

## ABSTRACT

### A Theology of Suffering Love: A Critique of the Fictional Embodiments of Divine Compassion in the Novels of George Eliot

Jason Neal Patrick, M.Div., B.A.

Mentor: Ralph C. Wood, Ph.D.

The unorthodox theology of nineteenth century British novelist George Eliot resulted not in a dispassionate avoidance of Christianity in her narratives but in an existential engagement with the faith she had once embraced. Prior to writing her first novel, Eliot, already recognized as a leading literary critic and translator, had adopted the empiricist and positivist philosophies of the elite intellectual circles of British society. Like many of her contemporaries, Eliot adhered to a liberal Christology advocating Jesus Christ as a moral exemplar whom humanity should imitate. A change in Eliot's religious viewpoints, however, emerged as she began writing fiction. Although she never returned to an orthodox form of Christianity, her novels reveal that she continued to struggle with Christianity's radical proclamation of Good News.

Eliot's novels contain characters who embody a "divine" compassion as they enter into the suffering lives of others, and who are, for her, incarnational. In her novels, Eliot enfleshes but a solitary aspect of the Incarnation—God's sharing in the suffering of humanity. After an introductory chapter tracing Eliot's own

religious journey, I address the “incarnations” in selected Eliot novels – Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede*, Romola (title character) and Dortha Brooke in *Middlemarch*. The sixth chapter addresses the theology of the Maurice who, like Eliot, was cognizant of the Enlightenment criticisms of Christianity yet remained orthodox in his treatment of the Incarnation.

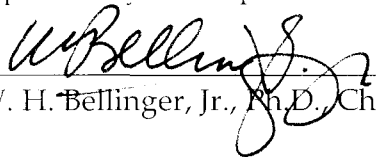
The conclusion of my dissertation addresses the postliberal context of 21<sup>st</sup> century Christianity and yields increased clarity to my examination of arguably the greatest novelist, Eliot, and greatest theologian, Maurice, of Victorian Britain. Although Maurice predates the dawn of the postliberal era, much of his theology hints at the nonfoundational character of present day theology. Maurice holds to a reality shaped by a community and tradition that have not been incapacitated by liberal reductionism. The primary theoretical source I utilize for the conclusion is Fritz Oehlschlager’s *Love and Good Reasons*. Oehlschlager’s work, treating the formation of a distinctively Christian ethic, explores the unique manner in which Christians read literary texts in a postliberal context, enabling them thus to sharpen their own moral and theological vision.

A Theology of Suffering Love: A Critique of the Fictional Embodiments of  
Divine Compassion in the Novels of George Eliot

by

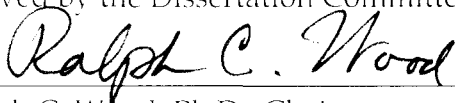
Jason Neal Patrick, M.Div., B.A.

Approved by the Department of Religion

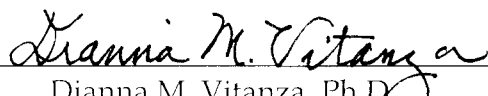
  
W. H. Bellinger, Jr., Ph.D., Chairperson

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved by the Dissertation Committee

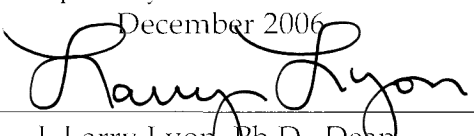
  
Ralph C. Wood, Ph.D., Chairperson

  
Bob E. Patterson, Ph.D.

  
Dianna M. Vitanza, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School

December 2006

  
J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

Copyright © 2006 by Jason Neal Patrick

All rights reserved

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	vi
Dedication	vii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: From the God of Mary Anne Evans to the God of George Eliot	10
The Religion of the Evans' Household and the Emerging Diversity in Victorian Religion	11
Mary Anne Evans, the Evangelical Child	12
The Journey Away from Evangelicalism and Orthodox Christianity	15
A Woman Spiteful of Orthodox Christianity	17
Making Peace with Her Religious Past: The Birth of George Eliot, the Novelist	25
Chapter Three: Dinah Morris, A Pastoral Embodiment of Suffering Love	32
Edgar Tryan – Eliot's First Example of a Pastoral Embodiment of Suffering Love	32
An Introduction to Dinah Morris as a Pastoral Embodiment of Suffering Love	34
The Religious Outlook of Adam Bede	38
Hetty Sorrel, Dinah's Counterpart	40
Dinah in the Bede Home	41
The Contrast Widens – Dinah and Hetty	43
While Dinah is away at Snowfield	46

Dinah—Hetty's Divine Visitor	56
A Marriage of Fellow-Feeling	59
Conclusion—Dinah's Salvific Impact on Hetty	62
Chapter Four: Romola, A Suffering Madonna Without a Church	65
Eliot's Historical Epoch Novel	65
Tito Melema, the Shipwrecked Greek	69
The Old Scholar and His Daughter	70
Tito's Treacherous Past	72
Fra Luca's True Identity—Romola's brother, Dino	75
Contrasting the Suffering Faith of Dino with the Hedonism of Tito	77
The New Florence	80
Baldassarre in Florence	81
A Troubled Marriage and an Enraged Father	83
Romola's Escape and Return to Florence	89
The Madonna of Florence	94
Parting Ways with Savonarola	99
A Despairing Madonna without a Church	103
Conclusion: Romola's Peace with the Memory of Savonarola	107
Chapter Five: Dorothea, Noble Citizen of Christ-Evicted Middlemarch	110
Young Dorothea: Ardent Submission in the Name of Duty	111
A Troubled Marriage and a New Friend	115

Dorothea's Surrounding Cast of Characters	128
One Love Blossoms While Another Begins to Wilt	134
Dorothea as an Embodiment of Divine Compassion for Lydgate	137
Dorothea as an Embodiment of Divine Compassion for Rosamond	141
Conclusion: Dorothea as a Religious Reformer	146
Chapter Six: Frederick Denison Maurice, Theologian of the Incarnate God of Suffering Love	152
The Common Ground Shared by Eliot and Maurice	153
Introduction to Frederick Denison Maurice	156
The Anomalous Maurice: Neither Conservative nor Liberal	158
Maurice's Doctrine of Revelation	162
On the Trinity and the Incarnation	165
On Connecting the Incarnation and the Cross	167
The Bible as the Church's Story	169
The Church's Mission in the World	172
Conclusion: The Divide Between Maurice and Eliot	174
Chapter Seven: Conclusion, A Christian, Postliberal Reading of George Eliot's Novels	177
Bibliography	189

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Baylor University provided me one of the best academic environments in which to explore and interpret the theological implications in the novels of George Eliot. I wish to first thank my mentor and dissertation committee chairperson, Dr. Ralph Wood. His expertise in the interdisciplinary field of religion and literature were of inestimable worth in producing the pages which follow. He allowed me not only to offer a close reading of Eliot but also to flesh out more fully the religious vision inherent in her novels. Second, I am grateful to Dr. Dianna Vitanza of the English Department. Because she is an Eliot scholar, her insights made me a better Eliot reader. Most of all, I thank her for introducing me to George Eliot through *The Mill on the Floss* in the Spring of 2001. Thanks also to Dr. Bob Patterson who joined my committee on short notice. His willingness to read and critique my work in such little time was not taken for granted.

I thank my parents, Mike and Nancy Patrick, for their reading of my work and their subsequent suggestions. A mother who is a retired English teacher is a dissertation writer's best friend! I extend my gratitude to my church family at Downsville Baptist Church. As their pastor since February 2001, I have been given support and understanding through this academic journey.



## DEDICATION

To my daughter Hannah, who is my own golden-haired Eppie

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

God, immortality, duty – how inconceivable the first, how unbelievable the second, how peremptory and absolute the third.

George Eliot

The Victorian novelist George Eliot undertook a religious pilgrimage that passed by way of the Anglican Toryism of her father, the fervent evangelicalism of her teacher, Maria Lewis, the Comtean positivism that she imbibed through intellectuals such as the Brays and Hennells, and finally the Feuerbachian agnosticism wherewith she sought to discover both the value and detriment of religious faith. Eliot's agnosticism gave way to a religious mysticism that resulted not in a dispassionate neglect of Christianity but in an existential engagement with the faith she had once embraced. Her primary concern in both life and literature was to cultivate a sense of self-denying duty within and between persons. The protagonists in Eliot's novels journey toward a willingness to embrace radical sacrifice, at times even unto death, so that they might fulfill their moral duty to fellow human beings.

In this dissertation, I will argue that Eliot presents a theology of suffering love in her fiction. I will illustrate Eliot's concern to create characters who embody this theology in her novels: persons who seek to enter into the suffering lives of others and, in so doing, to act with and on behalf of the Divine. Through these characters, Eliot invites readers to sacrifice and suffer for the sake of both their

own and others' redemption. In Eliot's novels, redemption sometimes appears as the alleviation of suffering, but it most often must be approximated through a character's willingness to become a fellow sufferer whose own suffering remains unrelieved. Suffering for those who suffer catalyzes Eliot's progression from an anti-Christian atheism to a mysticism that honors the Divine Mystery found in a willing embrace of suffering.

Eliot never returned to an orthodox form of Christianity after leaving it in her youth. Her novels reveal, however, that she continued to struggle with Christianity's radical proclamation of Good News. Eliot was a mystic rather than an atheist or agnostic. She adhered to an image of the divine as an ethereal abstraction that enabled such vague notions as spiritual goodness and compassionate sorrow for the human condition. For Eliot, Jesus of Nazareth stands as an exemplar, one who is unified with and inspired by this divine spirit, thus living as an embodiment of it. Eliot viewed Jesus as the sufferer who calls humanity to a similarly redemptive embrace of suffering. Thus does she populate her fiction with characters who seek to enter the suffering lives of others, and who thus become representatives of the Divine Mystery as Eliot understood it.

Eliot's attraction to Jesus as the divinely inspired fellow sufferer underscores the theological promise of the characters in her novels. Her characters also fail theologically, however, due to Eliot's rejection of an orthodox understanding of the unique Christ event. The Word Incarnate of the Christian Gospel not only shares in the suffering of others but also fully assumes human nature, taking humanity into himself, in order to save persons from sin and to

usher in the transcendent hope of sharing in the resurrection life. I will evaluate this theological shortcoming in Eliot's novels not through a standard that would have been alien to her, but through a comparison with the chief liberal theologian of her time, Frederick Denison Maurice.

Maurice shared Eliot's disdain for a Christianity that was little more than systematized dogma.<sup>1</sup> Whereas Eliot opted for a religion of suffering-centered duty toward fellow human beings in which much of Christian dogma is detrimental, Maurice continued to hold a high Christological vision of human life and its purposes.<sup>2</sup> Maurice and Eliot shared a common devotion to liberal Christianity, but they diverged concerning the validity of the Christian faith because of their differing Christologies. For Eliot, the righteous life consists of doing the good one can hope to derive from religious stories and communities. Eliot invites her readers into the mystery of sacrificial suffering, insisting that our strongest hope lies in performing our ethical duties selflessly toward one another. Maurice's theology, by contrast, emphasizes the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, not as a human exemplar, but as the enfleshed God who takes human life into himself, thus redeeming and sanctifying it. For Maurice, the suffering of the Incarnate God

---

<sup>1</sup>Eliot and Maurice had occasion to meet and shared a mutual respect for one another's work. Eliot writes in her journal in July of 1863 that she had received a letter from Maurice praising her recently published novel *Romola*. Eliot considers Maurice's commendation to be some of the highest words of praise she had ever received.

<sup>2</sup>Frederick Maurice (son), ed., *The Life of F. D. Maurice, Chiefly Told in His Own Letters*, 2 volumes (London: Macmillan and Company, 1884), 2: 319-20.

alone can enable Christians to suffer for others without becoming secretly egocentric and unconsciously moralistic.

While the mystic Eliot is far removed from orthodox understandings of the Incarnation, I will argue that her liberally reduced interpretation of the Christ event breathes distinctive life into characters who were, for Eliot, incarnational. These incarnational characters reflect, but are not identical to, the Incarnation of the Word in the Christian Gospel. Eliot was greatly influenced by the liberal, German theology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly the works of Strauss and Feuerbach that she had translated.<sup>3</sup> Under their influence, she developed a theological vision that derogates from the rich and multi-layered understanding of the Incarnation by reducing Jesus to a person who stands as a moral exemplar to others, one who has a supposedly advanced understanding of the Divine Mystery's desire for the world. The Incarnation proper, by contrast, is the historical revelation of the Triune God in Jesus Christ, the God-Man who is qualitatively discontinuous with all other persons. This divine enfleshment demands obedience and worship, moreover, not merely a humanly-generated imitation. Such a Triune and Incarnate God is not identical to the god of inchoate spirituality to whom Eliot paid homage.

After this introduction, the following chapter will trace Eliot's own religious journey. Although the emphasis of the dissertation centers on Eliot's fiction, this biographical account of her theological pilgrimage will prove indispensable in providing a proper context for reading Eliot's novels. Also, my

---

<sup>3</sup>Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* and Strauss' *The Life of Jesus*.

theological analysis of the novels establishes the progression of Eliot's own religious beliefs toward a reverent and suffering-centered mysticism, a development paralleled in her life, letters, and many essays.<sup>4</sup> In the next three chapters, I will offer close theological readings of selected characters in three of Eliot's eight novels. These chapters will demonstrate the theology of suffering of love Eliot sought to convey.

In Eliot's first full length novel, *Adam Bede*, Dinah Morris, an evangelical lay-preacher in the Methodist tradition, comforts the Bede family after the death of the family's patriarch. Dinah, however, more markedly embodies Eliot's theology of suffering love in her relationship with Hetty Sorrell, a young girl on trial for the murder of her own infant. As Hetty awaits her sentencing and likely capital punishment, Dinah visits her in prison, seeking to persuade Hetty to embrace God's forgiveness.<sup>5</sup> Yet the ministerial heroine, Dinah, remains ambiguous concerning the love and the faith that she personifies, since it is unclear whether she fosters a faith in God or faith in her own suffering compassion.<sup>6</sup>

Eliot envisioned *Romola* as her literary attempt to write the great historical novel.<sup>7</sup> *Romola*'s life is the tale of a young woman who gradually evolves into a

---

<sup>4</sup>For the letters of Eliot, Gordon S. Haight, ed., *The George Eliot Letters*, 9 volumes (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 1954-78). Eliot's essays have been published in many formats, but most were written while she worked at the *Westminster Review*.

<sup>5</sup>George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997), 381-5.

<sup>6</sup>Valentine Cunningham, *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissenters in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: University Press, 1975), 168. I will argue that Eliot's fictional pastor creates a faith in the pastor rather than in the God the pastor supposedly represents.

<sup>7</sup>Eliot spent most of 1861-2 in a return visit to Florence, Italy. Her journals

Madonna figure. She urges Lillo, the illegitimate son of her deceased husband, to act according to the good that God has shown him by embracing the radical sacrifice that such a life of obedience will entail.<sup>8</sup> Romola moves beyond a naive self-centeredness into an increasing human awareness of the divine mystery that inspires a selfless life of sacrificial love, yet apart from any distinctively Christian quality to such love.

Literary critics regard *Middlemarch* as Eliot's *magnum opus*. Dorothea Brooke, the novel's protagonist, is Eliot's most autobiographical character.<sup>9</sup> In many ways, the life of Dorothea Brooke follows lines similar to those seen in Romola's life. One major difference can be seen at the conclusion of Dorothea's story amidst an existential ambiguity that is absent, or certainly not as easily identified, in the lives of her previous heroines. As with Romola, Eliot offers the life of Dorothea as an example of a paradoxical good: Sacrificing a selfish desire for individual happiness opens a door through which a much larger divine goodness may enter. *Middlemarch*, however, leaves the reader with questions concerning both providence and theodicy. Does divine goodness enter into the lives of others only through the sacrificial acts of a few? If so, how efficacious is this providential goodness, especially if it is not rooted in the Incarnate Goodness?

---

communicate her diligent research on 15<sup>th</sup> century Florence during the time of Fr. Giralamo Savonarola's influence. *Romola* is a fictional retelling of some of the events in Florence as the background for the story of the novel's title character.

<sup>8</sup>George Eliot, *Romola* (London: J. M. Dent, 1999), 584-5.

<sup>9</sup>Although a great deal of autobiography is identifiable in Maggie Tulliver (*Mill on the Floss*) and Romola.

The sixth chapter and the conclusion of the dissertation will analyze and evaluate the theology expressed through the lives of Eliot's characters. Chapter Six will measure Eliot's reluctance to embrace an orthodox vision for a theology of suffering love by drawing upon the Christology of the previously cited F. D. Maurice. Unlike Eliot, Maurice refused to sever the idea of suffering love from the very real, historical event of the Incarnation in Jesus Christ. Maurice writes, "We feel that it is impossible to know the Absolute and Invisible God as man needs to know Him, and craves to know Him, without an Incarnation. . . . We receive the fact of an Incarnation, because we ask of God a Redemption . . . for humanity from all the plagues by which it is tormented."<sup>10</sup> Through this comparison with Maurice, I will also demonstrate how Eliot's characters, though profound examples of shared suffering, lack the redemptive power present in the actual Incarnation of Christ as envisioned by Maurice. The Logos made flesh not only shares in human suffering<sup>11</sup> but delivers persons, through their participation in his suffering, from their sin and thus into the promise of the resurrection life.

---

<sup>10</sup>F. D. Maurice, *Theological Essays* (Cambridge, England: Lutterworth Press, 2002), 85.

<sup>11</sup>In fact, the concept of a vulnerable and suffering God is one of the most recent theological developments in approaching the Incarnation. Such an idea was denied in the early and Medieval church as being antithetical to the impassibility of God. Helpful here is Thomas Weinandy's *Does God Suffer?* which traces the development of ideas of divine suffering. Weinandy concludes with a Thomistic vision, however, in which God is impassible and cannot suffer because there is no potential for an increase of love in God. Because God's love is perfectly actualized and infinite, there can be no increase or decrease in compassion for or toward humanity (Notre Dame: University Press, 2000), 126.



Eliot and Maurice were contemporaries sympathetic to one another, but with starkly different theological visions. The postliberal context of 21<sup>st</sup> century Christianity yields increased clarity to my examination of arguably the greatest novelist, Eliot, and greatest theologian, Maurice, of Victorian Britain. Eliot remains a classic 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal. Her belief that knowledge is universal and objective is the primary modernist assumption; and that which remains empirically unknowable – the transcendent or divine – is assigned to the inaccessible category of mystery. For Eliot, the Christian gospel addresses aspects of this mystery; but, due to its ancient Near Eastern supernaturalism, and hence its pre-modern character, it also verges upon the preposterously unbelievable to the educated liberal mind. This is the plight of the modern liberal – a reduction of all things to one of two categories, the empirically real or the mythically symbolic. Although Maurice predates the dawn of a postliberal era, aspects of his theology hint at the nonfoundational character of much of present-day theology. Unlike Eliot, Maurice holds to a reality shaped by a community and tradition beyond the scope of his own experience and knowledge, a reality that testifies to the impossibility of standing outside of the world in a supposed vacuum where all phenomena are viewed and interpreted through objective and universal means and where suffering love can be adopted as the non-communal and trans-historical norm for human existence. The primary theoretical source I will utilize for the conclusion is Fritz Oehlschlager's *Love and Good Reasons*. Oehlschlager's work, treating the formation of a distinctively Christian ethic, explores the unique manner in which Christians read literary texts in a postliberal context, thus

enabling them to sharpen their own moral and theological vision in distinctively ecclesial and historical terms.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup>Fritz Oehlschlaeger, *Love and Good Reasons: Postliberal Approaches to Christian Ethics and Literature* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University, 2003).

## CHAPTER TWO

### From the God of Mary Anne Evans to the God of George Eliot

Years before penning the words to her first work of fiction, young Mary Anne Evans<sup>1</sup> offered the following lines of sentimental poetry as a confession of her faith: "A Saint! Oh would that I could claim / The privileg'd, the honr'd name / And confidently take my stand / Though lowest in the saintly band!"<sup>2</sup> The naive, evangelical child Mary Anne would mature into the Victorian novelist George Eliot whose narratives piqued the religious consciences of her readers, engendering questions regarding the existence of God and the possibilities of God's presence in the world.

The religious journey of George Eliot was arduous, in part, because she always considered religion to be of utmost importance. Religious faith could not be tucked away as only one aspect of many. For Eliot, religion embraced all of existence, both as it was and as it should be. She believed, rather than being a philosophy that organizes one's spiritual beliefs into a system, religious faith was a committed engagement toward understanding who we are and what we should

---

<sup>1</sup>The pseudonym George Eliot is not adopted by Mary Anne Evans until the writing and publication of her first collection of fiction, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1856-7). I will refer to Eliot as Mary Anne Evans until her disavowal of orthodox Christianity at age 22, at which time she changes her name's spelling to Marian. There after, I will refer to Eliot as Marian Evans until she adopts the pen name George Eliot.

