, more fit in all things" (qtd. from the *Edinburgh Review* of February 1829.

15th April 2013 ><http://www.historyhome.co.uk/peel/religion/oxford2.htm><). The election, initiated by him, resulted in his defeat in 1829, but soon a new seat was found for him in Westbury.

<sup>539</sup> Both letters are qtd. in Roberts II, p. 424.

Victorian ideas<sup>540</sup> and the plethora of social movements concerned with improving public morals during the reign of Queen Victoria, she might even have found a new perspective for her static outlook, but for that she was not going to live long enough. Hannah More had outlived herself. The 'Oxford experience' belonged to the final stage in her life. Luckily for her, she could no longer partake in the new political wave sweeping across England. The Oxford experience, had it turned out the way she had hoped, would have been the culmination of her lifelong idea about an inseparable and indestructible union of state and church based on God-ordained power and providence, all grounded on morality, a morality which was intrinsically connected with religion.

These letters were written four decades after Hannah More had begun her moral crusade, a crusade which deeply reflects the religious, moral and social background of the late eighteenth century and its far-reaching changes which swept over Europe: *ancien régimes* were getting obsolete, new forms of government were envisaged, and the growing Enlightenment of the 'continent' increasingly exerted its influence on both liberal English thinkers and political radicals.

The French Revolution, in its first phase welcomed by many in Britain, once its horrible atrocities became known, was by the clergy and the conservatives made to be seen as God's punishment for godlessness and moral depravation. When Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) appealed to the awareness of those who were still indifferent or ignorant of the danger sweeping over from France, strictly warning the British nation of such a national catastrophe by making clear that departing from the conservative orientation would mean uncertainty and instability in the face of growing atheism, the old debate about the question whether the monarch was ordained by God and the existing hierarchical social order, consequently, of providential origin, gained in popularity again. Still existing sympathies for the French Revolution as a symbol of freedom and justice were no longer openly made known but were entrusted to private diaries instead, with the exception of free-thinkers and liberals like William Godwin and Thomas

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<sup>540</sup> Anne Stott names Hannah More "the first Victorian" in her biography.

Paine as well as Mary Wollstonecraft, for whom the question of the end of the existing inequality remained on the agenda. Their infuriated writings, ridiculing the concept of a God-ordained monarch, however, remained voices in the wilderness. Fear of possible negative consequences of the French Revolution and the possibility of a war made the nation stand together in patriotism. Whereas the establishment of church and government, defended by Edmund Burke, was anxious of steering the old course, the liberal camp on the other hand, much to its dismay, saw its hopes for more personal liberty pushed into the background.

As chance would have it, the political unrest in Britain went hand in hand with Hannah More's search for more meaning in her life after she had turned her back on London's licentiousness. The agitation which assailed Britain from outside matched her inner turbulence. From her new Evangelical angle, she had grown aware of a strong sense of mission and desire to save *her* nation. In this troubled time, Hannah More, instilled with Evangelical doctrines, saw the time come to commence her moral crusade. Her moral endeavours were directed to those whom she regarded as capable of changing the menacing course of the time, namely the rich and influential. But since she felt certain that only a nation with moral integrity would be able to successfully ward off the dangers which assailed Britain from outside, and to cope with the threatening domestic social upheavals inside, all ranks had to stand together. To guarantee moral integrity, before all else, the moral integrity of the higher ranks which, in More's opinion, had reached an alarmingly low level, needed to be improved, because their conduct served as an example for the middling ranks and also for the poor, to whom it would finally trickle down.

More's share in the ensuing war of ideas was to endeavour a moral rearmament of the British as the 'chosen nation'. The weapon she employed was her never-resting pen, which at the time auguring the upheaval in France, during the revolution itself, and its aftermath, brought forth, besides a trilogy of moral pamphlets directed towards those whose influence was great enough to save a nation from total decline by changing their way of life, a large number of *Tracts* for the poor, with the ultimate purpose not only to save their souls, but also to induce them to

peacefully remain within their pre-given social station in life as their 'natural' state. Thanks to her moral integrity, her good relations to the upper ranks, persons of consequence, and the higher echelons of the Anglican clergy, but also her eloquence and her powerful pen, she would gradually emerge as "a champion of the established order" (J.C.D. Clark, 246)

It was before this politically uncertain background, then, that Hannah More launched her conservative pamphlets, which were infused with didactic emphasis and growing religious purpose; and it was a bold undertaking she envisaged, because she risked that those who had hailed her for her literary success in London would shut their doors upon her. But More cleverly availed herself of a foresightful strategy, which she developed step by step: with *Thoughts* (1788) she surprised the rich, who felt flattered that they should be capable of the highest moral attainments, if only they made adequate efforts; in *Estimate* (1790) they were castigated for their lax religious outlook and their fallacious attitude towards charity and benevolence, and offered a new way of practicing 'true Christianity'; finally with *Strictures* (1799) the women of *ton* were reminded of their chance to morally draw even with or even surpass men in growing religious spirituality, and of their inert higher attainments. But it was her work for the poor in the Mendip area which put into action what Hannah More had preached in her moralizing pamphlets all along: 'active' and 'true' Christianity.