<sup>2</sup>Several sources. Here taken from Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (New York: Oxford, 1968), 20.

do. Throughout her religious journey, Eliot never divorced the ethical demands of faith from the intellectual inquiry concerning the transcendent.

*The Religion of the Evans' Household and the Emerging Diversity in Victorian Religion*

Born on November 22, 1819, Mary Anne Evans entered England a decade before an eruptive era of religious and sociological diversity was to begin. Her father, Robert Evans, was fiercely loyal to both the conservative Tory political party and the Anglican religious tradition, calling for a close alliance between church and state. Evans labored to earn the respect of the nobility of Nuneaton where he worked for the Newdigate family in a managerial position over their estate. Thus, although Evans was not a member of the land owning class, he had gained a financial and social freedom that most in his class lacked. His desire to be an adopted member of respectable English society resulted in a religious and political conformity to that class.<sup>3</sup> Robert Evans was a completely tradition-driven man who would never dare to question the authority or sincerity of Britain's monarch or the bishops of England's Church.<sup>4</sup> Mary Anne's admiration of her father, which would continue throughout her lifetime, understandably translated into submission to his political and religious views during her early childhood.

With the passing of the Reform Act in 1832, a tumultuous period of political, sociological, economic and religious transformation dawned in Britain. The Tory government lost its majority in Parliament in 1830, and the new Whig

---

<sup>3</sup>Kathryn Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 1998), 15.

<sup>4</sup>Haight, 8-9.

government, supporting the Reform Act, allowed for a greater diversity in both the government and the church.<sup>5</sup> Groups of Dissenters and Nonconformists were now rising to the same sphere of power and influence as the conservative High Churchmen of the previous century. These new religious and political voices were anything but monolithic, representing a plethora of new movements, from the rise of evangelical piety to classically liberal movements such as Unitarianism.<sup>6</sup> A renewed commitment to greater freedom for Roman Catholics and Jews in England also encompassed what Gerald Parsons refers to as England's "minor revolution," resulting in a "fundamental change" in both British society and Anglican worship.<sup>7</sup>

*Mary Anne Evans, the Evangelical Child*

At the age of eight, Mary Anne left her rural home of Griff House to move into The Elms,<sup>8</sup> a schoolhouse in the town of Nuneaton. Her primary instructor and influence during these years of early childhood was Maria Lewis, a woman "serious in her religion, belonging to the Evangelical wing of the Church of England."<sup>9</sup> Lewis' greatest religious concern was what she perceived to be a

---

<sup>5</sup>Gerald Parsons, "Reform, Revival and Realignment: The Experience of Victorian Anglicanism," *Religion in Victorian Britain*, Parsons, ed. (Manchester: University Press, 1988), 1: 15.

<sup>6</sup>This increasingly diverse environment included a growing number of agnostics and atheists, Auguste Comte's positivism standing as an example of just such a philosophy that Eliot would find attractive for a period of time.

<sup>7</sup>Parsons, 1: 17.

<sup>8</sup>Also referred to as the Wallington Boarding School.

<sup>9</sup>Hughes, 20-1.

detachment of Anglican worship from English society. The liturgy and structure of the Church, according to Lewis, failed to demonstrate concern for the needs of the socioeconomically lower classes of England. During the early years in which this evangelical spirit entered the Anglican Church, the upper classes decried evangelicalism as a dangerous procedure because it manipulated the emotions of the poor, turning them against the wealthy, thus presenting the possibility of a national religious crisis.<sup>10</sup>

The Christianity that Mary Anne had inherited from her father stressed formal worship. Through Lewis, Mary Anne learned the importance of sermons, doctrines, the biblical stories of Jesus, and the need to “experience” Jesus.<sup>11</sup> Although young Mary Anne would much later grow into the woman George Eliot who admired her father despite his weaknesses, at this age she had not identified these shortcomings. More likely, Eliot’s passionate commitment to her convictions, so evident in the moral and social concerns of her novels, characterized her whole life. If she were to be a Christian, she would be the most dedicated kind of Christian, and evangelicalism enlightened her to the intellectual and ethical responsibilities of the Christian faith. The evangelical views of Lewis that had so deeply influenced Mary Anne demanded that she act in accordance with her belief. From age twelve through her teenage years, therefore, Mary Anne

---

<sup>10</sup>Bernard Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 1995), 16-29.

<sup>11</sup>Haight, 9-10.

taught an evangelical Sunday School class, a commitment that eventually led to many hours of work for evangelical relief societies.<sup>12</sup>

Mary Anne's evangelical fervor was deeply tied to her always pressing intellectual interests. During her teenage years, she limited her reading to religious works authored by evangelicals. When she did occasionally read the works of Romantic poets and novelists, she reported feeling disdain for the escapism she sensed in their themes.<sup>13</sup> Mary Anne's dissatisfaction with the Romantics would eventually dwindle although her attraction to writers such as Wordsworth was a temptation she fought against vigorously. A letter written to Lewis when Mary Anne was twenty years old reveals the puritanical guilt that often overtook her. The romantic stirring Wordsworth inspired within her for the opposite sex resulted in the following vow of chastity: "Cease ye from man is engraven on my amulet."<sup>14</sup> Mary Anne's evangelical convictions led her to believe that she could not love both God and man, at least not in the romantic sense pertaining to the latter. The next few years of her life would bring about a considerable transformation. What would cause this evangelical once so confident in the doctrines of the church to flee from it and to embrace a positivist form of humanism?

---

<sup>12</sup>Blance Colton Williams, *George Eliot* (New York: MacMillan, 1936), 22.

<sup>13</sup>Haight, 23. Eliot wrote, "The weapons of Christian warfare were never sharpened at the forge of romance," Gordon Haight, ed., *The George Eliot Letters*, 9 volumes (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1954-78), 1: 23.

<sup>14</sup>Haight, ed., *The George Eliot Letters*, 1: 51. Retrospect allows humor to be seen in the words. Eventually Eliot's passion would prevail over her prudishness.

*The Journey Away from Evangelicalism and Orthodox Christianity*

Mary Anne's angst over her enjoyment of the Romantics eventually gave way to a suspicion that had likely been lurking in her mind for quite some time. Wordsworth, Byron, and Scott had more adeptly described the depths and heights of the human condition than anything she had discovered in conventional Christian literature. Evangelical orthodoxy told her who she should be, but Romanticism, at least for the time, allowed her to identify who she was or might become. Doubts concerning the insights of evangelical scholars and preachers began to form. Mary Anne found convincing the geological evidence supporting the age of the earth as quite ancient, leaving her baffled by Reverend Harcourt's *Doctrine of the Deluge* that sought to undermine scientific investigations by returning to a science-like interpretation of Noah's flood. By now a doubting evangelical, Mary Anne described Harcourt's methods as an attempt "to shake a weak position by weak arguments."<sup>15</sup>

As Mary Anne's Calvinism, which Lewis had coupled with the evangelical understanding of Christian faith, began to fade, she adopted a Rousseauistic estimate of human nature, not as a primitive yet noble savage, but as a man who textures his existence with natural phenomena in mind.<sup>16</sup> Frederick Karl makes

---

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 1: 34.

<sup>16</sup>Rosemary Ashton includes an excerpt of a letter Eliot wrote to Sarah Hennell concerning her attraction to Rousseau's philosophy, insisting that Rousseau holds great value not because his vision can be proved free of error but because his words carry the power of "sending an electric thrill through her intellectual and moral frame," *George Eliot: A Life* (London: Penguin, 1996), 67. Letter found in George S. Haight's *The George Eliot Letters*, 9 volumes (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1954-78), 1: 277.



clear that Mary Anne's evangelicalism was not of the 21<sup>st</sup> century sort: "She is quite clear that she is not rejecting Christianity; she is abandoning revelation, immortality, and formal worship of God and religion, whether Church of England or Dissent."<sup>17</sup> Mary Anne had begun her path toward demythologizing Christianity in such a radical sense that the only remnant was a sort of ethical extract, a Christ-like morality. The question to be addressed, however, is whether Christianity can remain without a belief in divine revelation or participation in the life of the church.

Mary Anne's own intellectual endeavors that caused her eventual abandonment of Christianity received support from new neighbors who were to play a pivotal role in Mary Anne's continuing formation. Charles Bray and his wife, Catherine Hennell Bray, discovered a vibrant, brilliant mind in the young lady who was now taking care of her father at their new estate in Foleshill. Charles Bray, an outspoken Unitarian, had written tracts challenging the scientific and historical claims of the church. Catherine Bray supported her husband's views, though not in so brash a manner as was his custom. Yet Catherine's greatest contribution to Mary Anne's intellectual development might have come through an introduction to her brother, Charles Hennell. Hennell, more organized and scholarly in his challenges to Christianity than Bray, authored *Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity*. Hennell began the work as an attempt to prove the historical origins of Christianity, but his research produced evidence that

---

<sup>17</sup>Frederick Karl, *George Eliot: A Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), 56.

challenged the historicity of both the gospels and the accounts of the ante-Nicene Church.<sup>18</sup> The effect of this amalgam of Unitarian and agnostic influences that Mary Anne experienced through the Brays and the Hennells brought her to the other side of the theological and philosophical pendulum upon which she had been swinging. The twenty two year old evangelical would emerge as a twenty three year old Comte-like positivist.<sup>19</sup> Mary Anne Evans – now Marian Evans<sup>20</sup> – began her own work of scholarship, laborious translations of German theology that would seemingly solidify her among the ranks of the agnostics, if not the atheists.

*A Woman Spiteful of Orthodox Christianity*

In January of 1842, Marian refused to do something that her father had taken for granted her entire life – she would no longer attend Sunday morning worship with him. Over the course of the next few months, Robert Evans sent his daughter to reside with her brother Isaac, hoping this would break her of what he perceived as unfounded rebelliousness. In a letter to her father, Marian attempts

---

<sup>18</sup>K. B. Kinney, “George Eliot and ‘The Real Drama of Evangelicalism,’” in *Crux* 32 (December 1996): 32.

<sup>19</sup>Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography*, 80.

<sup>20</sup>Ina Taylor records the name change from Mary Anne to Marian as taking place in 1850 after returning from a trip to Geneva, Switzerland. This journey coupled with a cold welcoming from her family upon her return brings about the name change as a signifier that she has taken “control of her own life.” *A Woman of Contradictions: The Life of George Eliot* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1989), 81.

to forge a peace with him through a sincere description of her convictions about the Christian faith:

I wish entirely to remove from your mind the false notion that I am inclined visibly to unite myself with any Christian community, or that I have any affinity in opinion with Unitarians more than with other classes of believers in the Divine authority of the books comprising the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. I regard these writings as histories consisting of mingled truth and fiction, and while I admire and cherish much of what I believe to have been the moral teaching of Jesus himself, I consider the system of doctrines built upon the facts of his life and drawn as to its materials from Jewish notions to be most dishonorable to God and most pernicious in its influence on individual and social happiness. In thus viewing this important subject I am in unison with some of the finest minds in Christendom in past ages, and with the majority of such in the present.<sup>21</sup>

Marian, concerned with affirming her newly found beliefs while still keeping peace with her father, compromised in May of 1842. She attended worship with her father but insisted that this did not signify her belief in the dogma the church proclaimed.

As she continued her relationship with the Brays over the next few years, Marian received an “assignment” that would further her alienation from Christianity. She was asked by Charles Bray to translate into English David Friedrich Strauss’ *Leben de Jesu* (*The Life of Jesus*). She complied, and the translation of his work, challenging the historicity of the gospels, became the basis for her new doctrine. No longer was it possible to cling to even an inkling of her evangelical beliefs that declared Jesus of Nazareth to be fully God or that his death upon a cross acted as an atonement for the sins of humankind. Ten years later, in 1855, Marian would complete a translation of Ludwig Feuerbach’s *The Essence of*

---

<sup>21</sup>Haight, *The George Eliot Letters*, 1: 21.

*Christianity*. These two translations were arduous tasks completed during Marian's decade of antagonism toward Christianity and, more generally, supernatural religion. Unfortunately, George Eliot is often misjudged as having retained this anti-Christian sentiment for the rest of her life and in all of her later novels. A close theological reading of her novels will reveal, as we shall see, a far more complicated interpretation of the Christian faith.

While in the midst of translating *The Essence of Christianity*, Marian declared herself in agreement with Feuerbach on all accounts. In Feuerbach's view, traditional Christianity suffered from an illusion and should more rightly be interpreted as a stage in the development of human self-understanding.<sup>22</sup>

Feuerbach argued that the abstract and theoretical God proposed by theology and philosophy was not the true God.<sup>23</sup> In his assessment of the evolution of human self-understanding, Feuerbach considered all views of God presented by the world's religions as nothing more than projections of what humanity has considered as "that of which none greater can be imagined" onto an entity that does not exist. Humans have created God in their own image, not the converse. Such conclusions led Marian to make the remark that is most often associated with her religious views. In 1881, *Century Magazine* published the words that Marian Evans supposedly spoke in 1855 (and there is little doubt that she did): "God is

---

<sup>22</sup>Kinney, 32.

<sup>23</sup>Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 197.

inconceivable . . . . Immortality is unbelievable . . . . Duty remains peremptory and absolute.”<sup>24</sup>

Marian’s allegiance to Feuerbachian theology from ages twenty four to thirty four was coupled with a larger philosophical adherence to Comte’s positivism. Having already been introduced to the shortcomings of rationalism through Immanuel Kant’s criticism of intuition as a source of knowledge, Marian identified a commonality between Kant and Comte – religion does not offer verifiable, empirical knowledge.<sup>25</sup> Although Marian’s philosophical outlook during this time of her life is most often associated with Comte, the continuing echoes of Kantian “reason” resonate in her later works of fiction. Pure reason ventures not into the arena of religion; whereas practical reason utilizes religion for moral purposes only. For Kant, religious stories and dogmas fulfill their purpose in guiding the reader toward good conduct.<sup>26</sup> Auguste Comte argued that humanity must pass through a religious and metaphysical stage before finally arriving at what he considered the apex of the scientific stage. Comte and Feuerbach were similar in that neither thought religion a negative aspect of society

---

<sup>24</sup>David Payne, “The Serialist Vanishes: Producing Belief in George Eliot,” in *Novel* 33 (Fall 1999): 40. The article in *Century Magazine*, of which I was not able to obtain a copy, was written by Frederic Myers.

<sup>25</sup>Suzy Anger, “George Eliot and Philosophy,” *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, George Levine, ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), 78.

<sup>26</sup>The Kantian idea of an objective and universal moral system existing in a vacuum free of a particular tradition and community has a postliberal criticism that will be addressed in the conclusion. See also Dennis Sansom’s “Does Morality Need God? A Kierkegaardian Critique of Kant’s Moral Philosophy of Autonomy,” in *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 26 (Spring 1999): 17.

as long as it was not interpreted as the peak of human development. Religion is necessary but only as a stage humanity must pass through to reach its highest self-understanding. Positivism rests upon the principle of “Continuity:” all past states of the human condition must be treated with “reverence,” as necessary contributions to later development.<sup>27</sup> Humanity is the product of all those who have been and all those who will be, and thus there can be no miraculous “new thing” called the Gospel and the Church.

This positivist philosophy led Marian to view life as essentially tragic.<sup>28</sup> The tragedy lay in the tension between the inner yearnings of humanity and the outward frustrations of such desire. The inner person cries out for a life with meaning and ultimate order, but the reality faced in the world only frustrates this will and desire. Perhaps Marian’s crisis would eventually lead to what separated her from both Feuerbach and Comte. The German theologian and French philosopher accepted and made peace with their positivist vision of human reality – by way of confirmed atheism – but Marian Evans never could.

For several years, however, she did discover a sense of calm after offering a eulogy over the grave of the God of orthodox Christian faith. No longer did her decisions appear to have eternal consequences. During this period, she writes, “I could shed tears of joy to believe that in this lovely world I may lie on the grass and ruminate on possibilities without dreading lest my conclusions be

---

<sup>27</sup>Kinney, 33.

<sup>28</sup>Bernard J. Paris, “George Eliot’s Religion of Humanity,” *George Eliot*, George R. Creeger, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), 11-12.

everlastingly fatal.”<sup>29</sup> Marian’s writings, both as a critic for the *Westminster Review* and later as a novelist, would decry what she found deplorable not only about evangelicalism but also the “cultural Christianity” to which her father belonged. Her most scathing comments against a Christianity that affirmed an oppressive society rather than acting as an angular prophecy against its sins can be read on the pages of her third novel, *The Mill on the Floss*.<sup>30</sup> The religion of the Dodsons and Tullivers, the family of young heroine Maggie Tulliver, manifests itself as empty ritual.

Observing these people narrowly, even when the iron hand of misfortune has shaken them from their unquestioning hold on the world, one sees little trace of religion, still less of a distinctively Christian creed. Their belief in the unseen, so far as it manifests itself at all, seems to be rather of a pagan kind: their moral notions, though held with strong tenacity, seem to have no standard beyond hereditary custom. You could not live among such a people; you are stifled for want of an outlet towards something beautiful, great, or noble: you are irritated with these dull men and women, as a kind of population out of keeping with the earth on which they live—<sup>31</sup>

Eliot as novelist here criticizes those whose faith has no bearing upon the realities of life that surround them. The Dodsons and Tullivers cling to a tradition that cannot rightly be called Christianity—it is only a view of the world that allows them to maintain their own social life of convenience and comfort.

Marian had little patience for a faith that was not willing to struggle with the difficult questions raised by human experience, and she viewed many forms of

---

<sup>29</sup>Haight, ed., *The George Eliot Letters*, 1: 143-4.

<sup>30</sup>George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (London: Penguin, 1985), originally published in 1860.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 362-3.

evangelicalism as guilty of this criminal refusal. Her most indicting words against a particular evangelical leader were published in the *Westminster Review* in 1855.

The Rev. John Cumming was her target.

Given a man with moderate intellect, a moral standard not higher than the average, some rhetorical affluence and great glibness of speech, what is the career in which, without the aid of birth or money, he may most easily attain power and reputation in English society? Where is that Goshen<sup>32</sup> of mediocrity in which a smattering of science and learning will pass for profound instruction, where platitudes will be accepted as wisdom, bigoted narrowness as holy zeal, unctuous egoism as God-given piety? Let such a man become an evangelical preacher; he will then find it possible to reconcile small ability with great ambition, superficial knowledge with the prestige of erudition, a middling morale with a high reputation for sanctity.<sup>33</sup>

Marian criticized the false spirituality of her time.<sup>34</sup> She was highly suspicious of doctrines espousing dogmatic certainty about matters that were at best mysterious and at worst nonsensical. She judged Cumming's preaching a form of emotional manipulation. By threatening his hearers with eternal damnation, Cumming advocated a form of Christianity in which life's whole effort should be directed toward receiving a reward in heaven rather than punishment in hell. Throughout her life, Marian insisted that such forms of evangelical Christianity were a perversion. Such religion is self-centered, whereas, true

---

<sup>32</sup>Likely referring to the region of Egypt where the Israelites are believed to have lived from the time of the patriarch Jacob until the exodus. Goshen is a lesser land than God intended for the Hebrew people. Here, as a metaphor, Goshen describes the evangelical clergy who are both undereducated and ill inspired for their callings.

<sup>33</sup>George Eliot, "On Dr. Cumming's Teaching," in *Westminster Review* (October 1855), found in *Religion in Victorian Britain: Sources*. James R. Moore, ed. (Manchester: University Press, 1988), 3: 214.

<sup>34</sup>Peter C. Hodgson, *Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 155.



Christianity, if there be such a thing, should be focused on duty toward fellow human beings.

Marian's disdain for dogmatic Christianity surfaces often in the many essays she penned prior to beginning her career as a novelist. In a review of J. A. Froude's *The Nemesis of Faith*, Marian selects passages of the book that underscore her own convictions. Froude is critical of the clergy who perform their "duty" for a wage rather than as a part of their perceived calling; and, upon this conviction, he argues that the proper character formation of humankind now takes place in the reading of books rather than through the superstitious spew of pulpiteers.<sup>35</sup> Marian would summarize the work as holding "suggestive hints as to the necessity of recasting the currency of our religion and virtue, that it may carry fresh and bright the stamp of the age's highest and best idea."<sup>36</sup> The classically liberal presupposition that modern culture has progressed beyond the superstitious and archaic world-view of biblical religion resonates throughout Marian's essays. In her review of R. W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect*, Marian confesses agreement with the author's thesis — that religion holds its adherents in "bondage to terms and conceptions which, having had their root in conditions of thought no longer existing, have ceased to possess any vitality, and are for us spells which have lost their virtue."<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup>George Eliot, "J. A. Froude's *The Nemesis of Faith*," in *Coventry Herald and Observer* (March 16, 1849). Selection cited in *Selected Critical Writings* by George Eliot, ed. Rosemary Ashton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 15-17.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>37</sup>George Eliot, "R. W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect*, as Exemplified in

Marian's religious outlook sought to sever the intellectual follies of Christian doctrine from what she judged as the valuable remnant of Christian faith—a moral vision of self-sacrifice. Nietzsche would later criticize this philosophy of George Eliot as typical of the error in English thinking. He failed to see any justification for the English necessity to cling to Christian morality after disposing Christian theology.<sup>38</sup> To Nietzsche, Marian Evans should have abandoned Christian ethics along with Christian orthodoxy. After a decade marked with disdain for Christianity, however, she would again swing on the theological pendulum, this time away from the near-atheist vision she had adopted for the majority of her twenties and thirties. By clinging to a form of Christian morality, Marian would revive a greater sense of awe for the mystery of the Divine whatever it might be.

*Making Peace with Her Religious Past: The Birth of George Eliot, the Novelist*

After a decade as a literary critic for the *Westminster Review*, George Eliot began living and traveling with her lover, George Henry Lewes,<sup>39</sup> an intellectual with a similar philosophical disposition. At this juncture in her life, with Lewes'

---

*the Religious Development of the Greeks and Hebrews,"* in *Westminster Review* (January 1851): 353-68. Here cited in George Eliot, *Selected Critical Writings*, 19.

<sup>38</sup>Alan Jacobs, "George Eliot: Good Without God," in *First Things* 102 (April 2000): 53. Description taken from Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols* (Oxford: University Press, 1998).

<sup>39</sup>Lewes remained legally married to his estranged wife while living with Eliot. For legal reasons, he was unable to acquire a divorce. Lewes and Eliot's relationship would likely be termed "common-law" marriage by present day standards. Eliot even referred to herself as Mrs. Lewes.

encouragement, Eliot dedicated herself to the writing of fiction. As opposed to her essays in the previous years that dismissed Christianity, her fiction communicated an openness to and appreciation for the goodness of the Christian faith, even in its evangelical form. While penning critical reviews of literature, Eliot sought to undermine and dismantle what she considered to be an ignorant and manipulative religious system and its proponents. In her novels, however, Eliot creates earnestly religious protagonists who do not seek to coerce and control their fellow man and woman but to suffer alongside their “brothers” and “sisters.”

Eliot would always hold to the “unknowability” and mystery of God as being her primary focus. Therefore, she had little use for any form of theism that sought to explain the ways of God to humanity. Yet an aspect of Eliot’s earlier Calvinism continued to linger. She recognized the utter depravity of humanity in the “constant sacrifice of individuals to the selfish interests of others.”<sup>40</sup> The dreadful imperfections of the human race raised, for Eliot, sincere and legitimate doubt that insight into the “Divine Mystery” could be gained through human perceptions.<sup>41</sup> Eliot writes that this sacrifice of individuals functions as a “proof” of just how incapable humanity is of discerning the “key” that could unlock the mystery of God.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup>Kimberly VanEsveld Adams, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2001), 198.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Haight, ed. *The George Eliot Letters*, 2: 403.

As her atheism evolved into agnosticism and then mysticism, Eliot began to surrender her own steadfast conviction that God was nothing more than a human projection, the thesis of Feuerbach that she had earlier championed. Although evangelicals might be naive in their presuppositions concerning the “knowability” of God, Eliot recognized that evangelicals were often those who were most sympathetic with the world’s sufferers, and such sympathy was to her a “divine” action:

Many things I would have argued against ten years ago, I now feel myself too ignorant and limited in moral sensibility to speak of with confident disapprobation: on many points where I used to delight in expressing intellectual difference, I now delight in feeling emotional agreement.<sup>43</sup>

The division between the intellectual and the emotional life was a tension Feuerbach and Comte had relinquished. They allowed the intellect primacy over what they considered the subjectivity of emotions. Feuerbach “tore down idols” of traditional religion, but Eliot was willing to “cherish” them, or at least “cherish those who cherish them.”<sup>44</sup> In a letter to Francois D’ Albert-Durade, Eliot writes of the “strong hold evangelical Christianity” held over her as a child and young woman, and how she could not help but remember the substantial fellowship she shared with the “earnest people” of evangelicalism.<sup>45</sup> Eliot concludes the letter by admitting that she can no longer harbor any hostility toward a faith in which “human sorrow and human longing for purity have expressed themselves: on the

---

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 3: 230.

<sup>44</sup>Brian A. Davies, “George Eliot and Christianity,” in *Downside Review* 100 (January 1982): 57.

<sup>45</sup>Haight, ed., *The George Eliot Letters*, 3: 230.

contrary [Eliot] has sympathy with it that predominates over all argumentative tendencies."<sup>46</sup>

Eliot's real life experiences with earnest Christians resulted in sympathetic portraits of Christian characters in her novels.<sup>47</sup> Her willingness to praise the goodness of Christians while remaining hostile toward their doctrinal faith demonstrates Eliot's wisdom in discerning the faults of Feuerbach's reduction of religious experience to nothing more than personal need. Eliot even venerates Christian writings that subscribed to many doctrinal ideas she would have scorned. She realized that the religious experience evoked by such works was of greater importance than what she would have considered narrow theological tenets. For example, Eliot commented that the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis "works miracles to this day, turning bitter waters into sweetness."<sup>48</sup> Eliot certainly grew to appreciate the power for goodness prompted by Christianity despite the fact that she would never again accept its theological convictions. In another letter, preserved by John Cross, her second, and only legal, husband, Eliot writes, "Pray don't ever ask me again to rob a man of his religious belief. I have

---

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Davies, 54. Examples include Edgar Tryan and Dinah Morris. Eliot, though critical of Savonarola in *Romola*, begins and ends with a sympathetic portrait of Florence's preacher. Even the hypocritical Bulstrode (*Middlemarch*) receives Eliot's forbearance after his dishonesty has been revealed, and he has been publicly shamed.

<sup>48</sup>From *The Mill on the Floss*. Here quoted in Geoffrey Parrinder, "The Great Novelist of English Religion," in *Epworth Review* 19 (Summer 1992): 83.

too profound a conviction of the efficacy that lies in all sincere faith to have any negative propagandism in me."<sup>49</sup>

Just as Eliot despised the manner in which many evangelicals sought to dissect and explain the truth of Christianity, so could she never completely embrace the manner in which Strauss, Feuerbach, and Comte sought to dissect and refute the truth of Christianity. When translating Strauss in her early twenties, Eliot had a statue and an engraving of Christ in her study. As she neared the completion of the translation, she confessed that she was "Strauss-sick," explaining that she often found repulsive the tearing apart of the "beautiful story of the crucifixion."<sup>50</sup> Although her pilgrimage would take her through a season of embracing such scholarly dissections, Eliot would eventually burgeon into the novelist who would narrate stories suggesting that religious experiences carry precedence over religious explanations.

Biographer Kathryn Hughes insists that Eliot remained a "natural historian" concerning the Christian faith and its numerous manifestations.<sup>51</sup> Not only did Eliot retain a shared sympathy with the evangelical tradition that shaped her in her childhood and adolescent years, but she also admired the Oxford Movement and its leaders, such as Cardinal John Henry Newman. After reading Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, Eliot writes that the work was to her a

---

<sup>49</sup>John W. Cross, ed., *George Eliot's Life as Related in her Letters and Journals* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1885), 2: 343.

<sup>50</sup>Parrinder, 80.

<sup>51</sup>Hughes, 259.

“revelation of a life—how different in form from one’s own, yet with how close a fellowship in its needs and burthens.”<sup>52</sup> Whether with the evangelical concern for the impoverished or with a more liturgical tradition such as Catholicism or even the high-church tradition of Anglicanism, Eliot remained sympathetic to the concerns of those who professed faith in Christ. She remained critical, however, of the confidence one could invest in any historically, concretely existing community of faith. This doubt is the key theological component always present in Eliot’s fiction.

Eliot’s rejection of many of the Church’s dogmas, such as the Incarnation, the atonement and the resurrection, would solidify her place as a lone religious pilgrim who, though she had thousands of sympathetic readers, was without a true community of faith. For Eliot, these dogmas could only function as literary themes in her novels. For example, the Incarnation is not the cosmic event of the one true God taking humanity unto himself in Jesus Christ but is, instead, a moral invitation to imitate the compassion seen in Jesus’ life into our lives. The atonement is not the death of Christ received for the forgiveness of sin but a moral lesson toward self-sacrifice in our own lives. The resurrection is not the hope of a redeemed creation resulting in a full and eternal participation in the divine life of the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Instead, resurrection is reduced to a river of humanistic inspiration flowing with the possibility of replicating Jesus’ own ethics in our lives. Therefore, the Church, for Eliot, is nothing more than a finite institution fostering better morality in the world. Such an understanding of

---

<sup>52</sup>Haight, ed., *The George Eliot Letters*, 4: 159.

the Church is a far cry from the biblical vision of the Bride of Christ who participates in the Trinitarian life in the present day while also awaiting a full consummation to Christ in the eschaton. Dogmatic certainty concerning religious faith becomes the antagonistic vice to be vanquished in Eliot's narratives. Thus, Eliot's use of liberally minimized Christian doctrine is complex and must be interpreted with care and diligence.

The following chapters will examine one of these liberally reinterpreted doctrines in three of her novels. The Incarnation as a *symbol* remains powerful for Eliot in that it emphasizes God's willingness to descend to humanity and share in its suffering. The Incarnation as a *dogma*, however, insists upon the historical reality of God becoming flesh in Jesus Christ, not only to share in the suffering of humanity but also to assume humanity, thus redeeming persons from their sin, ushering them into the resurrection life celebrated by the Church. For Eliot, to make such a claim with certainty was a bizarre philosophical impossibility made only by the ignorant, whose supposed error she would forgive, or else by the arrogant, whom she would chastise. Eliot's attraction and commitment to separating Christian dogma from Christian morality typifies a classically liberal appraisal of religion. Whether there exists an alternative or corrective to this liberal vision of Christian faith is a question that will be addressed in Chapter Six through a comparison between Eliot and a Victorian contemporary, Anglican theologian Frederick Denison Maurice.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Dinah Morris, A Pastoral Embodiment of Suffering Love

#### *Edgar Tryan – Eliot's First Example of a Pastoral Embodiment of Suffering Love*

In her first two novels,<sup>1</sup> Eliot's religious and moral concerns are not mere aspects of the stories, but the controlling motif. Eliot's first novel, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, recounts three stories about the parish church in the town of Milby, located in the English Midlands. Because each narrative takes place at a different time in Milby's history, the reader is introduced to a new cast of characters with each story. As the title of the novel suggests, a major character in each story is a priest or pastor.

The final story, "Janet's Repentance," is the longest and most literarily mature narrative in the collection. Janet is the wife of a tyrannical lawyer, Robert Dempster, who carries the power and influence of a local chieftain. Dempster, a supporter of traditional Anglicanism, opposes a new evangelical preacher, Edgar Tryan, not because he fears a competitive and more personalized Christianity, but because the uniformity of Milby's worshipping community allows him greater control over them. Initially, Janet is depicted as a weak character, beaten down by Robert's abuse, who simply follows her husband's directives in all matters. The evangelical Reverend Tryan is able, however, to draw close to Janet after Robert

---

<sup>1</sup>Eliot's first work of fiction, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, is a collection of three novellas. Her second work, *Adam Bede*, is her first full-length novel.

suffers fatal injuries in a horse riding accident. The kindness and generosity of Tryan help direct Janet's own journey toward repentance as she struggles to forgive a cruel husband who is dying. She confesses to Tryan, "I want to tell you how unhappy I am—how weak and wicked. I feel no strength to live or die. I thought you could tell me something that would help me."<sup>2</sup> Tryan becomes Janet's confessor, and her gratitude for his counsel expresses the conviction that God has come near to her through this evangelical preacher.<sup>3</sup> Through Janet's interaction with Tryan, she moves from self-absorbed depression and callousness to a self-sacrificial sympathy toward others.

As Eliot's first character to embody suffering love, Edgar Tryan occupies a heroic role in the narrative. Already at work in Eliot's fiction, however, is an analysis of evangelical—and more broadly, traditional—Christians as clinging to a naive, even primitive, religious outlook but as nonetheless accomplishing great moral good for the community. Eliot's narrator, not content to let the novella speak for itself, offers a direct statement of the matter:

The first condition of human goodness is something to love; the second, something to reverence. And this latter precious gift was brought to Milby by Mr. Tryan and Evangelicalism. . . . The movement was good, though it had that mixture of folly and evil which often makes what is good an offence

---

<sup>2</sup>George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, "Janet's Repentance" (London: Everyman, 1994), 298.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, "[Tryan's] words come to me like rain on parched ground" (308), ". . . while she was confessing she felt her burthen removed. The act of confiding in human sympathy, patient pity, prepared her soul for that stronger leap by which faith grasps the idea of the Divine sympathy" (337), "[Janet] walked in the presence of unseen witnesses—of the Divine love that had rescued her, of the human love that waited for its eternal repose until it had seen her endure to the end" (351).

to feeble and fastidious minds, who want human actions and characters riddled through the sieve of their own ideas, before they can accord sympathy or admiration. . . . The real heroes, of God's making, are quite different: they have their natural heritage of love and conscience which they drew in with their mother's milk; they know one or two of those deep spiritual truths which are only to be won by long wrestling with their own sins and their own sorrows; they have earned great faith and strength so far as they have done genuine good work; but the rest is dry barren theory, blank prejudice, vague hearsay. Their insight is blended with mere opinion; their sympathy is perhaps confined in narrow conduits of doctrine, instead of flowing forth with the freedom of a stream that blesses every weed in its course; obstinacy or self-assertion will often interfuse itself with their grandest impulses; and their very deeds of self-sacrifice are sometimes only the rebound of passionate egoism. So it was with Mr. Tryan: . . . he made the mistake of identifying Christianity with a too narrow doctrinal system.<sup>4</sup>

Eliot's narrator, synonymous with her own didactic voice, praises Tryan as one who, despite his doctrinal rigidity, also has "the only true knowledge of our fellow-man . . . that which enables us to feel with him."<sup>5</sup> Although Tryan's character might be underdeveloped due to the brevity of "Janet's Repentance," he establishes a pastoral archetype connecting human sorrow with divine sympathy that Eliot will flesh out with greater artistry and precision in her next novel — *Adam Bede*.

*An Introduction to Dinah Morris as a Pastoral Embodiment of Suffering Love*

The angelic heroine of Eliot's second novel, *Adam Bede*, enters the narrative in the second chapter. Dinah Morris emerges as a seemingly controversial figure because she is a woman preacher. As a girl, Dinah heard an aged John Wesley proclaim the words of the prophet in an open field, "The Spirit of Lord is upon me

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 265-6.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 266.

because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.”<sup>6</sup> Later, in her adolescence, Dinah would reflect upon this experience and thus receive her own calling to proclaim the gospel. As the novel begins, Dinah is visiting her aunt and uncle, the Poyser family, in Hayslope, where she prepares to preach in an open field after the workday has concluded.

The title character of the novel, Adam, is a traditional Anglican, but his brother Seth has devoted himself to the pietist relationship with God proclaimed by Dinah. Seth, therefore, is a supporter of Dinah, accompanying her while she stands in a cart and proclaims the gospel. Many others in the town of Hayslope look on from the outskirts of the open area, curious to witness this supposed anathema – preaching that is both outside of the church building and performed by a woman. Yet the hostility of the townspeople is soon alleviated. The eye of suspicion cast upon Dinah is first softened by her “feminine delicacy,” and then it completely disappears in recognition of the “total absence of self-consciousness in her demeanour.” The narrator’s description of Dinah centers on the eyes of the woman preacher:

There was no keenness in the eyes; they seemed rather to be shedding love than making observations; they had the liquid look which tells that the mind is full of what it has to give out, rather than impressed by external objects. . . . The eyes had no peculiar beauty, beyond that of expression; they looked so simple, so candid, so gravely loving, that no accusing scowl, no light sneer could help melting away before their glance.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (Chatham, Kent: Wordsworth Classics, 1997), 17.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

The removal of apprehension from Dinah's audience allows them to listen more readily to the content of her sermon. Dinah proclaims that Jesus came down from heaven with the purpose of telling good news about God to the poor, but what could that good news be in the midst of lives so full of suffering? Dinah speaks in a voice sympathetic to her listeners, asking honest and sincere questions, wondering whether it is possible to trust that God will take care of them while suffering through the "blight, bad harvests, the fever, and all sorts of pain and trouble."<sup>8</sup> Dinah's conclusion to these questions conveys Eliot's own implicit Christology. Her listeners can know that God loves them because Jesus loves them, and their love is one and the same. Because Jesus "came in a body like ours," we share a mutual sympathy, a fellow-feeling with Jesus. Jesus, according to Dinah, reveals to "us poor, ignorant" folk what "God's heart is, what his feelings toward us are."<sup>9</sup>

After sharing this conviction of God's love with her listeners, Dinah moves to the grave part of her message. Her already "pale face became paler," and her loving eyes took on "an expression of appalled pity."<sup>10</sup> Dinah confronts the people of Hayslope with their sinfulness, which she describes as their self-absorption and folly over against the godly and wise life of self-sacrifice. Beth Cranage, a local girl listening to Dinah from a distance, is terrified by the prospect that Dinah has introduced — God is so very near that He can see Beth's sinfulness in her self-

---

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 20-1.

centered propensity for ornamenting herself so that others will take notice, most evident in the earrings that she wears.<sup>11</sup> Dinah's sermon concludes with the certain promise that if her hearers will repent from their sin, nothing will be able to separate them from God.<sup>12</sup>

After the sermon, Seth escorts Dinah back to the Poysers. In their conversation, Seth confesses his love for Dinah and asks her if she thinks it possible that the two of them could ever be married. In her response, Dinah reveals the priority of her divine self-sacrificial calling upon her life, stating that "God has called [me] to minister to others, not to have any joys or sorrows of [my] own." Perceiving that Seth is pained by her words, Dinah explains further, "I seem to have no room in my soul for wants and fears of my own, it has pleased God to fill my heart so full with the wants and sufferings of his poor people."<sup>13</sup> Thus, the presentation of Christ in Dinah's sermon is a model that the preacher herself seeks to imitate — a selfless servant who bears the sorrows of the world.

At the conclusion of Seth and Dinah's conversation, Eliot speaks to the reader as the didactic narrator, pejoratively describing Methodism's subjective sentimentalism but, more importantly, insisting upon its authentic display of "charity, faith and hope."<sup>14</sup> The religiously inclined protagonists of Eliot's early fiction fit this description. They are the well-intentioned and warm-hearted doers

---

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 29.

of good whose only fault appears to be their simplistic clinging to an absurd and ancient Book of stories and the later dogmas rooted in that Book.

*The Religious Outlook of Adam Bede*

Although the focal character of this chapter is Dinah Morris, the narrative of *Adam Bede* builds toward a climactic marriage between Adam and Dinah. The influence of Dinah and his own experiences of suffering help form Adam into a suitable mate. Dinah's role in *Adam Bede*, therefore, cannot be sufficiently described without at least a rudimentary understanding of Adam's own story.

Adam works as a carpenter with his younger brother Seth in a shop owned by Jonathan Burge, another citizen of Hayslope. A diligent and gifted laborer, Adam also evidences a certain moral rigidity. Adam stands as a pillar of integrity whose will remains unshaken by any temptation to compromise his character. This moral excellence on his part, however, carries with it a harsh, judgmental tendency toward those who lack his same steadfast and capable will to do the good.

When Adam returns to the home he shares with his brother and parents, he discovers that his sot of a father, Thias, has failed to build a coffin that was to be delivered to a family in a nearby town. While Adam's father sits drunk in a local tavern, Adam determines that he will work through the night to finish the coffin so that it can be delivered at the promised time the next morning. Adam's mother 'Lisbeth, who adores her eldest son, argues that he does not have sufficient time to complete the task. Adam replies, "What signifies how long it takes me? Isn't the coffin promised? Can they bury the man without a coffin? I'd work my right

hand off rather than deceive people with lies in that way. It makes me mad to think on it.”<sup>15</sup>

The narrator explains Adam’s moral and religious outlook as having both a “depth of reverence” and a “hard commonsense,” and thus, as Adam turning away from “doctrinal religion.”<sup>16</sup> Seth might have use for the pious tendency toward emotional, heart-felt religion; but Adam readily embraces an attitude of mystery concerning the nature of God. For Adam, Christian religion serves the purpose of establishing rules and laws for the betterment of the community, and – having a steadfast will – Adam easily adheres to his rigid Christian moralism.

After spending the entire night completing the promised coffin, Adam and Seth complete the delivery the next morning. On their journey back home, tragedy strikes. The brothers discover their father drowned, face down in water. Reflecting upon his harsh words against his father, Adam begins to soften his heart as he takes the first small step toward the religion of Christian sympathy and fellow-feeling that mirrors Dinah’s own theological vision.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 43. “When death, the great Reconciler, has come, it is never our tenderness that we repent of, but our severity.” Narrator’s words describing Adam’s sorrow over being so critical of his father.