More's *Thoughts* were her first effort to moralize the British nation 'from above'. Directed to the rich and influential, they were an appeal to rectify their manners and morals for the sake of securing Britain the reputation as a moral stronghold endowed with the capacity to ward off her enemies. Even if this pamphlet was still rather reserved with regard to her Evangelical orientation, it vehemently called for a strict observation of the Sabbath and hinted at such detestable issues as the slave trade and duelling.

*Estimate*, enlarging on *Thoughts*, was an appraisal of the religious state both of the higher ranks as well as the dormant clergy who, instead of

being critical of the former, preferred to be in their good grace. *Estimate*, however, was getting to the heart of the matter by making it perfectly clear that the majority of those who professed to be Christian were only nominal ones whose hearts were shut up to true Christianity, whose benevolence was profaned by being turned into a means of exchange for a guilty conscience, and whose charity thus had no value in God's eyes. More warned about the danger of Enlightenment creeping into England with the help of self-affirmed philosophers and sceptics and did not hesitate to enlarge on her views how a true Christian ought to act and to live; and did not hesitate to argue over religious dogmas.

Finally with *Strictures*, she made clear that women ought to play a more active role, albeit in the sphere Providence had assigned to them. Hannah More ambivalently encouraged women's rationality, at the same time castigating *the female wit* and lifting a warning finger lest knowledge in women might make them vain. She saw less danger arising from the beauty than from the educated woman, because the former cared only for her "own rights", the latter, however, for "the rights of women"<sup>541</sup>. As it finally turned out, what Hannah More granted women was a rationality in the complete service of God. Much as *Strictures* were hailed by her followers, they also annoyed many who felt that More was unnecessarily poking her nose in other people's affairs, so for instance when forbidding such popular amusements as baby balls. And she certainly did not make any friends when reasoning over the innate sinfulness of children. One of the certainly most interesting chapters in *Strictures* deals with More's position on novel reading. Condemning their effect especially on young girls whose frame of mind was not yet strengthened, she pointed out their poisoning effect because of their triggering in them totally false expectations for later life.

With her school scheme and affiliated social projects, which brought hope to people whose existence was forgotten by those who should have felt responsible for them, namely church and government, Hannah More ventured to moralize the British nation 'from below'. It was a world of her own Hannah More created in the Mendips with the help of her sister

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<sup>541</sup> *Strictures II*, p. 15.

Martha and William Wilberforce's generous financial support. The pious sisters' work there had a missionary character, because the conditions they were confronted with strongly resembled those which missionaries normally faced in the inner parts of Africa. The Mendip project signified Hannah More's turning from the noble world to the forsaken one, from her writing for the elite to popular writing. And what had begun as a mere educational venture in the form of (mainly) Sunday schools, soon went beyond it, when the More sisters started to lend their support also to the problems of the grown-ups, especially to those of the poor women. The children were henceforth prevented from aimlessly loitering around on Sundays, their only day off from working, and were offered a limited education, confined to reading the Bible, and later the *Tracts* of mostly More's own writing, intended as 'safe reading'. This limitation was in tune with Hannah More's vision of making religious enlightenment possible in the poor, but also making clear that social mobility was as much out of their reach as it was desirable for their betters. The low station they were born into was considered providential and interference with it would thus mean disobeying God's will. What could be done for them, however, was done: besides opening to them the possibility of going to heaven in the next life, alleviating their present life to an extent which would find God's assent. More's primary aim was to make poverty seem a God-given chance of inheriting a place in heaven, in an effort to psychologically enhance the status of poverty, even if it was generally seen as a (semi-) natural state decreed by a higher authority beyond human reach.

More's *Tracts* offered many examples how to cope with poverty decently, and were besides essentially a call for loyalty and patriotism. They underlined honest poverty in the laborious and respectable poor, and they discriminated the ragged poor as being lazy and, thus, as responsible for their poverty. Inherent in these simple educatory and social measures, however, was the More sisters' zealous missionary aim to save as many souls as possible, in agreement with their Evangelical tenets, which were "conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism" (Bebbington, 2-3).

It can be assumed that Hannah More's work for the poor in the Mendips yielded more satisfaction than her work for the rich, because she must



have eventually realized that the poor lent her an ear, whereas the rich, although they admired and read her, ultimately did not care for her moral guidelines.

It is of interest how Hannah More, as a devout Evangelical within the Church of England, managed to make friends not only with her Evangelical brethren like William Wilberforce and John Newton, but also secured the appreciation of 'regular' Bishops like Beilby Porteus, Bishop of London, and Dr. Beadon, Bishop of Bath and Wells. In times of growing infidelity, the least deviation from the creed of the Established Church or the existing political order, was suspected of infidelity. Because of this atmosphere of distrust, Hannah More as an Evangelical within the Church of England was growingly eager to distance herself from the Methodists. Apart from this deliberation, she also found that, however close she might have felt to them because of their evangelical sentiment, their way of practicing their belief was too fanatical for More's liking. That many in her time were unable or unwilling to distinguish between the Evangelicals and those of evangelical sentiment, as the uniting factor of all who were enlightened by the Religious Revival of the early eighteenth century, often caused the Anglican Evangelicals to be taken for Methodists, a circumstance which rendered the More sisters' missionary work in the Mendips additionally difficult at times.

Since Hannah More's thinking and striving was subordinate to God-given and inescapable Providence as the guiding principle of her life, her possibilities for social and moral reform remained confined to pre-given boundaries: boundaries which were expressive of God's insurmountable will for the existing well-established hierarchical social order, hopefully to last until the end of days.

As Providence played *the* central role in Hannah More's life, her inclination to look backward rather than forward, steadily hankering after the past and forever engaging history as an example to drive her point home, seems to make sense. The past was used for teaching the presence and testifying the transitory state we are in. In the case of Hannah More it also exemplified how precious time was and how it had to be used for preparing for the life to come after death. In this sense, moral reform

meant to come clear with the state of one's mind and the worldly temptations. Because of this backward-looking attitude, much as Hannah More invested in her efforts to uplift the morals of her contemporaries and to alleviate poverty, they were destined ultimately to remain without lasting effect. If she had not shut her eyes to the direction the wind of change had begun to blow, she could have made her social activities a much more effective thing to be better remembered by posterity. Instead, she was opposed to any change which did not include her own understanding of piety and did not serve this end.

From whatever angle we may try to understand More's motives of her activities and moral efforts, the only logical answer can be that they rested in her steadily growing zeal for Evangelicalism and the precepts she developed for its practical application. The fact that she occasionally took the freedom of disregarding Evangelical doctrines if her utilitarian disposition asked for it, irritated some of her admirers. The Anglican clergy, on the other hand, challenged by More's lay-statements on Christian dogmas, often answered with open criticism. Backed by many well-wishing bishops of the Established Church, however, such reprovals remained without further consequences, although they may have contributed to the notorious Blagdon Controversy, which nearly put an end to her Mendip school scheme.

More's thinking and acting is a mirror of her time. From today's standpoint, she is often classified as a mere bigot. But this certainly paints a very short-sighted picture of her. We may castigate her limitations, but we should not forget to take into consideration that they were also pre-given by the time she lived in. If she was a 'reformer' after all, as she is seen by some today, this rested on her 'active Christianity'. But whatever good she may have done, owing to her unshakable belief in the providential hierarchical order, it is now in danger of being devalued by her allegedly having been a helpmate for delaying the end of the *ancien régime*. If she is also reproached for not leaving behind a legacy, her purposeful life, which was dedicated to the moral rearmament of Britain, should make up for this deficiency.

In retrospect, she may be seen as a fanatic in matters of religion and hierarchy. Especially women critics argue that she worked against female interests, claiming for herself special treatment she would otherwise not have granted to the fair sex. For this, elitism may be imputed to her. That vanity was often in the play seems to be ascertained by her correspondence. But as vanity is a common bent, why should it be criticized in someone of such merits.

If she was a child of her time, she was also a 'wrongdoer' from today's point of view in as much as she had the intellectual and pecuniary means to contribute to changing the social position of women in the long run. However, she questioned their intellectual abilities on the one hand, and believed in their capacity to break even with or to even outstrip men on the religious level on the other hand, if their inborn spirituality got back on the right track. However high-minded this may appear at first sight, the fact that Hannah More constantly had the Evangelical dogmas as the mainspring of all her doing at the back of her mind, we may also deplore that she made the welfare of women part of her religious interests - unlike Mary Wollstonecraft, who truly had the welfare of women in mind. The question, thus, whether Hannah More was doing the right things for the wrong motives, will remain ultimately unanswerable.