*Hetty Sorrel, Dinah's Counterpart*

The sixth chapter introduces Hetty Sorrel, Dinah's cousin, who is also residing in the home of their aunt and uncle, the Poysers. Eliot contrasts Dinah and Hetty by describing the vast difference in the way they embody Eliot's chief spiritual virtue and vice – Dinah's self-sacrifice over against Hetty's self worship. The relationship between Dinah and Hetty, more than any other in the novel, presents Eliot's ethic of fellow-feeling as preparing the way for redemption. Here, Hetty is introduced as the lost soul to whom Dinah will attach herself in order that on some future day, Dinah might save Hetty from her self-centeredness.

Hetty is a vain creature, self-absorbed with her own physical beauty, and clinging to the hope that her sensuality will enable her to make an exodus away from her life as poor, simple farm girl. The reader first sees Hetty looking and admiring her own reflection in the dishes that have been set on the family dining table.<sup>18</sup> Soon after this introduction of Hetty, two visitors arrive at the Poysers' home – the Reverend Irwine, the affable parish priest, and Captain Arthur Donnithorne, the young man who will inherit the Hayslope farms when the current squire, his grandfather, dies. The narrator describes Arthur as "very full of jokes, a great favorite throughout the estate on account of his *free manners* (emphasis mine)."<sup>19</sup> The wealthy and powerful Arthur's "free manners" foreshadow the tragic romance that begins to unfold between himself and Hetty. Hetty's beauty flames an incorrigible lust within Arthur, and Hetty's obsession

---

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 59-60.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 70.

with climbing to a better station in Hayslope society infatuates her with the hope of becoming Mrs. Arthur Donnithorne.

Before leaving the Poysers, Rev. Irwine and Arthur declare the reason for their visit—the death of Thias Bede. Upon hearing this news, Dinah imagines the sadness of the widow ‘Lisbeth: “She will mourn heavily; for Seth has told me she’s of an anxious troubled heart. I must go and see if I can give her any help.” The selfless servant of suffering love must go to minister in the Bede home while her self-absorbed cousin, Hetty, remains at the Poyser home entertaining thoughts of a dance with Arthur at an upcoming ball.

### *Dinah in the Bede Home*

Eliot draws upon Dinah’s ministry to ‘Lisbeth as a tangible example of selfless love, thus revealing her own conception of God as a fellow sufferer who sympathizes with his hurting creatures. When Dinah first enters the Bede home, she places a hand upon one of ‘Lisbeth’s unsuspecting hands. The normally anxious and fretful ‘Lisbeth receives immediate comfort from this stranger whom she sensed was a “sperrit.”<sup>20</sup> The noumenal Dinah glides through the Bede household knowing exactly the right things to do and say. Dinah’s visit to the Bede home grants great clarity to both her character and her understanding of ministry:

God didn’t send me to you to make light of your sorrow, but to mourn with you, if you will let me. If you had a table spread for a feast, and was making

---

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 90-1. ‘Lisbeth’s appraisal of Dinah as a spirit or angel illustrates the Bede matriarch’s religious propensity for mixing elements of Christianity with rural, folk superstitions.

merry with your friends, you would think it was kind to let me come and sit down and rejoice with you, because you'd think I should like to share those good things; but I should like better to share in your trouble and your labour, and it would seem harder to me if you denied me that.<sup>21</sup>

Dinah's mere presence causes "'Lisbeth, without grasping any distinct idea, without going through any course of religious emotions," to feel "a vague sense of goodness and love, and of something right lying underneath and beyond all this sorrowing life."<sup>22</sup> 'Lisbeth intuits the spiritual goodness of Dinah, thus revealing one of Eliot's key convictions – the subjective feeling<sup>23</sup> of God and about God serves as a better vessel toward knowing God than does the content of religious dogma.

While in the Bede home, Dinah also confesses to 'Lisbeth and Seth that she will soon return to her home of Snowfield in Stonyshire, a community of impoverished laborers who need her more than do the partakers of agrarian ease in Hayslope. The dark and cold Snowfield, filled with "lonely, bare, stone houses," has no provision of comfort and consolation, save the "love of God" in Dinah's soul.<sup>24</sup> Dinah views her ministry to the citizens of Stonyshire as a form of

---

<sup>21</sup>*Adam Bede*, 91-2.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>23</sup>Here I am not referring to the Western notion of emotional feeling, but to the concept of intuition. Friedrich Schleiermacher's use of the term *Gefühl* in *The Christian Faith* (London: T & T Clark, originally published in German, 1821-2) serves as an apt illustration of Eliot's own theological propensity toward grounding religious knowledge in the intuition rather than in biblical authority or Church tradition.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 100.

priestly mediation—“Spreading their difficult circumstances before the Lord,” Dinah brings the comfort of God into their lives as well as her own.<sup>25</sup>

*The Contrast Widens – Dinah and Hetty*

After describing Dinah’s selflessness in her ministry to ‘Lisbeth, Eliot next returns to Hetty in order to further contrast the two nieces who live at Hall Farm. While Dinah selflessly serves the Bede widow, Hetty obsesses over the affluent and lackadaisical life that could be hers as the wife of Arthur Donnithorne. Then, one evening when Dinah gently, yet purposefully, confronts Hetty, the divergent paths of virtue and vice they follow become transparently obvious.

During Arthur’s visit to Hall Farm, he learned that Hetty traveled near his estate on a visit to Mrs. Pomfret, who was teaching her to both stitch and lace-mend. Although Arthur devises a plan to encounter Hetty on this path in the near future, Rev. Irwine offers a warning about the impropriety that could result from flirting with the girl. Arthur would be acting irresponsibly as a member of the aristocracy if he were to plant ideas of a romance in the mind of young working-class Hetty.

Arthur’s attraction to Hetty, however, conquers the moral resistance that Rev. Irwine attempted to instill in the young gentleman. Arthur determines to meet Hetty on the path with the intention of making it a casual encounter, therefore abating any romantic feelings toward him that he might have encouraged during his previous visit to Hall Farm. The meeting does not go as

---

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 118.

planned. The two lock eyes and immediately fall under the spell of infatuation. Arthur determines that he will meet Hetty on the path again that evening as she is returning to Hall Farm. Once again, his intentions are to strip her of any notion that a romance is unfolding between them, but this second meeting ends instead with a first kiss. Arthur now stands on perilous moral ground for someone of his stature within the community while Hetty Sorrel opens the gate to Hall Farm that night dreaming of life as the future Mrs. Arthur Donnithorne.

On this same evening, Dinah has returned from the Bede home and is preparing for her departure to Snowfield. Before entering the house, Dinah and Hetty meet at the gate of Hall Farm. Their two faces

made a strange contrast, seeing the sparkling self-engrossed loveliness [of Hetty] looked at by Dinah's calm pitying face, with its open glance which told that her heart lived in no cherished secrets of its own, but in feelings which it longed to share with all the world.<sup>26</sup>

As the two young women retire to their adjacent bedrooms, Eliot portrays their nightly rituals as evincing of their characters. When in her room, Hetty pulls her chair up close to the mirror as an act of self-worship; but Dinah takes the chair in her room and sets it down in front of the window so that she can look out upon the world that is her field of ministry.<sup>27</sup> In front of her window, Dinah "closed her eyes, that she might feel more intensely the presence of Love and Sympathy . . . .

---

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 125, 131.

That was often Dinah's mode of praying in solitude—simply to close her eyes, and to feel herself enclosed by the Divine Presence . . . ."<sup>28</sup>

During her prayer, Dinah experiences an intensification of her feelings for Hetty now that she is surrounded by a "thorny thicket of sin and sorrow."<sup>29</sup> Dinah imagines her as injured and lacerated, weeping and looking for a rescuer. Dinah's imagination and sympathy act and react with one another, heightening her need to reach out to Hetty as a lost sinner and thus sorrow's victim. Unable to resist this divine prodding, Dinah knocks on Hetty's door, thus shocking Hetty out of her fanciful slumber in front of the mirror. Hetty's happiness soon turns to worry and anxiety as she discerns Dinah's pale and subdued countenance. Dinah's words to Hetty cause further distress.

Dear Hetty, it has been borne upon my mind tonight that you may someday be in trouble—trouble is appointed for us all here below, and there comes a time when we need more comfort and help than the things of this life can give. I want to tell you that if ever you are in trouble, and need a friend that will always feel for you and love you, you have got that friend in Dinah Morris at Snowfield; and if you come to her, or send for her, she'll never forget this night and the words she is speaking to you now.<sup>30</sup>

Dinah's promise to come to Hetty's aid angers her; but the Methodist minister's words foreshadow a dire development that will require Dinah's comfort and compassion.

---

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 132.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 134.

*While Dinah is away at Snowfield*

The middle chapters<sup>31</sup> of *Adam Bede* center around the unfolding narratives primarily involving Adam, Arthur and Hetty. As a skilled and disciplined carpenter, Adam captures the admiration of both his fellow laborers and the gentry. Arthur, a few years Adam's junior, has respected Adam since the days of their youth; and the young squire determines to make Adam superintendent of the woods. This prospective promotion, coupled with Adam's aspirations of beginning his own carpentry business, gives him hope for establishing a secure and happy household for himself and his future wife. Who might that future wife be? The normally disciplined and serious Adam has his own infatuation with Hetty, entirely unaware of her romantic encounters with Arthur. Hetty, of course, carries no matrimonial intentions toward Adam, viewing him only as a simple laborer like herself who can do nothing to improve her station in life.

Arthur, unaware of Adam's hopes for a life with Hetty, continues to meet with her. Yet Arthur's conscience is so troubled that he attempts to justify the affair as harmless — a light, trifling matter. Rev. Irwine, unaware of the budding romance, continues to discuss issues of morality and integrity with Arthur. Arthur cannot help but wince at his own ethical shortcomings revealed to him during these conversations. On one occasion, Arthur tells Irwine that it is "vexatious" to have one's moods determine a course of action that is against one's own rational resolutions. Irwine disagrees, stating that both moods and resolutions partake of the same nature; and if a seed of the soul grows into an

---

<sup>31</sup> Chapters 16-44.

exceptional action, the same admission must be made about the germinal foolishness within every person. Arthur, still hoping for some merciful conclusion to this discussion, asks Irwine if the better man at least struggles against temptation whereas the worse man does not even bother with the struggle. Irwine does not agree: "Consequences are unpitying. Our deeds carry their terrible consequences, quite apart from any fluctuations that went before."<sup>32</sup>

Adam will soon discover the forbidden and secret relationship between Arthur and Hetty, but first, Eliot, the religious philosopher, interrupts the narrative with a didactic chapter,<sup>33</sup> insuring that her readers recognize the spiritual journey that Adam is undergoing. Because this chapter is vital to understanding the theological vision Eliot presents in *Adam Bede*, we must also pause to unpack what Eliot accomplishes in this chapter.

Eliot begins by describing herself as a realist, stating that some might prefer the author "to represent things as they never have been and never will be."<sup>34</sup> Rather than depicting an idealized world of advantaged and unblemished souls, Eliot argues that the world of "ugly, stupid, inconsistent" people carries greater

---

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 144-5.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., chapter 17 (first chapter of the second book).

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 147.



aesthetic<sup>35</sup> appeal because that very world actually exists.<sup>36</sup> Eliot's desire for realism in her fiction rests upon her presupposition concerning the greatest of all virtues: "fellow-feeling."<sup>37</sup> In seeing people struggle in the same areas of life where readers themselves struggle, in recognizing other people's weaknesses as our own weaknesses, in feeling heartache to such a degree that comfort is demanded and no room for censure remains, Eliot creates a narrative world in which sympathy with fellow man and woman is the greatest religious and moral good.

I suggest that Eliot encourages the reader to evaluate how well the characters of *Adam Bede* are embodying this supreme virtue of "fellow-feeling." Dinah has completed this journey toward "fellow-feeling." Adam's loss of his father suggests an impetus toward his own beginning of the journey. Arthur's compulsions to have what he wants no matter the cost make it doubtful that he will learn this greatest virtue. Hetty, however, is the character most in danger. Her self-absorption leaves no room in her soul for "fellow-feeling."

In this didactic chapter, Eliot's narrator includes a lengthy interview with a much older Adam, thus allowing the reader to hear the words of the mature protagonist. Adam in his later years serves as a support for Eliot's theology of

---

<sup>35</sup>For Eliot, the primary qualifier of "beauty" is that which is actual or really exists. In this chapter, Eliot references the plain Dutch paintings picturing peasants as portraying a beauty far superior to the idealized paintings of royalty and wealth, 149. See also the chapter on Eliot in J. Hillis Miller's *The Ethics of Reading* (New York: Columbia University, 1987).

<sup>36</sup>*Adam Bede*, 148.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 149-151.

“fellow-feeling.” When asked about the Rev. Ryde, Rev. Irwine’s successor at Hayslope, Adam agrees that Ryde’s sermons carried more doctrine; “but doctrines [are] like finding names for your feelings, so as you can talk” of things you do not know.<sup>38</sup> When it comes to religion, Adam has little use for “notions.”

I’ve seen pretty clear, ever since I was a young un, as religion’s something else besides notions. It isn’t notions sets people doing the right thing – it’s *feelings*. It’s the same with the notions in religion as it is with math’ matics – a man may be able to work problems straight off in’s head as he sits by the fire and smokes his pipe; but if he has to make a machine or a building, he must have a *will* and a *resolution*, and love something else better than his own ease.<sup>39</sup> (emphases mine)

The proleptic interview with Adam prepares the reader for the first softening of Adam’s heart following the funeral of Thias Bede. Since his father’s death, guilt has continued to plague Adam. Adam’s rigidly harsh and judgmental attitude toward his drunken father resulted in mean-spirited words and actions that cannot be redeemed. Adam’s memories center around his rebukes of his father and the manner in which Thias silently hung his head and endured the chastising words of his eldest son. Adam confesses, “Ah! I was always too hard. It’s a sore fault in me as I’m so hot and out o’ patience with people when they do wrong, and my heart gets shut up against ‘em, so as I can’t bring myself to forgive ‘em.”<sup>40</sup> This confession is not a momentary episode of shame. Adam’s

---

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 153. Humorously, Adam alludes here to a man who might know the name of a hammer but has no idea how to use it. Similarly, what good is it to know all the doctrines of Christianity if your own life experiences haven’t brought about the “feelings” that such doctrines reflect?

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 151. The italicized emphases make clear that feeling does not mean emotion but intuitive moral insight and action.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 169.

relationships with others will slowly begin to move toward the embodiment of “fellow-feeling,” most fully embodied in Dinah. Eliot’s narrator both points to the emergence of this new Adam and foreshadows the further suffering he must first endure.

[Adam] had too little fellow-feeling with the weakness that errs in spite of foreseen consequences. Without this fellow-feeling, how are we to get enough patience and charity towards our stumbling, falling companions in the long and changeful journey? And there is but one way in which a strong determined soul can learn it—by getting his heart-strings bound round the weak and erring, so that he must share not only the outward consequence of their error, but their inward suffering.<sup>41</sup>

Adam’s moment of greatest suffering arrives when, one day while walking through the woods over which Arthur had just appointed him superintendent, he sees Arthur and Hetty embracing and kissing one another. Twenty yards removed from Adam, the lovers part, Hetty hurries away toward home and Arthur saunters toward Adam, uncertain about what Adam has seen.<sup>42</sup> Pleasantries have been dismissed as the two men engage in an argument. Arthur learns of Adam’s love for Hetty, and the young squire finally begins to sense the fierce consequences of the affair he considered a trivial matter. For the first time in his life, Arthur listens to justified words of condemnation, experiencing them as “scorching missiles that were making ineffaceable scars on him.”<sup>43</sup> Arthur, who always had a ready justification for his actions, stands in stunned silence, facing

---

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 176.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 251.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 255.

the “first great irrevocable evil he had ever committed.”<sup>44</sup> Recovering his ability to speak, Arthur returns to old habits, seeking to justify his actions toward Hetty; but Adam has no patience for excuses. The verbal argument between the two escalates into a physical conflict, ending with Adam knocking the young squire unconscious.

Adam feels immediate remorse, even fearing that one of the violent blows may have killed Arthur. Relieved to see the young squire regain consciousness, Adam assists Arthur to the nearby Donnithorne family hermitage. Once inside this small house, the argument resumes. Adam demands that Arthur end his relationship with Hetty and apologize for the impropriety of the affair. Arthur again attempts to justify himself by explaining the scene that Adam witnessed in the woods as mere flirtation. Adam proves himself wiser than the squire by insisting that while such romantic encounters are inconsequential to the wealthy Arthur, a farm maiden such as Hetty views Arthur’s advances as an expression of love and commitment. Adam thus demands that Arthur do something he has never had to do before – admit his wrongdoing and write a letter to Hetty explaining that they can no longer see one another. For once in his life, Arthur cannot bestow a privilege or a gift upon his accuser so as to escape the dreadful moment of repenting his own moral failure.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 260-3. Adam makes certain that Arthur understands what he must do, an action that is nothing short of repentance. He must not only express remorse to Hetty for his irresponsible behavior, but the weak-willed Arthur must also commit himself to ending the relationship with Hetty.

By the next morning, Arthur has returned to his old habits. He writes the letter to Hetty, ending their relationship; but also convinces himself that the entire episode will serve Hetty well in the future. If Hetty thought their relationship had a matrimonial future, Arthur concludes that he played no part in such a fancy. Such a conclusion was conjured in the country girl's imagination. Although his letter ending their relationship might hurt Hetty, Arthur presumes that he will one day be able to do her a favor to atone for her present sorrow. The young squire continues his practice of self-justification, remarking, "So good comes out of evil. Such is the beautiful arrangement of things!"<sup>46</sup>

Before Hetty opens her letter from Arthur, Seth Bede receives a letter from Dinah, and her words calling him to make the sacrificial commitment to follow Christ presage the tragedy about to befall Hetty. Dinah writes about Jesus as the "Man of Sorrows," reflecting upon his words to "deny thyself, take up thy cross and follow me."<sup>47</sup>

I have heard this enlarged on as if it meant the troubles and persecutions we bring on ourselves by confessing Jesus. But surely that is a narrow thought. The true cross of the Redeemer was the sin and sorrow of this world – that was what lay heavy on his heart – and that is the cross we shall share with him, that is the cup we must drink of with him, if we would have any part in that Divine Love which is one with his sorrow.<sup>48</sup>

Dinah understands cross-bearing as suffering with and for others who are laden with the consequences of their own sins and the sins committed against them. For

---

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 266.

<sup>47</sup>Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23.

<sup>48</sup>*Adam Bede*, 279.

Dinah, bearing the cross calls her to seek out and comfort those who suffer alone. Juxtaposed with Dinah's letter is the letter Hetty will soon read, a letter that will drive her to a place of isolated suffering.

After Hetty receives the letter from Arthur, her feelings of love change into bitterness and hatred toward the young squire who has toyed with her. Not only does Arthur reject Hetty in the letter, he also informs her of his departure for several months of military service. As Adam encounters Hetty at Hall Farm during his next several visits, he observes a great change in her. He perceives this change to be a softening of her heart due to the sorrow she has experienced; instead, Hetty is recoiling from all feeling, becoming isolated, indifferent and apathetic. Adam's misunderstanding of this change in Hetty renews his hope that she might still one day be his wife. The forlorn Hetty decides that she must settle for the best possible outcome and accepts Adam's proposal to become his wife.

As their wedding plans develop, the novel takes its most tragic turn. Although Eliot's description of Hetty's affair with Arthur did not detail the extent of their love-making, the revelation that Hetty is pregnant reveals that their relationship was not a "light, trifling" matter.<sup>49</sup> The realization that she will not be able to conceal her condition drives the desperate Hetty further into forlorn isolation. She lies to Adam, stating that she wishes to travel to Stonyshire to see Dinah. Instead, she begins the long journey to Windsor to find Arthur, hoping that he will help her bear the responsibility for this circumstance that all British society will deem shameful. As Hetty sets out on her journey, Eliot's narrator

---

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 310.

remembers walking some of the same paths that Hetty now treads. On one such occasion, the narrator recalls seeing a cross, probably a tombstone, planted by the road. Reflecting upon this cross, the narrator asks if a “traveler to this world who knew nothing of the story of man’s life upon it” would be able to make sense of this cross. Does this “image of agony” seem strangely out of place surrounded by “joyous nature”? Only a stranger could find the symbol of suffering out of place. The residents of this world know full well that “man’s religion has much sorrow in it, [that man] needs a suffering God.”<sup>50</sup> Eliot’s theological vision in *Adam Bede* centers around this God who is a fellow sufferer, a God who becomes vulnerable and seeks to be near during our sorrow, but not a God who can overcome this sorrow. Where is this God, this divine manifestation of fellow-suffering, for Hetty? His personal emissary has not yet arrived, but she will be returning soon.