Hannah More was a highly intellectual woman, gifted with a pen that filled a whole nation with awe and encouraged its philanthropy to a hitherto unknown extent. When we consider her deep religiousness paired with patriotism and loyalty to state and church, which culminated in her desire to rescue the British nation from damnation by moralizing it, Hannah More might be spared from threatening oblivion. If she was not great in the classical sense of the word, she certainly possessed greatness, and she deserves to be remembered for all the good she has done.

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## Abstract

Hannah More (1745 - 1833) was probably the best-known female writer of her time. Her long and purposeful life can be divided into distinct periods. This dissertation deals with the time after her return from London to Bristol, when she exchanged her fame gained as a dramatist and bluestocking for a new religious and social calling. Her efforts to moralize the British nation were undertaken in the face of the threat from revolutionary France, the social unrest in England, and the spreading philosophy of the Enlightenment. Hannah More, a stout believer in the *ancien régime*, considered these occurrences to be primarily the outcome of the existing Godlessness of society towards the end of the eighteenth century. She felt compelled by her growing Evangelicalism to save the nation: the rich and the poor; and she devoted special attention to women and their duties and responsibilities. Only if they all stood together, More felt, the old order, which gave stability and security, could be guaranteed.

This dissertation follows Hannah More on her moral crusade. Her preaching tone increased with her growing Evangelical zeal. But to effect moral reform she not only relied on her never resting pen, she also put into practice her moral guidelines. In setting up a range of schools for the poor, she contributed to the growing philanthropic movement and also gave evidence that benevolence is a matter of the heart and not a sacrifice in exchange for a life displeasing to God.

Much as Hannah More was hailed, she was not undisputed in her time. Her freely expressed criticism of the Anglicans did not always make her friends. Even today, opinions about her are ambivalent. They range from 'revolutionary' to 'bigot'. This dissertation will try to paint a picture of a highly intellectual woman with a mission, who can only be understood within the religious and moral context at the end of the eighteenth century.

## Zusammenfassung

Hannah More (1749-1833) war wahrscheinlich die bekannteste weibliche Schriftstellerin ihrer Zeit. Ihr langes und bedeutungsvolles Leben kann in klar umrissene Zeiträume untergeteilt werden. Diese Dissertation beschäftigt sich mit der Zeit ihrer Rückkehr von London, wo sie als Dramatikerin und Bluestocking Berühmtheit erlangt hatte, nach Bristol, um sich neuen religiösen und sozialen Aufgaben zu widmen. Ihre Bemühungen, die britische Nation zu moralisieren, fanden vor dem Hintergrund der Gefahr, die vom revolutionären Frankreich ausging sowie sozialer Unruhen in England und der sich ausbreitenden Philosophie der Aufklärung statt. Hannah More, eine unerschütterliche Anhängerin des *ancien régime*, sah in diesen Ereignissen vorrangig das Ergebnis der um sich greifenden Gottlosigkeit der Gesellschaft gegen Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts. Bestärkt durch ihre evangelische Orientierung fühlte sie sich verpflichtet, die britische Nation zu retten, die Reichen wie die Armen. Den Frauen, deren Pflichten und Verantwortung, widmete sie ihre besondere Aufmerksamkeit. Sie war sich sicher, dass nur gemeinsam die alte Ordnung, von der sie sich Stabilität und Sicherheit versprach, aufrecht erhalten werden konnte.

Diese Dissertation folgt den Spuren Hannah Mores auf ihrem moralischen Kreuzzug. Mit ihrem wachsenden Evangelikalismus steigerte sich auch ihr predigender Ton. Um moralische Reformen durchzusetzen, setzte sie nicht nur ihre nimmermüde Feder ein, sondern lebte auch vor was sie predigte. Sie gründete eine Reihe von Schulen und trug zur wachsenden philanthropischen Bewegung bei. Sie bewies, dass Mildtätigkeit eine Herzensangelegenheit ist und nicht ein Opfer im Austausch für ein nicht Gott gefälliges Leben.

Auch wenn Hannah More zu Lebzeiten bejubelt wurde, war sie trotzdem nicht unumstritten. Ihre offene Kritik an der Anglikanischen Kirche brachte ihr nicht nur Freunde ein. Heute noch gehen die Meinungen über sie auseinander. Sie bewegen sich zwischen 'Revolutionärin' und 'Frömmlerin'. Diese Dissertation hat zum Ziel, das Bild einer hochintellektuellen Frau nachzuzeichnen, die von einer Mission beseelt

war, welche nur im Zusammenhang des religiösen und moralischen Kontextes Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts verstanden werden kann.



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