Physical exhaustion and financial hardship torment Hetty during her journey to Windsor. While on her journey, Hetty thinks of Dinah as a kind reminder that one person remained in the world who would show her no “dark reproof or scorn,” one generous soul who would not “rejoice in her misery, as a punishment.”<sup>51</sup> When Hetty finally arrives in Windsor, she discovers that Arthur is no longer there. With no money left, Hetty wanders aimlessly into the surrounding countryside. Hetty disappears from the narrative; the next time the reader sees Hetty, she is in prison and about to undergo a trial for the murder of her infant!

---

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 309.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 323.

After Hetty's supposed visit to Dinah lasts for weeks, Adam travels to Stonyshire to find her and bring her back home. He discovers that Hetty never visited Stonyshire; and after investigating a nearby coach station, Adam discovers the true story. His bride-to-be went in search of a former lover. She carried Arthur's child in her womb, and now she awaits trial in the town of Stoniton for the murder of that child.

A despondent and broken Adam rents a room in Stoniton for the few days of the trial. His former school teacher and friend, Bartle Massey, stays with him; and Rev. Irwine also stops by each day to inform them of the events taking place at the trial Adam cannot bear to attend. Adam now suffers to such an extent that Eliot pauses in the narrative to describe his "baptism" into sorrow and fellow-feeling.

Deep, unspeakable suffering may well be called a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state. The yearning memories, the bitter regret, the agonised sympathy, the struggling appeals to the Invisible Right . . . made Adam look back on all the previous years as if they had been a dim sleepy existence, and he had only now awaked to full consciousness. It seemed to him as if he had always before thought it a light thing that men should suffer; as if all that he had himself endured and called sorrow before, was only a moment's stroke that had never left a bruise. Doubtless a great anguish may do the work of years, and we may come out from that baptism of fire with a soul full of new awe and new pity.<sup>52</sup>

As the story resumes, the narrator describes Adam's "supreme moment of suffering:" he attends the last day of the trial, hears the guilty verdict pronounced

---

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 363.



against Hetty and silently cries out to God for help.<sup>53</sup> Hetty will be hanged until dead.

*Dinah – Hetty's Divine Visitor*

Before Hetty's indictment and imprisonment, Eliot's narrator describes a greater prison already incarcerating Hetty. Hetty resides in a "hard, unloving, despairing soul with a narrow heart and narrow thoughts" where her own sorrows consume her.<sup>54</sup> This existential prison now becomes a physical reality – a dark, isolated room surrounded by walls made of steel bars. Desperate Hetty sits in her prison cell awaiting the hangman's noose on the coming Monday. Another visitor has arrived in Stoniton as Hetty's trial concludes. Dinah has received the news of Hetty's tragic plight. The minister enters the prison cell as a vessel of divine comfort and hope to one facing imminent execution. In the darkness of the cell, Hetty cannot see her visitor. Dinah not only identifies herself as the one who has come to comfort Hetty in these final hours, but also informs Hetty that another visitor is in the cell with them. Frightened, Hetty asks for the identity of this other person. Dinah responds,

Someone who has been with you through all your hours of sin and trouble – who has known every thought you have had – has seen where you went, where you lay down and rose up again, and all the deeds you have tried to hide in darkness. And on Monday, when I can't follow you – when my arms can't reach you – when death has parted us – He who is with us

---

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 371.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 331.

now, and knows all, will be with you then. It makes no difference – whether we live or die, we are in the presence of God.<sup>55</sup>

Dinah desires to offer more than a comforting assuagement as Hetty's looming execution draws nearer. Instead, Dinah actually causes Hetty greater discomfort by confronting the murderess with her need to open up her hard and lying heart to God so that he might forgive her of sin and thus come, in this her darkest hour, as the sole, authentic comfort. Dinah encourages Hetty to accept God's love for her just as Hetty accepts Dinah's genuine concern for her.

If God our Father was your friend, and was willing to save you from sin and suffering, so as you should neither know wicked feelings nor pain again? If you could believe he loved you and would help you, as you believe I love you and will help you, it wouldn't be so hard to die on Monday, would it?<sup>56</sup>

Dinah acts as an embodiment of God's gracious love for Hetty, but Hetty cannot accept the love of the Invisible God as easily as she can receive the tangible love of Dinah whom she can see, hear and touch. Concerning God's love for her, Hetty confesses, "I can't know about it."<sup>57</sup> Hetty's lack of faith does not deter Dinah from urging Hetty to confess and pray for God's mercy.

Hetty, you are shutting up your soul against him, by trying to hide the truth. God's love and mercy can overcome all things . . . . He can't bless you while you have one falsehood in your soul; his pardoning mercy can't reach you until you open your heart to him and say, 'I have done this great wickedness; O God, save me, make me pure from sin.'"<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 382.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 383.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

Dinah prays for Hetty, who either cannot or will not pray for herself. Dinah's prayer is a pleading to "Jesus, thou present Savior," who has "entered that black darkness where God is not" to come and do what she cannot do.<sup>59</sup> God can actually rescue Hetty, while Dinah confesses that she can only clasp Hetty in her "weak arms, and urge her with weak pity."<sup>60</sup>

Dinah's prayer continues, filled with emotional, almost ecstatic, pleas that God might forgive Hetty. Hetty sobs out Dinah's name, throwing her arms around her, and confessing that she will tell all — she will not hide it anymore.<sup>61</sup> Hetty tells Dinah her story, concluding with the abandonment of her crying, newly born, baby daughter. This abandonment caused the death of the child, and Hetty confesses that the cries of the baby continue to haunt her. As Hetty concludes her retelling of the events, she asks Dinah if God will now take the sound of the crying baby away since she has confessed her sin. Dinah responds, "Let us pray, poor sinner: let us fall on our knees again and pray to the God of all mercy."<sup>62</sup>

On Monday morning, as Hetty is being led to the platform for her hanging, she and Dinah encounter a grieving Adam. A measure of genuine transformation has occurred in Hetty, as for the first time she looks upon another human being and takes notice of the significant change she has caused in him. No longer

---

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 383-4.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 388.

selfishly looking inward to fulfill her own happiness, Hetty is now able to look with pity upon one she has hurt greatly. She asks for Adam's forgiveness, and he readily grants it.<sup>63</sup> Hetty's life is rather sentimentally spared as a horse riding Arthur Donnithorne gallops into the Stoniton square with a government pardon reducing Hetty's sentence to Australian imprisonment.

Arthur had returned home after his grandfather's death, eager to take his position of leadership in Hayslope. Instead, he received the news that his immoral affair with Hetty had not only been discovered, but that she was to be hanged for the murder of their infant child. Although Arthur rescues Hetty from the hangman's noose, both of their lives now take a lamentable path. Hetty remains a prisoner. Arthur will move out of Hayslope so as to avoid the embarrassment his presence as landlord would cause families such as the Poysers and Bedes.

### *A Marriage of Fellow-Feeling*

Eliot concludes her first full-length novel with a love story. Although Seth's courting of Dinah had failed,<sup>64</sup> a matrimonial love begins to blossom between Adam and Dinah. The meek and gentle Seth harbors no ill feelings toward his brother for these romantic feelings toward Dinah, but Dinah is initially reluctant to indulge her romantic inclinations toward Adam. As she had told Seth, she tells Adam that her commitment to Jesus, "the Man of Sorrows," would be threatened and would seize her with "great terror" should she become "a lover of

---

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 392.

<sup>64</sup>See page 36.

self,” no longer bearing the “Redeemer’s cross.”<sup>65</sup> With her almost monastic sense of vocation, Dinah understands the bliss of marriage to Adam as a selfish pleasure that would bring divine judgment.

Dinah will wed Adam; but in the interval between her refusal of Adam and her eventual marriage to him, Eliot’s narrator describes the spiritual change that has taken place in Adam due to his suffering. This change, described earlier as a baptism into suffering,<sup>66</sup> makes Adam a suitable mate for the woman who has given her life to suffering love. Adam’s journey into sorrow beginning with his father’s death and culminating in his heartbreak over Hetty make him capable of the most prized virtue — “fellow-feeling.”

For Adam, though you see him quite master of himself, working hard and delighting in his work after his inborn inalienable nature, had not outlived his sorrow — had not felt it slip from him as a temporary burthen, and leave him the same man again. Do any of us? God forbid. It would be a poor result of all our anguish and our wrestling, if we won nothing but our old selves at the end of it — if we could return to the same blind loves, the same self-confident blame, the same light thoughts of human suffering, the same frivolous gossip over blighted human lives, the same feeble sense of that Unknown towards which we have sent forth irrepressible cries in our loneliness. Let us rather be thankful that our sorrow lives in us as an indestructible force, only changing its form, as forces do, and passing from pain into sympathy — the one poor word which includes all our best insight and our best love.<sup>67</sup>

As painful as Adam’s experiences had been, they prove invaluable. Adam knows sorrow and sympathy, and they have changed him into a better person. Even so, Eliot’s narrator asks if we would prefer the sadness and pain of life be

---

<sup>65</sup>*Adam Bede*, 434.

<sup>66</sup>See page 54.

<sup>67</sup>*Adam Bede*, 415.

removed. The complexities involved in such a query make a definitive, absolute answer impossible. For every Adam that weathers life's painful storms and emerges stronger, there are also the Hettys who live out the remainder of their days as conquered, hopeless souls.<sup>68</sup> Adam, however, experienced the "growth of higher feeling . . . bringing with it a sense of added strength: we can no more wish to return to a narrower sympathy, that a painter or a musician can wish to return to his cruder manner, or a philosopher to his less complete formula."<sup>69</sup>

Adam's sorrow and pain have made him spiritually akin to Dinah. He no longer casts a judgmental eye upon his supposed moral inferiors but, instead, seeks to join them in their suffering. As Dinah has already done, he too invests himself in "fellow-feeling." The soul-mates are married by Rev. Irwine whose final thoughts act as the benediction over the celebrated union of Dinah and Adam: "The love that had brought hope and comfort in the hour of despair, the love that had found its way to the dark prison cell and to poor Hetty's darker soul – this strong gentle love was to be Adam's companion and helper till death."<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup>Hetty dies while in prison or during the return trip after her release. This possible allusion is described in a conversation between Arthur and Rev. Irwine as retold by Adam, 451-2. Nothing of Hetty's own actions or feelings are revealed after Arthur arrives with her pardon. The last description of Hetty is that of the frightened girl, clinging to Dinah and asking Adam to forgive her. She and Adam share a parting kiss after which she tells Adam that she has hated and cursed Arthur, but she will try to forgive him because she knows it is the only way God will forgive her, 392-3. She only attempts this forgiveness as a child obeying a command – it is what Dinah has told her she must do.

<sup>69</sup>*Adam Bede*, 451.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 456.

*Conclusion – Dinah's Salvific Impact on Hetty*

Although Dinah's compassionate suffering has a redemptive effect upon several characters in *Adam Bede*, the most poignant passage presenting "Savior Dinah" comes in her previously mentioned visit with Hetty in the Stoniton prison. After returning to a brief description of this passage, I will conclude with an evaluation of Dinah's vision of Christian salvation that expresses a great irony – the fictional Methodist remains orthodox in her Christian faith while her creator, Eliot, seeks to subdue this fervent orthodoxy with her own vision of humanitarian mysticism.

As they leave the prison cell, Hetty clings to Dinah as she is led out to the gallows for her execution on Monday morning: "It seemed as if [Hetty's] last faint strength and hope lay in that contact; and the pitying love that shone out from Dinah's face looked like a visible pledge of the Invisible Mercy."<sup>71</sup> Has Hetty come to trust in the divine forgiveness offered by God through Jesus Christ as Dinah had urged her? Or has Hetty found merely one kindly person who embraces rather than condemns her in her final moments? According to Valentine Cunningham, Hetty leans on Dinah as a "human being, rather than as a source of divine comfort."<sup>72</sup> Thus, Cunningham argues, Hetty's repentance is superficial, and what could have been a theological message gives way to a humanist one. Yet

---

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 392.

<sup>72</sup>Valentine Cunningham, *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissenters in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: University Press, 1975), 168.

such an appraisal ignores the complexity of Eliot's liberal religious philosophical vision in *Adam Bede*.

Although Hetty's repentance falls well short of a submission to Dinah's theological orthodoxy, an element of theism – rather than mere secular humanism – remains in Hetty's conversion. Eliot knew well the Christian story and doctrine of the Incarnation, the God who becomes flesh in Jesus Christ, taking all of sinful humanity into himself. For Eliot, such a story loses its theological power if the Church insists upon its objective, historical validity.<sup>73</sup> Unlike the author who created her, however, Dinah believes this Incarnation was an historical event affecting the potential salvation of humankind. Yet Eliot still crowns Dinah an incarnational queen – having been moved by the love of God expressed in the biblical narrative, Dinah has become an embodiment of divine compassion. She manifests God's love as she becomes a fellow sufferer with Hetty.

For Dinah, her actions as a follower of Christ become a vessel through which Hetty receives eternal salvation. Dinah does not view herself as Hetty's Savior but as one through whom the Holy Spirit is working to redeem Hetty. For Eliot, eternal salvation remains in the realm of myth and religious superstition,<sup>74</sup> and thus the fellow-feeling that Hetty experiences through Dinah is *only* an

---

<sup>73</sup>See Chapter Two for a description of Eliot's classical liberal religious philosophy as influenced by Feuerbach, Strauss and Comte.

<sup>74</sup>Eliot does not present an antagonistically atheist denial of eternal salvation; but she does harbor the liberal doubt that renders as nonsensical religious convictions about such realities as participating in the kingdom of heaven.



experience of salvation from self-centeredness that potentiates her transformation into a fellow sufferer.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Hetty's transformation (and for Eliot, her salvation) is best evidenced by her interaction with Adam on the Monday morning before her scheduled execution. See above, 63.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Romola, a Suffering Madonna Without a Church

#### *Eliot's Historical Epoch Novel*

After authoring *Adam Bede*, Eliot wrote two more novels, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*. In preparation for her next novel, *Romola*,<sup>1</sup> Eliot dedicated nearly two years to researching Renaissance Florence and its primary religious figure, the Dominican friar, Girolamo Savonarola. Although the historical figure Savonarola plays a key role in *Romola*, the fictional title character comes to embody a religious vision similar to Eliot's own ethereal mysticism.

As a result of Eliot's extensive research—much of it seemingly transferred from her notes directly into the narrative—literary critics did not receive *Romola* with enthusiasm.<sup>2</sup> Eliot places the reader immediately on the streets of Florence in the year 1492. Her Victorian audience found this alien culture difficult to comprehend, and the dissonance for modern readers is even greater. Therefore, before exploring the theological vision of *Romola*, I will first provide a brief

---

<sup>1</sup>George Eliot, *Romola* (London: Everyman, 1999). Originally published in 1861.

<sup>2</sup>The “excessive erudition,” however, was but one of two major criticisms leveled against *Romola*. The novel also contains an uncanny number of coincidences, thus creating “melodramatic” moments that hinder the believability of the narrative. (Leonée Ormond, “George Eliot and Her Critics,” *Romola* [London: Everyman, 1999], 624-25).

summation of the history and political climate of Renaissance Florence during the late 15<sup>th</sup> century.

On April 9, 1492, Lorenzo de' Medici (Lorenzo the Magnificent) died, and the political turmoil resulting from his death serves as the Florentine milieu for the early chapters of *Romola*. Although the Medici family had surrendered any formal recognition of royalty, Lorenzo's influential leadership remained dominant not only in the governance of Florence, but throughout Italy.<sup>3</sup> After Lorenzo's death, the accession of his son, Piero, to his father's unofficial post was met with great resistance and antagonism. The Signoria<sup>4</sup> exiled for "perpetuity" the spoiled and pretentious Piero after he had surrendered far too much of Florence's sovereignty to the powerful new French king, Charles VII.<sup>5</sup>

The invading French king and his army entered Florence as welcomed guests because of the influence of the city's most dynamic religious leader, the fiery Fra Girolamo Savonarola. The friar's preaching appealed to many in Florence, the great "daughter of Rome," because of the apocalyptic importance he gave to the city as the New Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> The spirit of the Renaissance placed Florence at a cultural and religious crossroads. The city boasted of artists such as

---

<sup>3</sup>Christopher Hibbert, *Florence: The Biography of a City* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), 138-9.

<sup>4</sup>The Signoria is the traditional government body of leadership in Florentine political matters although during the Renaissance their authority was at times usurped by the another governing body – the Council of Seventy.

<sup>5</sup>Hibbert, 149, 154.

<sup>6</sup>Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton, New Jersey: University Press, 1970), 34.

Leonardo da' Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarroti and celebrated its Greek and Roman classicism, but Florence was most highly honored, in large part because of Savonarola's preaching, as the womb from which a new Christianity might be born. Savonarola insisted that before this new age could dawn in Florence, the city must first be purged of both her reliance on pagan philosophy and the vice of "vanities," the hoarding of material extravagances<sup>7</sup> at the cost of assisting the impoverished of Florence. The exile of Piero de' Medici and the entrance of Charles VII were interpreted by Savonarola as divine signs that the mission of Florence in this new age had begun.<sup>8</sup>

Charles VII wrested control of seaports, levied taxes on Florence and secured the city as a temporary military post for his soldiers.<sup>9</sup> After having gained these concessions from Florence, Charles VII continued his military conquests in Europe, and a more democratic government advocated by Savonarola was inaugurated. The populace (*popolani*) of Florence expected that the prosperity promised by Savonarola would come after the purgation, but the mass deaths caused by the Plague brought even greater difficulties into the city.

Growing doubts about Savonarola and his prophecies gave rise to dissenting groups within the city. The *piagnone*, composed largely of the peasant

---

<sup>7</sup>Not only did these extravagances include jewelry, wigs, ornate furniture and the like, but also the books and works of art which Savonarola considered profane and pagan.

<sup>8</sup>Hibbert, 154.

<sup>9</sup>Gene Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1983), 73.

class, continued to support the prophet while two other groups, the elder *arrabiati* and the youthful *compagnacci*, plotted against the friar.<sup>10</sup> The Franciscans, jealous of the Dominican friar's popularity, also joined the opposition. The movement against Savonarola was hardly monolithic. Members of Florentine aristocracy could not agree amongst themselves about whether a return to Medici power or a continued commitment to a governing council was more desirable. Eliot's description of Savonarola's eventual downfall in *Romola* is detailed and accurate, and thus, this portion of Florence's history is best saved for a later part of the chapter.

The Proem of *Romola* is a sweeping aerial tour of the city which concludes by narrowing its focus upon a singular unnamed Florentine citizen. He is a microcosm of the spirit of Florence during the Renaissance, "inheriting its strange web of belief and unbelief."<sup>11</sup> As a humanist, he eagerly purchases pagan manuscripts and artistic works from antiquity, but he has not been able to surrender his religious convictions—a "waxen image of the Madonna Annunziata" hangs in his home, and he continues to perform penance by making donations to shrines of the saints.<sup>12</sup> In the midst of this Catholic and pagan amalgam, Eliot offers her own verdict about Florentine spirituality and morality: ". . . men still hunger for the reign of peace and righteousness—still own that to

---

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 157-8.

<sup>11</sup>*Romola*, 10.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 9. The man also ridicules the Frati with his friends, but continues making donations to the monastic orders for their buildings.

be the highest which is a conscious voluntary sacrifice. For the Pope Angelico is not yet come.”<sup>13</sup> Eliot has thus introduced the reader to Renaissance Florence, and the first chapter begins with the awakening of a sleeping sojourner on a Florentine porch.

*Tito Melema, the Shipwrecked Greek*

The first major character introduced in *Romola* is the novel's primary antagonist. Ambiguity shrouds the arrival of Tito Melema, a Greek scholar possessing precious jewels, in Florence on the day of Lorenzo de' Medici's death. A Florentine peddler named Bratti discovers the sleeping Greek; and after Tito wakes, Bratti eyes the gems in Tito's possession as Tito explains that a shipwreck has brought him to Florence. In the hope of profiting from Tito's gems, Bratti befriends the stranger, inviting him to follow him to the city's market square. After flirting with a young Florentine girl named Tessa, Tito follows Bratti to the barber shop of a man named Nello. Although Nello has no aristocratic connections, Bratti believes that the barber will be able to introduce Tito to others who can secure a purchaser for his gems. Tito is also eager to sell his treasures, needing to liquify these few assets to gain a foothold in this new community. Nello determines that he will introduce Tito to an aged, blind scholar named

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 12. The Pope Angelico is the “angelic, perfect Pope of the future to whom many medieval and Renaissance Christians looked forward to in hope,” Ibid., 589, endnote 33.

Bardo de' Bardi, a friend of Bartolommeo Scala, one of Florence's most powerful citizens, whose wife "delights in gems."<sup>14</sup>

Prior to being introduced to Bardo, Nello and Tito discuss Florentine culture; and their conversation pertaining to the religious architecture of Florence foreshadows Tito's greatest flaw. Concerning the city's churches, Tito remarks,

Your buildings smack too much of Christian barbarism for my taste. I have a shuddering sense of what there is inside — hideous smoked Madonnas; fleshless saints in mosaic, staring down idiotic astonishment and rebuke from the apse; skin-clad skeletons hanging on crosses, or stuck all over with arrows, or stretched on gridirons; women and monks with heads aside in perpetual lamentation.<sup>15</sup>

Tito harbors a strong aversion to religious or political ideas emphasizing the need for sacrifice and suffering; and Eliot, the prophetess who stresses fellow-feeling and suffering as the highest goods, will continue to magnify Tito's scorn for the ascetic life until it brings about his inevitable demise. Despite this weakness in Tito's character, his cheery demeanor and handsome face leave a favorable first impression on almost everyone he meets, especially Bardo and his daughter, Romola.

### *The Old Scholar and His Daughter*

Bardo de' Bardi's life has been spent collecting manuscripts of Greek and Roman philosophers and authoring critical works of scholarship on these texts. Old age, however, has brought blindness; and now the sightless scholar relies on his daughter, Romola, to act as his amanuensis. Added to the frustration of

---

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 36.

lessened productivity is Bardo's resentment toward Dino, a son who abandoned the Bardi household for the monastery. Rather than having a son who will continue his scholarly work after he has died, Bardo is left with a daughter who must record his final words. No one will be left to complete Bardo's work, and the only comfort he has is the assurance that his daughter will establish a library preserving and honoring his life's labor.

Tito's introduction to Bardo and Romola serves the young Greek well. Not only will he be able to meet with Scala concerning his jewels, but Tito will also prove useful to Bardo in his own work. Romola's attraction to Tito is immediate: "It seemed that she was destined to a sudden confidence and familiarity with this young Greek, strangely at variance with her deep-seated pride and reserve; and this consciousness again brought unwonted colour to her cheeks."<sup>16</sup> Tito also finds himself in awe of Romola. Her "simplicity" introduces him to "noble womanhood, which is perhaps something like the worship paid of old to a great nature-goddess, who was not all knowing, but whose life and power were something deeper and more primordial than knowledge."<sup>17</sup> Eliot's description of Tito's infatuation with Romola underscores her role as the protagonist in the developing narrative. Romola will appear as the key religious figure set in contrast to the treachery of the clever and conniving Tito. In this early portrait of

---

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 99.



Romola, Eliot also emphasizes that Romola's virtue is drawn from a source more profound than religious knowledge or dogma.<sup>18</sup>

As Tito continues to spend time in the Bardi household assisting Bardo in his scholarship, the romance between Tito and Romola escalates. Before Bardo allows the relationship between his daughter and Tito to move in the direction of betrothal and marriage, he insists that his friend and benefactor – Bernardo del Nero – grant approval. Bernardo, who is also Romola's godfather, dislikes the displaced Greek; but he acquiesces to the young couple's desire to wed after a lengthy betrothal period is agreed upon.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Tito's Treacherous Past*

A Dominican friar, Fra Luca, disturbs Tito with his seemingly constant presence. After Fra Luca secures a private audience with Tito, the anxious Greek discovers that the friar has been pursuing him in order to deliver an urgent message. The message discloses Tito's story prior to his arrival in Florence. As a boy, Tito was adopted by a man named Baldassarre. Years later, Tito and Baldassarre had been on a journey when their ship was overtaken by Turks who made Baldassarre their slave. Tito escaped with the gems given to him by Baldassarre so that he might sell them to pay a ransom that would free his father. After Tito sold his gems in Florence, he decided to keep the money for himself,

---

<sup>18</sup>Although Savonarola will not become a major character until Book II, I believe this to be an early reference to the manner in which Savonarola's "religion" will fail Romola even though he is indispensable to her initial transformation.

<sup>19</sup>*Romola*, 77-8, 132.

rationalizing his decision by assuming Baldassarre to be dead. Eliot poignantly describes Tito's self-justification:

Under every guilty secret there is hidden a brood of guilty wishes, whose unwholesome infecting life is cherished by the darkness. The contaminating effect of deeds often lies less in the commission than in the consequent adjustment of our desires – the enlistment of our self-interest on the side of falsity; as, on the other hand, the purifying influence of public confession springs from the fact, that by it the hope in lies is forever swept away, and the soul recovers the noble attitude of simplicity.<sup>20</sup>

This virtuous "simplicity" belongs to Romola, but never to Tito, who will attempt to conceal his past through an intricate web of falsehoods.

The message Fra Luca brings to Tito is from Baldassarre himself, urgently requesting the ransom so that he might be freed to rejoin Tito. Rather than obeying his father's directive, Tito persists in his self-indulgent justifications:

What looked at closely, was the end of life, but to extract the utmost sum of pleasure? And was not his own blooming life a promise of incomparably more pleasure, not for himself only, but for others, than the withered wintry life of a man who was past the time of keen enjoyment, and whose ideas had stiffened into barren rigidity? . . . Baldassarre had done his work, had had his draught in life: Tito said it was his turn now. . . . [The gems and florins] were rather his who could extract the most pleasure out of them. . . . The men around him would expect that he should immediately apply those florins to his benefactor's rescue. But what was the sentiment of society? – a mere tangle of anomalous traditions and opinions, which no wise man would take as a guide, except so far as his own comfort was concerned.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 119-20. Tito's evaluation of his moral "predicament" ends with an approach to ethics deemed "emotivism" by Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre defines emotivism as "the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character. . . . Emotivism thus rests upon a claim that every attempt, whether past or present, to provide a rational justification for an objective morality has in fact failed." (*After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology* [Notre Dame: University Press, 1984, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.], 10-11, 19). I will refer to MacIntyre's own vision for moral

According to Tito, any system of morality exalting self-sacrifice finds advocates only in those who will benefit from others' self-sacrifice.<sup>22</sup> Tito confesses no gratitude for Baldassarre's adoptive rescue of him when he was a destitute child, arguing that he instead gave purpose to the old man's life. Baldassarre, therefore, should be grateful and cease burdening Tito.<sup>23</sup> Tito reasons that his only motive for ransoming Baldassarre would be a cowardly submission to the condemnation bourgeois Florentine society would bring against him for keeping the proceeds from the gems.<sup>24</sup>

Another self-indulgent relationship further evidences Tito's wickedness. While continuing to court Romola, Tito not only flirts with Tessa, the Florentine peasant he met the first day in the market, but he also participates in a mock

---

theology in the conclusion where focus will shift to the postliberal ethics of reading proposed by Fritz Oehlschlaeger.

<sup>22</sup>Tito's moral (or rather, amoral) vision resembles the political ethics of Niccolò Machiavelli who, interestingly, is a minor character in *Romola*. The Machiavelli of *Romola* is a young man whose highest virtue is self-preservation through the judicious use of one's power. The Machiavellian ideology as presented in *The Prince* became dominant in Florence one generation after the events described in *Romola*. Tito is also a proto-Nietzschean figure. Although I have made the moral evaluation that he is a hedonist, Nietzsche would dismiss my ethical presuppositions and identify Tito as one who is "beyond" the fabricated moral spectrum of "good and evil" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* [Cambridge: University Press, 2002], Tito's rising above the "herd of humanity" is best described in pp. 91-2).

<sup>23</sup>*Romola*, 120.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.* Tito avoids his moral responsibility toward Baldassarre through a conclusion with which Eliot would ironically agree if the context were different: The virtuous decision is reached "only when outward law has become needless – only when duty and love have united in one stream and made a common force," 120. Tito here is referencing the "outward law" of duty toward one's guardian as an insufficient foundation for true virtue.

wedding ceremony that Tessa believes is valid. This secret and bogus marriage results in the naive and submissive Tessa's bearing Tito two children while keeping Tessa hidden from public view. The affair is not discovered until late in the narrative.<sup>25</sup>

*Fra Luca's True Identity – Romola's brother, Dino*

In one of the novel's first of many far-fetched coincidences,<sup>26</sup> Romola receives a message from her brother Dino, who is near death and wishes to convey a final message to her. Dino has, in fact, taken the name Fra Luca and is serving under the forceful and potent Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola at the San Marco church and monastery. The only man in Florence who knows the truth about Tito is Dino. This coincidence causes Tito great anxiety.<sup>27</sup>

Romola travels to San Marco, assured that her brother desires to make a final confession to her, seeking her forgiveness for his abandonment of their father. Dino rests in a monastic cell where he is attended by another monk. There Dino struggles to speak but finally tells Romola that he has received a vision that he must communicate to her before he dies. Romola's anger now piqued, she insists that her brother desist from his talk of religion and visions, asking, "What is

---

<sup>25</sup>Tito, realizing the control he has over Tessa asks her, "What makes you feel so safe with me?" to which she responds, "Because you are so beautiful – like people going into Paradise. They are all good," *Romola*, 110. Tito's external attractiveness masks the treacherous self-indulgence present in all of his decisions.

<sup>26</sup>See footnote 2.

<sup>27</sup>*Romola*, 140-1.

this religion of yours that places visions above natural duties?"<sup>28</sup> Dino, aware that Romola refers to his forsaking of their father in his monastic devotion to scholarship, answers:

My father has lived amidst human sin and misery without believing in them: he has been like one busy picking shining stones in a mine, while there was a world dying of plague above him. . . . The studies he wished me to live for were either childish trifling – dead toys – or else they must be made warm and living by pulses that beat to worldly ambitions and fleshly lusts, for worldly ambitions and fleshly lusts made all the substance of the poetry and history he wanted me to bend my eyes on continually. . . . What were the maxims of philosophy to me? They told me to be strong, when I felt myself weak; when I was ready, like the blessed Saint Benedict, to roll myself among thorns, and court smarting wounds as a deliverance from temptation. For the Divine Love had sought me, and penetrated me, and created a great need in me; . . . I felt that there was a life of perfect love and purity for the soul; in which there would be no uneasy hunger after pleasure, no tormenting questions, no fear of suffering. . . . I must live with my fellow-beings only as a human soul related to the eternal unseen life. . . . It came over me after I had been tempted into sin and had turned away with loathing from the scent of the emptied cup. And in visions I saw the meaning of the Crucifix.<sup>29</sup>

For Romola, the highest good had been to serve her father faithfully, without questioning the value of her father's scholarship. Dino, by contrast, had been more concerned with the lack of value in such scholarship and could not in good conscience fritter his life away, disengaged from the suffering masses of the world. Dino's words affect Romola, startling her into silence.

Another monk enters the cell during Dino and Romola's exchange; and as he removes the cowl from his head, Romola recognizes him as Savonarola. His voice carries great authority though he speaks gently, and he commands Romola to kneel beside her brother's bed. She obeys. Dino, not realizing that his sister

---

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 159.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 160.

will soon be betrothed nor that the treacherous Tito is her lover, relays his vision to her. Three times Dino has seen Romola marry a faceless man who is the “Great Tempter;” and after the ceremony, Bardo, who had been present in the vision of the wedding, suffers greatly in the midst of apocalyptic imagery including blood and fire. Dino’s interpretation of the vision is that Romola should not marry but instead dedicate her life to a different calling.<sup>30</sup> Dino dies before he can elaborate on this alternate path for Romola’s life.

In his final action, Dino extends a crucifix to Romola, intending her to take it from him. Dino dies with the crucifix in his hand, and Savonarola encourages Romola to accept it. Romola again obeys the friar, stretching out her hand and grasping the image of the slain Christ. Eliot describes the change that this event has effected in Romola: “It seemed to her as if this first vision of death must alter the daylight for her evermore.”<sup>31</sup>

*Contrasting the Suffering Faith of Dino with the Hedonism of Tito*

A nervous Tito waits for Romola’s return. Having overestimated how much Dino knew about his and Romola’s relationship, Tito prepares for a confrontation that will not take place. Romola’s presence on the loggia where Tito stands is sudden — “like a flash of lightning.”<sup>32</sup> Eliot here presents Romola as a Madonna-figure, a depiction that will be reiterated on numerous occasions

---

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 163.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 166.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 182.

throughout the remainder of the novel. Why is this the first such description? Romola has returned from a meeting in which she was introduced to suffering, and the more suffering she encounters, the more Madonna-like she will become. Tito feels, rather than sees, “the glory about her head, the tearful appealing eyes.”<sup>33</sup>

Although Tito soon realizes that Dino has not divulged Tito’s treacherous past to Romola, the impact of Dino and Savonarola’s religious ardor worries Tito. Romola describes the friars’ lives as “strange” and “possessed with fervid beliefs that seem like madness to their fellow-beings.”<sup>34</sup> She confesses, however, that Savonarola’s “voice seems to have penetrated [her] with a sense that there is some truth in what moves them: some truth of which [she] knows nothing.”<sup>35</sup> Although Romola felt indignation toward Dino prior to and during their meeting, she has since “thought less of what was in [her] own mind and more of what was in his.”<sup>36</sup> Romola places Dino’s crucifix in a place of prominence, her family’s cabinet; but Tito, who recoils at the symbol of suffering, will soon find a way to make the crucifix disappear.

Romola next begins to compare her soon-to-be husband’s joyful demeanor with the suffering physiognomy of her brother.

Strange, bewildering transition from those pale images of sorrow and death to this bright youthfulness, as of a sun-god who knew nothing of night! What thought could reconcile that worn anguish in her brother’s face — that

---

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 184.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 185.

straining after something invisible – with this satisfied strength and beauty, and make it intelligible that they belonged to the same world?<sup>37</sup>

Tito furthers the contrast between himself and Dino with a gift he presents to Romola. Tito commissioned the artist Piero di Cosimo to construct and paint a triptych in which Tito and Romola are depicted as Bacchus, the god of wine, and Ariadne, a fertility goddess of Crete.<sup>38</sup> Tito places the triptych in the Bardo family cabinet, in the same place occupied by the crucifix. Dino locks the crucifix inside the triptych, telling Romola that he will throw the key in the River Arno. Although this is a playful exchange between the two lovers in which Tito desires only images of pleasure and happiness to surround them, Romola asks Tito, “But if I ever want to look at the crucifix again?” Tito’s response indicates his disavowal of any good reason to consider the suffering Christ: “Ah! For that very reason it is hidden – hidden by these images of youth and joy.”<sup>39</sup>

“Book I” of *Romola* concludes with the official betrothal of Tito and Romola after which the engaged couple witnesses a haunting effigy of “Winged Time with his scythe and hour-glass.”<sup>40</sup> The exchange that follows forecasts a troubled marriage. After seeing “Winged Time,” Romola says to Tito,

“I wish it had not happened. It will deepen the images of that vision which I would fain be rid of.”

---

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 186.

<sup>38</sup>Tito and Romola are painted as Ovis’ Bacchus and Ariadne with Tito’s own interpretive change, placing them on a ship surrounded by grapes, flowers and exotic animals.

<sup>39</sup>*Romola*, 205.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 206.



"Nay, Romola, you will look only at the images of our happiness now. I have locked all sadness away from you."

"But it is still there – it is only hidden," said Romola, in a low tone, hardly conscious that she spoke."

"My Ariadne must never look backward now – only forward to Easter, when she will triumph with her Care-dispeller."<sup>41</sup>

Hedonist Tito, as husband to Romola, only commits to her as a wife who will join him in a life of pleasure. If Romola looks back to a dying Dino or the image of a suffering Christ, Tito cannot be her companion because he exists as a creature for whom "cares" and duties are cast aside. He desires Romola to join him in a life that refuses the necessities of moral duty and self-sacrifice. As a "Care-dispeller," Tito's highest moral good is his own happiness.

As the first book of *Romola* concludes, the romance between Tito and Romola foreshadows a tragedy. The omniscient narrator affords us insight into the virtues and vices of the primary characters, Romola and Tito. Romola is duty-bound, evidenced in her commitment to her father. Even though her labors are tedious and dull, she is faithful to her duty because she trusts in her father's love for her. Can such a trust and faith be sustained in a relationship with Tito who is incapable of love? If his patience with Romola's commitment to duty wanes, his pretended love will be shown for what it really is – a fading infatuation.

### *The New Florence*

"Book II" begins eighteen months after Tito and Romola have wed. Florence has undergone a great political change best summarized by two events: the arrival of French King Charles VII and his troops after the exile of Piero de'

---

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 207.

Medici and the unrivaled influence of Girolamo Savonarola's apocalyptic preaching.

Although Savonarola remains in the background for the early narrative of *Romola*, his significance increases as he becomes the embodiment of a new religious possibility for Romola. Eliot thus gives the theological vision of Savonarola greater prominence. Savonarola believed that "God had committed to the Church that sacred lamp of truth for the guidance and salvation of men, and he saw that the Church, in its corruption,"<sup>42</sup> had become a sepulchre to hide the lamp."<sup>43</sup> The forcefulness of Savonarola was derived from his "burning indignation at the sight of wrong; in his fervent belief in an Unseen Justice that would put an end to the wrong."<sup>44</sup> His faith in a "supreme and righteous Ruler became one with the faith in a speedy divine interposition that would punish and reclaim."<sup>45</sup> The gospel according to Savonarola had three emphases: (1) the Church must be punished and purged for her unrighteousness, (2) the Church will be reclaimed as God's active agent of saving grace in the world, and (3) this reformed and revitalized Christianity shall begin in Florence—the city where all

---

<sup>42</sup>This corruption specifically references Pope Alexander VI of the Borgia family who will eventually excommunicate Savonarola for his continued support of Charles VII rather than affirming the military conquests of the papacy.

<sup>43</sup>*Romola*, 215.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*

“heathens should be converted and the whole world become subject to the one true law.”<sup>46</sup>

*Baldassarre in Florence*

The narrative picks up 18 months later. Much has changed. Bardo has died, and Romola has labored to establish and organize a library honoring her father’s scholarship, a memorial that will be funded by her godfather, Bernardo del Nero. The aristocratic members of Florentine society have welcomed the charismatic Tito into their circle as one of their most persuasive advisors. Yet rather than struggling with selfish justifications for his infidelity toward Baldassarre, Tito has now become a willfully brazen man who no longer bothers with self-justification. He has “distinctly and self-consciously adopted” this villainy as his role in life.<sup>47</sup>

The narrative resumes with Tito walking the streets of Florence accompanied by his new political friends as French soldiers also march through the streets escorting three prisoners. One of the convicts, a crazed old man, escapes and flees toward the main Florentine sanctuary, the Duomo. Tito has stopped on the porch of this same church when suddenly his arm is grasped by the fugitive. Their eyes lock, and the mutual recognition is immediate. Baldassarre holds the arm of the son who refused to pay his ransom. Tito’s companions, surmising that this is an escaped prisoner, question his identity. Tito

---

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 221.

responds that he is “‘surely a madman,’ . . . and it seemed to Tito, when he had spoken, that some magical poison had darted from Baldassarre’s eyes, and that he felt it rushing through his veins.”<sup>48</sup>

Baldassarre surrenders his grip from Tito’s arm and flees into the Duomo where Savonarola is preaching. Outside, Tito nervously deliberates about what lie he must tell, what wicked action he must perform, should Baldassarre attempt to expose him as a traitor. As Baldassarre wanders through the Duomo, he captures the attention of Romola as she listens to Savonarola’s sermon. Romola is sympathetic to Baldassarre’s presence because his agedness reminds her of her now deceased father – the “grey hairs, the stamp of some unwonted suffering in the face, confirmed by the cord round his neck.”<sup>49</sup>

As a consequence of the hard labor and torment that Baldassarre endured as a slave, he has become senile and demented, as he clings desperately to his rare moments of lucidity. The shock of seeing Tito outside the Duomo brings Baldassarre to a state of enraged clarity. He knows he has seen his perfidious son. A strong desire for vengeance becomes the exhausted Baldassarre’s reason for living. His ears drink in Savonarola’s insistence that a purgation of evil prepares the way for righteousness and justice to prevail.<sup>50</sup> Hearing this call to moral cleansing, not as a verdict upon Florence but as the condemnation of Tito as a

---

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 227.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 231.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 232, 235.

wicked man, Baldassarre determines that he will take the life of the son who chose not to save his own father's life.<sup>51</sup>

*A Troubled Marriage and an Enraged Father*

Romola sees little of her husband. Tito busies himself making new political friends, certain that his pretty and simple Romola will follow his lead. Although Romola remains focused on completing the organization of her father's scholarship so that his library can be built, she is also becoming jealous for her husband's time. Eliot, however, prepares the reader for a great transformation in Romola's near future. Romola's attraction to Tito is based upon her conviction that he is a trustworthy and faithful husband. Nothing in Tito's character awakens Romola to a greater vision for her life.

All Romola's ardour had been concentrated in her affections. Her share in her father's learned pursuits had been for her little more than a toil which was borne for his sake; and Tito's airy brilliant faculty had no attraction for her that was not merged in the deeper sympathies that belong to young love and trust. *Romola had had contact with no mind that could stir the larger possibilities of her nature; they lay folded and crushed like embryonic wings, making no element in her consciousness beyond an occasional vague uneasiness.*<sup>52</sup> (emphasis mine)

---

<sup>51</sup>The artist Piero di Cosimo, who had painted the portrait of Tito and Romola despite his disdain for Tito, is present at the Duomo. He both witnesses Baldassarre's grasp of Tito and assists him in securing lodging once the old prisoner leaves the Duomo. His evaluation of Baldassarre grasping Tito speaks volumes about the difference between the suffering father and carefree son. Concerning Baldassarre's face: " . . . ugly – with deep lines – looking as if the plough and harrow had gone over his heart. A fine contrast to my bland and smiling Messer Greco . . . ." 238.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 252. With Romola now listening ever more closely to Savonarola's preaching, their paths will begin to draw closer, eventually merging. In this passage, Eliot is foreshadowing Savonarola's "nature" as the one that will awake the "larger possibilities of [Romola's] nature."

Romola attempts to dismiss any resentment she feels toward Tito because of the exorbitant amount of time he spends at work and with political allies. Her selfless impulse insists that she find the source of her marital frustrations within herself rather than her husband.<sup>53</sup> Tito, on the other hand, finds his duplicitous existence more difficult to manage. He has provided a new home for Tessa and their children, Lillo and Ninna, whom he rarely visits. After the encounter with Baldassarre, Tito purchases “chain mail” to wear as armor beneath his clothing should the forsaken father attack him.

In yet another coincidence, the shelter that Piero di Cosimo assisted Baldassarre in securing is a small grain barn outside Tessa’s new home. The young mistress who believes Tito is her husband – he has given her the false name Naldo for himself – befriends the man who lives only to murder her beloved Tito. Tito will soon discover this convergence, and the chain mail will save his life in the ensuing confrontation with Baldassarre.

Because of the dangerous complexities of Tito’s treacherous life, he determines that he must gain as much financial independence as rapidly as he can so that he and Romola can begin a new life outside of Florence. In attempting to secure these funds, Tito sells the items intended for Bardo’s memorial library, an act that Romola considers unforgivable.<sup>54</sup> Tito’s eloquent arguments justifying his

---

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 253. “The great need of [Romola’s] heart compelled her to strangle, with desperate resolution, every rising impulse of suspicion, pride, and resentment; she felt equal to any self-infliction that would save her from ceasing to love.”

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 289.

actions will finally fail him. For every rationalization he proposes, Romola answers with a heart-wrenching reminder that this was her final duty to her father, but that Tito has now made it impossible for her to fulfill it.<sup>55</sup> For example, Tito declares that a “substantial good” will come from a greater circulation of the materials that had been part of Bardo’s library than if they had been put away in a rarely visited, stuffy Florentine library. Romola fires back vehemently,

You talk of substantial good, Tito! Are faithfulness, and love and sweet grateful memories, no good? Is it no good that we should keep our silent promises on which others build because they believe in our love and truth? Is it no good that a just life should be justly honoured? Or, is it good that we should harden our hearts against all the wants and hopes of those who have depended on us? What good can belong to men who have such souls? To talk cleverly, perhaps, and find soft couches for themselves, and live and die with their base selves as their best companions. . . . But I will not give up that duty. What have I to do with your arguments? It was a yearning of his heart, and therefore it is a yearning of mine. . . . You are a treacherous man!<sup>56</sup>

Romola is one of Eliot’s first protagonists whose commitment to duty is not indispensably linked to the narrative and community of Christian faith.<sup>57</sup> The discussion concerning the influence of Immanuel Kant’s moral philosophy upon

---

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 290.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 291-2. As noted earlier, Romola’s commitment to duty echoes the Kantian sentiment that performing one’s duty produces a goodness that is the intrinsic reward of fulfilled duty. See footnote 24.

<sup>57</sup>Dorothea Brooke of *Middlemarch* is the best example, and she will be the focus of the next chapter. Note here that Romola’s commitment to duty is coming prior to her conversion to Christ through Savonarola’s intervention. Romola will cling to duty (although her understanding of it will change) before entering the church, through the church and outside of the church. Earlier protagonists such as Edgar Tryan, Dinah Morris and Maggie Tulliver are duty-bound because of their already present Christian faith (Tryan and Morris) or their coming into the Christian faith (Maggie).

Eliot centers upon how *direct* this influence was.<sup>58</sup> Eliot did read Kant's philosophy, at one point criticizing those who did not interpret Kant correctly. In his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant writes about a universal moral law to which we – paradoxically, if not contradictorily – submit as our greatest act of freedom.<sup>59</sup> Kant's systematic philosophical assertion is similar to Eliot's own narrative philosophical assertion. Romola is aware of the call of duty; and in her obedience to that call, she performs the greatest good.<sup>60</sup>

Tito, desiring to escape the seething presence of duty-bound Romola,<sup>61</sup> visits Tessa. During this visit, Tito discovers that Baldassarre is the visitor who sleeps in the granary. Perhaps hoping to lessen some of the anxiety surrounding

---

<sup>58</sup>J. Hillis Miller identifies the similarity of Kantian morality with the moral vision in Eliot's own novels. He, however, continues the Kant and Eliot comparison by insisting that their similarities do not extend into the realm of aesthetics. See *The Ethics of Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 66-7.

<sup>59</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by Allen W. Wood (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale, 2002). Although too much of a simplification, the parallel between the Christian's submission to Christ as Lord as the greatest act of freedom should be noted. This act is a paradox for the Christian but a contradiction to others.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, Section II. This is Kant's "categorical imperative" which stresses (1) the universality of the moral action, "Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become universal law," (2) the unity of humanity, "So act that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means," and (3) the autonomy of the individual, "The will of every rational being is a will giving universal law."

<sup>61</sup>Tito will face even greater disappointment when he returns home. Having suspected that Romola's anger would subside with time, he is alarmed that his eventual return home finds her still unforgiving: "Tito felt that Romola was a more unforgiving woman than he had imagined; her love was not that sweet clinging instinct, stronger than all judgments, which, he began to see now, made the great charm of a wife," *Romola*, 325.



his life, Tito prepares to meet with Baldassarre to offer money and kind words as repentance for past misdeeds. Eliot describes this “repentance” as not coming “with a white sheet round it and taper in hand, confessing its hated sin in the eyes of men. . . . It was the repentance that would make all things pleasant again, and keep all past unpleasant things secret.”<sup>62</sup> Baldassarre meets Tito’s repentance with a dagger, but the blade is broken by the chain mail. Baldassarre falls to the ground exhausted and embittered with disappointment that Tito still lives. After explaining his desire to be forgiven, Tito meets yet a second refusal to accept his sort of repentance which is nothing more than vain self-justification. (The first such refusal occurred when Romola rejected Tito’s justifications for selling Bardo’s library.) Tito informs Monna Lisa, the woman who cares for Tessa and the children during his absence, that they are no longer to allow Baldassarre to lodge in the small granary. The next morning, Baldassarre is gone.

Before “Book II” concludes, Tito has another dangerous confrontation with Baldassarre. One evening Tito meets with a group of Florence’s leading politicians<sup>63</sup> at the home of the powerful and wealthy Bernardo Rucellai. Tito’s scheming has resulted in political alliances on almost every side of Florentine

---

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 314-5.

<sup>63</sup>The majority of this group supports a return to Medici power (some are members of the Council known as the Magnificent Eight) and thus stands against both the religio-political vision of Savonarola and the near democratic vision of the *arriabatti*.

society;<sup>64</sup> and on this evening, he hopes to gain greater trust with those supporting the Medici family. This hope is threatened when a now composed Baldassarre enters the dining room and makes a matter-of-fact announcement to Rucellai and the others that a traitor is in their midst.<sup>65</sup> Tito's rejoinder to this accusation is that Baldassarre is not his betrayed father nor a scholar as he had claimed in his accusation, but a former servant of Tito's family; and that, while a prisoner, insanity took hold of the beleaguered old man, giving birth to this fantasy of his having been betrayed by Tito. Tito also reminds those gathered around the table that Baldassarre is the escaped prisoner who accosted him outside the Duomo. A nervous Tito waits to see if this lie will overturn the truth.

Rucellai proposes a test. If Baldassarre is a scholar, he should recall a Homeric figure engraved upon one of the gems supposedly belonging to him and sold by Tito to Rucellai. Rucellai challenges Baldassarre to turn to the passage written by Homer from which the engraved subject is taken. Baldassarre's senility resurfaces. He fails to locate the passage, and Tito narrowly escapes being discovered as a traitor. Eliot underscores Tito's lie as yet another sign of his growing treachery: "[Tito] had borrowed from the terrible usurer Falsehood, and

---

<sup>64</sup>*Romola*, 355. "Hitherto [Tito] had seen success only in the form of favour; it now flashed on him in the shape of power – of such power as is possible to talent without traditional ties, and without beliefs."

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 357. "There is a man among you who is a scoundrel, a liar, a robber. I was a father to him. I took him from beggary when he was a child. I reared him, I cherished him, I taught him, I made him a scholar. My head has lain hard that his might have a pillow. And he left me in slavery; he sold the gems that were mine, and when I came again, he denied me."

the loan had mounted and mounted with the years, till he belonged to the usurer, body and soul."<sup>66</sup>

*Romola's Escape and Return to Florence*

As Tito continues to secure political alliances, Romola determines to leave Florence and Tito forever. Savonarola's preaching has influenced her motivations. Under the tutelage of her father, Romola had drunk from the cup of pagan philosophy long enough to refuse the "superstition" of Christian orthodoxy. The demand of self-sacrifice in Savonarola's sermons, however, so transforms Romola that she recoils from the pleasure-seeking hedonism of her husband.<sup>67</sup> As Romola undergoes this transformation, associated with both her disdain for her husband and her attraction to Savonarola's theology of sacrifice, Eliot describes the foundation or source of Romola's conversion:

She was not acting after any precedent, or obeying any adopted maxims. The grand severity of the stoical philosophy in which her father had taken care to instruct her, was familiar enough to her ears and lips, and its lofty spirit had raised certain echoes within her; but she had never used it, never needed it as a rule of life. She had endured and foreborne because she loved: maxims which told her to feel less, and not to cling close lest the onward course of great Nature should jar her, had been as powerless on her tenderness as they had been on her father's yearning for just fame. She had appropriated no theories: she had simply felt strong in the strength of affection, and life without energy came to her as an entirely new problem.<sup>68</sup>

To make her escape, Romola dresses as a "Pinzochera," a religious sister belonging to the third order of St. Francis. A Pinzochera was known for "living in

---

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 360.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 252-3.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 329.

the world but [being] especially devoted to deeds of piety.”<sup>69</sup> As Romola succumbs to sleep while wearing her raiment of renunciation, Eliot informs the reader that no angel nor “piercing vision” comes from the heavens to guarantee Romola’s future. She has “no other choice than to grasp that stumbling guidance along the path of reliance and action which is the path of life, or else to pause in loneliness and disbelief, which is no path, but the arrest of inaction and death.”<sup>70</sup>

When Romola wakes the next morning, she takes Dino’s “crucifix, and with trembling fingers, she passes the cord through the little ring, hangs the crucifix round her neck, and hides it in the bosom of her mantle.”<sup>71</sup> Questions concerning her brother Dino surround Romola’s thoughts about her escape from Florence. She recognizes a similarity between her commitment to sacrifice and the monastic orders to which Dino submitted. Brother and sister “rush away forever from earthly delights” so that they might “dwell on images of sorrow rather than of beauty and joy.”<sup>72</sup>

As Romola walks away from Florence, two Dominican friars entering the city cross her path. She lowers her head, worried should she be discovered as the imposter Pinzochera. While resting and thinking she has eluded their detection,

---

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 326-7. The dress and the new vocation to which it points “were in keeping with [Romola’s] new scorn of that thing called pleasure which made men base—that dexterous contrivance for selfish ease, that shrinking from endurance and strain, when others were bowing beneath burdens too heavy for them, which now made one image with her husband.”

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 333.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 334.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 327.

Romola is confronted by one of the friars, Girolamo Savonarola himself. Like her brother Dino, Savonarola has a message from God for Romola:

. . . it is declared to me that you are seeking to escape from the lot God has laid upon you. You wish your true name and your true place in life to be hidden, that you may choose for yourself a new name and a new place, and have no rule but your own will. And I have a command to call you back. My daughter, you must return to your place.<sup>73</sup>

An indignant Romola informs Savonarola that he has no power over her, and the friar responds that it is “the truth that commands” her. His indictment of Romola is that she “scorns obedience,” and the possible redemption that awaits her is based upon a choice that she must make: “Either you must obey [truth] and it will lead you; or you must disobey it, and it will hang on you with the weight of a chain that will drag forever.”<sup>74</sup>

Savonarola begins to compel Romola into submission, but not in obedience to the church and its dogmas. Instead, Eliot describes Romola’s first movement of obeisance as the “strongly-felt bond of simple human fellowship” that she discerns in the friar’s eyes.<sup>75</sup> Savonarola’s claim of authority rests not in “fellow-feeling,” however, but in the Church. He persuades Romola that her desire to sacrifice for the sake of a greater good will remain an abstract and unrealized pursuit because she is already proving herself to be inconsistent in other vows. In running away from Florence, she is failing to be “faithful to the spoken word” of

---

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 363.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 364.

her marriage vows to Tito.<sup>76</sup> He urges her to cease from “scorning the mysteries of the Church” and to abandon the notion of discovering her duty in the inadequate concept of “integrity” alone. True duty, according to Savonarola, must be found in “religion.”<sup>77</sup>

Self-doubt temporarily overtakes Romola, and Savonarola commands her to bring forth the crucifix that she wears beneath her mantle. He points to the image of the suffering Christ and proclaims the message that converts Romola from her vision of individualistic self-abnegation into a “kingdom”<sup>78</sup> of self-sacrifice and suffering in faithfulness to Christ.

There, my daughter, is the image of Supreme Offering, made by Supreme Love, because the need of man was great. . . . Conform your life to that image, my daughter; make your sorrow an offering: and when the fire of Divine charity burns within you, and you behold the need of your fellow-men by the light of that flame, you will not call your offering great. . . . See, then, my daughter, how you are below the life of the believer who worships that image of the Supreme Offering, and feels the glow of a common life with the lost multitude for whom that offering was made, and beholds the history of the world as the history of a great redemption in which he is himself a fellow-worker, in his own place and among his own people.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 365.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 366. Savonarola describes this religious discovery of one’s duty as follows: “But how will you find the good? It is not a thing of choice: it is a river that flows from the foot of the Invisible Throne, and flows by the path of obedience. I say again, man cannot choose his duties.”

<sup>78</sup>At this point in the novel, Romola believes Savonarola’s vision of the life of sacrifice and suffering is synonymous with and inseparable from the Church, its gospel and its dogma. She will later undergo yet another “conversion,” after which a great shadow of doubt shall be cast on Savonarola’s vision of the kingdom of God.

<sup>79</sup>*Romola*, 367.

Romola submits to Savonarola's vision of this "higher life" as she "renounces her own will [in order] to bow before a Divine Law."<sup>80</sup>

The crucifix remains the focal symbol as Eliot concludes "Book II" of *Romola*. Savonarola describes two types of wisdom to Romola, her own wisdom which would leave her "without a share in the Divine life" and wisdom that is "the religion of the Cross," one that will "quench the sense of suffering Self in the ardours of an evergrowing love."<sup>81</sup> Romola, reluctant to confide in anyone but Savonarola, submits to his authority to such a great degree that she agrees to accept Fra Salvestro<sup>82</sup> as her confessor, meeting with him regularly while beginning a new life of service to the destitute of Florence. Romola returns to Florence, enters the home she thought she had left forever and walks to the family cabinet. She does not unlock the triptych-tabernacle in order to hide the crucifix, but she places it outside where she will see the image of suffering and sacrifice daily.<sup>83</sup>

As the second book of *Romola* comes to a close, we pause once more to identify the manner in which Romola has changed. At the end of "Book I," Romola's inherent sense of duty was directed toward her father in whom she could place her trust and faith. Now, however, she believes rightly that her

---

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 368.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 369.

<sup>82</sup>Fra Salvestro is the other friar present with Savonarola. He also is a historical figure, one of two Dominican friars who was executed with Savonarola.

<sup>83</sup>*Romola*, 374.

husband is a scoundrel. How can she sustain the virtue of loving service? In what object can she place her faith? Savonarola arrives with the answers — Christ, the Cross and the Church.

*The Madonna of Florence*

As “Book III” begins, almost two years have passed since the great political upheaval in Florence. Savonarola’s popularity has waned in the midst of the Plague and continued political violence. The peasants begin to doubt that Florence is God’s chosen city in the midst of what seems like divine judgment, and the aristocracy who oppose Savonarola celebrate the declining allurements of the meddling preacher. Savonarola also faces opposition from the Church, having been reprimanded by Pope Alexander VI for refusing orders to return to Rome. This reprimand will ripen into excommunication.

As the narrative resumes, the people of Florence are observing a parade in which the Madonna dell’ Imbruneta is being carried through the streets. For almost two centuries, when suffering through disease or disaster, Florence had found deliverance by paying homage to this image of the Holy Mother.<sup>84</sup> After the procession, the people of Florence return to their daily routines. One group consists of plainly dressed women who walk the streets of the city tending to the sick and feeding the hungry. We first see Romola in “Book III” as one of these women.<sup>85</sup> Eliot juxtaposes the servant Romola with the procession of the Madonna

---

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 378-9.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 379.



dell' Impruneta to further an earlier comparison. Romola's experiences of suffering and her conversion to Savonarola's vision of self-sacrifice have transformed her into an embodiment of the Madonna.

Romola kneels on the streets to help an old man who seems near death as he battles hunger and exhaustion. Eliot's narrator identifies the old man as Baldassarre. Romola offers him bread to combat starvation, but a group of angry men surround Romola and Baldassarre. The men, railing against the injustice that those near death receive food while nothing remains for them, demand that Romola surrender her bread basket. Romola, the new Madonna, shames the men with a statement coupling strength and conviction.

Hunger is hard to bear, I know, and you have the power to take this bread if you will. It was saved for sick women and children. You are strong men; but if you do not choose to suffer because you are strong, you have the power to take everything from the weak. You can take the bread from this basket; but I shall watch by this old man; I shall resist your taking the bread from him.<sup>86</sup>

The men back away from Romola and Baldassarre without taking any of her bread. Baldassarre's life will be spared because of Romola's service to him. Baldassarre, who has been spying on Tito and Romola's home, informs her that he knows who she is and also tells Romola about the mistress Tessa. Baldassarre hopes that Romola's resentment toward an unfaithful husband will convince her to assist him in murdering Tito.

After this first meeting with Baldassarre, Romola returns to other "patients on straw beds." Moments before, Tito had arrived in the city on horseback with good news for the city – very soon forcibly closed Italian seaports, which had

---

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 383.

much to do with Florence's financial crisis, would be reopened. Romola's patients, believing this to be a divine sign of favor in response to the parade honoring the Madonna dell' Imbruneta, declare, "The Holy Virgin be praised! It was the procession! The Mother of God has had pity on us!" As Romola prepares to exit, she promises to return later with their dinners, and the same feeble chorus proclaims, "Bless you Madonna! Bless you!" Eliot connects the two statements of gratitude: "[Their] tone was much the same as that in which they had a few minutes before praised and thanked the unseen Madonna."<sup>87</sup>

Romola's new life in the Church includes some difficulties for her. Her and Tito's marriage has not improved but seems as false to her now as when she had left him. Romola also senses that the people with whom she worships are "miserably narrow," as reflected in their "impetuous reaction towards her old contempt for their superstition."<sup>88</sup> Christian dogmatism remains an obstacle for Romola, but she recovers her "firm footing" in her new faith through "works of womanly sympathy."

---

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 393, 395. The Madonna dell' Imbruneta was hidden behind a tabernacle as she was carried through the streets of Florence. Thus the reference to the image as the "unseen Madonna." Commenting on this connection between the Madonna and Romola, Brian A. Davies states, "Romola's value is more than the Unseen Madonna. Her presence in the streets of Florence is incarnational," "George Eliot and Christianity," in *Downside Review* 100 (January 1982): 50. Kimberly VanEsveld Adams, author of *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2001), offers valuable insight to Eliot's use of the Madonna figure in both *Romola* and *Middlemarch*. Adams states that Romola is also being equated with the Madonna dell' Imbruneta, the Madonna whose purpose was to shield the Florentines from the "harsh justice of Christ." Romola is, therefore, the vessel of God's grace over against the judgment of Savonarola, 172.

<sup>88</sup>*Romola*, 395.

Florence had need of [Romola], and the more her own sorrow pressed upon her, the more gladness she felt in the moments in which she lightened the burden of life to others. All that ardour of her nature which could no longer spend itself in the woman's tenderness for father and husband, had transformed itself into an enthusiasm of sympathy with the general life. She had ceased to think that her own lot could be happy – had ceased to think of happiness at all: the one end of her life seemed to her to be the diminishing of sorrow.<sup>89</sup>

The living Madonna of Florence extends kindness and mercy even to Tessa, who could have rightly inspired Romola's jealousy. The naive Tessa thinks she is Tito's ("Naldo's") only wife, and she is pleased by his spending much more time with her. The increasing frequency of Tito's visits to Tessa are a consequence of Romola's new religiosity, "chilling his nature with positive dislike."<sup>90</sup>

The first time Romola and Tessa meet, Romola does not know of Tito's infidelity.<sup>91</sup> A merchant named Bratti frightens Tessa at a carnival when "suddenly a gentle hand was laid upon her arm, and a soft, wonderful voice, as if the Holy Madonna were speaking, said, 'Do not be afraid; no one will harm you.'"<sup>92</sup> On a second occasion, Romola sees Lillo, Tessa and Tito's son, lost in the streets of Florence. Although Romola is not a mother, Eliot continues to describe her as an embodiment of the Holy Mother.

---

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 431. In accordance with his hedonism, the hyper-sexual Tito recoils from Romola's religion that defines sex as a giving of oneself rather than taking from another, an act of monogamous commitment rather than an act of self-seeking pleasure.

<sup>91</sup>Baldassarre has not yet conveyed this information to Romola.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 437. After assisting Tessa safely back to her home, Romola "glides" away, "vanishing" around a building, 439.

Romola, with the ready maternal instinct which was one hidden source of her passionate tenderness, instantly uncovered her head, and, stooping down on the pavement, put her arms around him, and her cheeks against his, while she spoke to him caressing tones.<sup>93</sup>

Romola returns Lillo to Tessa who sleeps next to the crib of her infant daughter, Ninna. Tessa wakes; and after thanking Romola, the two women converse and Romola learns that Tessa is Tito's mistress.<sup>94</sup> Romola, realizing the girl's simplicity and innocence, bears no bitterness toward her. Romola says nothing to Tessa, aware that no good could come from the girl's learning of Tito's duplicity.

### *Parting Ways with Savonarola*

Romola depends upon Savonarola and his vision of the Church because she believes there to be no alternative for satisfying the "moral needs" of Florence. She submits to his dogmas and prophecies as peripheral components of his theological vision.

The pressing problem for Romola just then was not to settle questions of controversy, but to keep alive that flame of unselfish emotion by which a life of sadness might still be a life of active love. . . . Romola was so deeply moved by the grander energies of Savonarola's nature, that she found herself listening patiently to all dogmas and prophecies, when they came in the vehicle of his ardent faith and believing utterance. . . . Romola's trust in Savonarola was something like a rope suspended securely by her path, making her step elastic while she grasped it; if it were suddenly removed, no firmness of the ground she trod could save her from staggering, or perhaps falling.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 466.

<sup>94</sup>Tito had left a lock of his curly hair with Tessa to comfort her in his absence, and Romola readily identifies her husband's unique dark locks, 472.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 396-7.

Savonarola's refusal to obey Pope Alexander VI, together with the friar's subsequent excommunication, rouse a great sympathy within Romola for Savonarola. His separation from the Church also distances her from the Church because Savonarola had been her sole inspiration for submitting not simply to a life of self-sacrifice, but self-sacrifice as manifest in the crucifix.<sup>96</sup>

Problems begin to emerge between Romola and Savonarola as the friar's charismatic strength also becomes his greatest weakness. The prophet who speaks for God loses the necessary humility to acknowledge that his prophetic vision is incapable of encompassing the entirety of the will of God.<sup>97</sup> Romola begins to recognize Savonarola's arrogance when she learns that the friar may have supported the jailing of her godfather, Bernardo del Nero. Before confronting Savonarola, Romola kneels to pray, filled with confused pain concerning Savonarola.

[Romola] had simply felt that [Savonarola's] mind had suggested deeper and more efficacious truth to her than any other, and the large breathing-room she found in his grand view of human duties had made her patient towards that part of his teaching which she could not absorb, so long as its practical effect came into collision with no strong force in her. But now a sudden insurrection of feeling had brought about that collision.<sup>98</sup>

When Romola receives an audience with Savonarola, she asks him not only why he has failed to speak out against the imprisonment of Bernardo del Nero,

---

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 463-4.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 448.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 451-2. After praying, Romola's first action is to "hasten to her sick people in the courtyard, and by some immediate beneficent action, revive that sense of worth of life which at that moment was unfed by any wider faith."

but also why he seems reluctant to have the Great Council overturn a sentence of execution upon her godfather and four others who have been found guilty of supporting a Medicean return to power. Romola recognizes that her elevated “fellow-feeling” for Savonarola is diminishing as a result of his certainty that his political aims against Medicean advocates are identical with his God-given prophecies and visions. Savonarola’s concern to help the Florentine peasants by establishing a more democratic form of government includes a personal satisfaction in witnessing the downfall of aristocratic opponents such as Bernardo del Nero.<sup>99</sup> Romola’s indignation toward Savonarola boils over as she denounces him for refusing to grant her godfather the compassion he preaches for all:

And if anything weighs against the observance of the law, let this weigh for it – this, that you used to preach more earnestly than all else, that there should be no place given to hatred and bloodshed because of these party strifes, so that private ill-will should not find its opportunities in public acts.<sup>100</sup>

After leveling this accusation of injustice, Romola fears she has “committed sacrilege in her passion;” she is compelled, however, to justify her remarks to the friar who had brought such a great change in her life, but from whom she is now estranged. Romola begins with the opening words of the Catholic confessional:

Forgive me, father; it is pain to me to have spoken those words – yet I cannot help speaking. I am little and feeble compared with you; you brought me light and strength. But I submitted because I felt the proffered strength – because I saw the light. Now I cannot see it. Father, you yourself

---

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 492.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 494-5.

declare that there comes a moment when the soul must have no guide but the voice within it, to tell whether the consecrated thing has sacred virtue.<sup>101</sup>

An imperturbable Savonarola offers a politically utilitarian response to Romola's heart-wrenching pleas: "The death of five men – were they less guilty than these – is a light matter weighed against the withstanding of the vicious tyrannies which stifle the life of Italy, and foster the corruption of the Church."<sup>102</sup> Savonarola's certainty that his vision for Florence is identical with God's kingdom reveals itself once again. Because Savonarola is willing to die for this vision, he easily justifies the execution of five men as a sacrifice to be laid upon the altar of "God's kingdom."<sup>103</sup> Romola seeks a statement of clarification from Savonarola, asking him if he does not see that his surety will give credence to the enemies who charge him with confusing the interests of God's kingdom with the interests of his own political party. Confirming Romola's implication, Savonarola declares, "The cause of my party is the cause of God's kingdom."<sup>104</sup> Without hesitation, Romola voices her disagreement with this conflated religio-political vision, "God's kingdom is something wider – else, let me stand outside it with the beings that I love."<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 496.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 497.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 498.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

*A Despairing Madonna without a Church*

Romola appears as a Madonna at the execution of Bernardo del Nero. Eliot describes the godfather and goddaughter in transcendental terms. Romola needs “no arm to support her” and “she sheds no tears, experiencing an “intensity of life” beyond all emotions.<sup>106</sup> Romola stands firm so that Bernardo might stand firm; and although she is physically present at the scaffold, her memory does not recall the actual point of death, the “supreme moment” of her “identity” with him.<sup>107</sup>

Romola will once again leave Florence. Not only has her godfather been executed, but Tito’s political scheming has finally done him in. An *arrabiato* named Dolfo Spini discovers that Tito has been working on three different sides of the political drama in Florence in an effort to gain enough financial independence to escape to another political post in Milan. News of this discovery incites a *compagnacci* mob to attack Tito; and after being severely beaten, Tito is able to escape by jumping off a bridge into the Rubaconte River. He swims until exhausted, crawls to shore and collapses where in another staggering coincidence none other than Baldassarre discovers him. The betrayed father

---

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 502. Eliot’s Madonna-like Romola is too Stoic. The Church’s Virgin Mary cries with and for the suffering.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 504.



finally achieves vengeance, expending all of the life he has left in him choking Tito to death.<sup>108</sup>

Just prior to Tito's death, as Romola prepares to drift away from Florence in a boat, she is consumed by thoughts of despair and sorrow. Her discontentment with Savonarola heightens into a general disappointment with humanity for the manifold failure of persons to carry out their duties to one another.

A new rebellion had risen within her, a new despair. Why should she care about wearing one badge more than another, or about being called by her own name? She despaired in finding any consistent duty belonging to that name. What force was there to create for her that supremely hallowed motive which men call duty, but which can have no inward constraining existence save through some form of believing love? . . . The vision of any great purpose, any end of existence which could ennoble endurance and exalt common deeds of a dusty life with divine ardours, was utterly eclipsed for her now by the sense of a confusion in human things which made all effort a mere dragging at tangled threads; all fellowship, either for resistance or advocacy, mere unfairness and exclusiveness.<sup>109</sup>

The despair that Romola experiences connects the loss of faith in humankind with the loss of faith in "the Invisible Goodness."<sup>110</sup> Romola's commitment toward duty

---

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 553. As the Florentines bring the two bodies into the city the next day, Eliot reports their reflections on what had taken place between Tito and Baldassarre. Questions abound pertaining whether justice had been served; but Eliot provides the reader with her answer: "Who shall put his finger on the work of justice, and say, 'It is there?' Justice is like the Kingdom of God – it is not without us as a fact, it is within us as a great yearning." Eliot's verdict succinctly defines her liberal religious philosophy. She cannot accept a transcendent, yet actual, kingdom of God that breaks into time and space through the Church's Good News of Incarnation, Cross and Resurrection. Eliot reduces "kingdom of god" to being *good* by willing ourselves into doing what is *right*, but such virtues or moral valuations of *good* and *right* become mere abstractions without a narrative and community to define and embody them.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 505.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 506-7.

and sacrificially serving others is based upon a “fellow-feeling” with her fellow Florentines. This “fellow-feeling” had become more tangible under the guidance of Savonarola’s Christianity. Her distrust of Savonarola has produced doubt about all men and women, including herself. Eliot comments on Romola’s state of despair.

We cease to believe in our own better self, since that also is part of the common nature which is degraded in our thought. . . . Romola felt even the springs of her once active pity drying up, and leaving her to barren egoistic complaining.<sup>111</sup>

When Romola’s boat comes to rest on a foreign shore, she finds herself in a village that has been devastated by the Plague. The death, illness and hopelessness do not add to her despair but inspire within her a renewed commitment to duty. Realizing the need for water, Romola carries a pitcher to a nearby well where a boy from the village describes her as “the Holy Mother, come to take care of the people who have the pestilence.”<sup>112</sup> The survivors have walked out of the village, and many of them, including the priest, come near the water well. The priest, who had “trembled” at the pestilence, trembles even more “at the thought of the mild-faced Mother, conscious that the Invisible Mercy might demand something more of him than prayers.”<sup>113</sup> Romola stays in the village for many months, helping the survivors to reestablish their village. After time, the belief that Romola “was a supernatural form dissipated,” but the villagers never

---

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 558.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 560.

surrendered the belief that she was a woman “whom God had sent over the sea to command them.”<sup>114</sup> Romola climbs back into her boat and disappears across the Mediterranean as mysteriously as she had appeared.<sup>115</sup>

Before embodying the Madonna for this village, Romola, in her despair, had concluded, “I am tired of life. I want to die.” Her ability to serve and love the villagers in the midst of their tragedy, however, brings her into a “new baptism.”<sup>116</sup> Romola recognizes that when she had served the people of Florence, she had done so with a justifying “argument,” that one should live to “lighten sorrow.”<sup>117</sup> Romola now desires to live with no argument or dogma, apart from the “energetic impulse to share in the life around her, to answer the call of need and do the work which cries out to be done.”<sup>118</sup> I realize the distinction between these two forms of duty seems ambiguous. Romola’s new vision of duty is stated with more clarity and precision a few sentences later.

If everything else is doubtful, this suffering that I can help is certain; if the glory of the cross is an illusion, the sorrow is only truer. While the strength is

---

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 562.

<sup>115</sup>Eliot’s conclusion to this chapter adds to the surreal and even gothic character of the episode: “Many legends were afterwards told in that valley about the blessed Lady who came over the sea, but they were legends by which all who heard might know that in times gone by a woman had done beautiful loving deeds there, rescuing those who were ready to perish,” 563.

<sup>116</sup>*Romola*, 564.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

in my arm I will stretch it out to the fainting; while the light visits my eyes  
they shall seek the forsaken.<sup>119</sup>

To summarize, Romola refuses to embrace an ethic that insists on having a theological doctrine or philosophical argument as its foundation. For this Florentine Madonna, the true ethics of duty to fellow man and woman is obedience to the *intuition* to sacrificially serve and love others. The intuition is pure, and all doctrines and arguments detract from its divine simplicity.<sup>120</sup> Romola had previously believed, under Savonarola's influence, that she must submit to the Church and its doctrines to carry out her duty of serving others. Convinced that the religious institution encumbers rather than nurtures the intuition of loving duty, the new Madonna must now find a new community.

*Conclusion: Romola's Peace with the Memory of Savonarola*

When Romola returns to Florence, Savonarola has not only been imprisoned but is awaiting his execution. Romola, now filled with sympathy for her former mentor, seeks to understand how his motives might still be true despite the conflation of his vision for Florence and God's kingdom.

Her soul cried out for some explanation of his lapses which would make it still possible for her to believe that the main striving of his life had been pure and grand. The recent memory of the selfish discontent which had come over her like a blighting wind along with the loss of her trust in the man who had been for her an incarnation of the highest motives, had produced a reaction which is known to many as a sort of faith that has sprung up to them

---

<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>Romola's emphasis upon "fellow-feeling" and intuition over cognition are two of the primary tenets of classical liberalism, the limitations of which will be addressed in Chapter 7, Conclusion: A Christian, Postliberal Reading of George Eliot's Novels.

out of the very depths of their despair. . . . [Savonarola] shone forth as a man who had sought his own glory indeed, but sought it by labouring for the very highest end – the moral welfare of men – not by vague exhortations, but by striving to turn beliefs into energies that would work in all the details of life.<sup>121</sup>

As Romola makes her peace with the imperfect man who sought to usher in God's perfect kingdom, Eliot as narrator also reflects upon how the experience of imprisonment has humbled the friar. In the midst of Savonarola's sorrow, the "voice of Sadness" tells him that he has taught others what he himself has failed to learn; but even this revelation should not bring despair.<sup>122</sup> Simply because Savonarola's "heart is bowed in penitence," he has received the gift of knowing that God has not abandoned him.<sup>123</sup> His sorrow is evidence of God's presence with him. The friar's final statement in the novel, shortly before his execution, is one of humble faith: "I count as nothing: darkness encompasses me: yet the light I saw was the true light."<sup>124</sup>

The "Epilogue" of *Romola* introduces us to a new home where the Madonna of Florence has adopted Tessa, Lillo and Ninna. The final conversation takes place between Lillo (now a boy of ten or eleven) and Romola, about the ubiquitous question of childhood – "What am I to be?" Lillo begins to mull over what he must do to be thought of as a great man who enjoys many pleasures. Romola warns him against seeking after such a self-serving existence.

---

<sup>121</sup>*Romola*, 574-5

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, 577.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, 578.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*

It is only a poor sort of happiness that could ever come by caring very much about our own narrow pleasures. We can only have the highest happiness, such as goes with being a great man, by having wide thoughts, and much feeling for the rest of the world as well as ourselves; and this sort of happiness often brings so much pain with it, that we can only tell it from pain by its being what we would choose before anything else, because our own souls see it as good.<sup>125</sup>

Romola tells Lillo that the reason they will be observing the anniversary of the death of Savonarola the next day is that the friar embodied the good man she is describing.

Wise Romola has secured a “sort of ultimate deliverance;” but, as Basil Willey comments, the surrealism of Eliot’s historical novel casts doubt on its heroine’s salvation *via* the “sanctity of service.”<sup>126</sup> Romola thus remains a Madonna without a Church, a woman who will not accept the dogmas and supernaturalism of the world’s Savonarolas; but she can also recognize that Savonarola joined her in holding a more important virtue in common – the willingness to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their fellow men and women. Romola describes Tito and Savonarola as Lillo’s choices for what he might become, and preferring that Lillo follow the pattern of the latter, she concludes with the following mandate: “If you mean to act nobly and seek to know the best things God has put within reach of men, you must learn to fix your mind on that end, and not on what will happen to you because of it.”<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 584.

<sup>126</sup>Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies* (New York: Columbia University, 1950), 250.

<sup>127</sup>*Romola*, 584.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Dorothea, Noble Citizen of Christ-Evicted Middlemarch

In *Romola*, the shadow of Kant darkens all meaningful “God-talk” by restricting it to the moral sphere. This shadow looms even larger in *Middlemarch*. Eliot’s heterodoxy obscured the God revealed in Jesus Christ in both *Adam Bede* and *Romola*, but *Middlemarch* eclipses this God entirely, evicting him to the margins of theological inviability.

Eliot writes only one novel, *Felix Holt*,<sup>1</sup> between *Romola* and *Middlemarch*. Both the literary critics of Eliot’s century and of today consider *Middlemarch* Eliot’s *magnum opus*, although some argue that its literary greatness is rivaled by her final novel, *Daniel Deronda*.<sup>2</sup> *Middlemarch* is named for the fictional English Midlands town in which it is set. The novel follows the lives of several characters, the central figure being Dorothea Brooke, a 19-year-old orphan, who, along with her younger sister Celia, has been adopted by their wealthy bachelor uncle, Arthur Brooke. The focus of this chapter is the manner in which Dorothea embodies divine compassion in her relationships with fellow Middlemarchers.

---

<sup>1</sup>*Felix Holt* is by far the least religious fictional work of Eliot’s, directing its focus toward the strictly political rather than the theological.

<sup>2</sup>Two examples of those who argue the dissenting opinion that *Daniel Deronda* surpasses *Middlemarch*: (1) From Eliot’s own time, *Contemporary Review* 29 (London: Strahan and Company, 1877): 348-69 ; (2) F. R. Leavis, “George Eliot’s Novel,” *Commentary* 30, 1960.

*Young Dorothea: Ardent Submission in the Name of Duty*

Eliot begins *Middlemarch* with a “Prelude” honoring Theresa of Avila as a great soul in the history of the world, precisely because she discovered and worked toward an “object” that was beyond herself. Her sacrifices for the sake of others exemplified a selflessness that could never shrink into “self-despair” because her “consciousness” had been “raptured” by a “life beyond self.”<sup>3</sup> Eliot intends for Dorothea to be seen as another great soul who embodies the spiritual hunger and potential of a St. Theresa.

The Madonna imagery so prevalent in *Romola* continues in *Middlemarch*.<sup>4</sup> The second sentence of the first chapter makes an allusion to the “Blessed Virgin” in describing Dorothea’s manner of dress.<sup>5</sup> Also, in the first paragraph, the novel offers its sole description of Dorothea’s religious ardor as having a specifically Christian bent: It is the destiny of humanity as “seen by the light of Christianity”

---

<sup>3</sup>George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Norton Critical Edition* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2000), 3.

<sup>4</sup>Kimberly vanEsveld Adams, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism: The Madonna in the Work of Anna Jameson, Margaret Fuller, and George Eliot* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2001), 185-95. The Madonna imagery in *Romola* is used as a corrective over against the Ariadne and Antigone descriptions of Romola preferred by the hedonist Tito. In *Middlemarch*, however, the Madonna, as well as the Greek goddesses, appear as descriptions of the greatness to which Dorothea might rise. A Christian element contradicting the greatness of Ariadne and Antigone with the goodness of the Madonna exists in *Romola* but not in *Middlemarch*. All figures of feminine glory, whether Christian or pagan, serve the same purpose in *Middlemarch* – to underscore the potential greatness of woman that too often remains merely potential rather than actual because of societal limitations.

<sup>5</sup>*Middlemarch*, 5.



that made preoccupation with “feminine fashion appear an occupation for Bedlam” to Dorothea.<sup>6</sup>

The first interaction between characters involves Dorothea and her sister Celia. Their conversation concerns the jewelry they had inherited from their mother. Celia desires to divide the keepsakes with her sister; but Dorothea, thinking such ornate items frivolous, tells Celia to keep them all. Although Dorothea relents, accepting one item of jewelry, this early exchange between sisters underscores the ascetic nature of Dorothea’s religion.

After witnessing this exchange between the sisters, we meet their uncle and guardian, Mr. Brooke. He and his two nieces reside in the Grange, a manor located in the rural parish of Tipton. One evening, Sir James Chettam, a frequent dinner guest at the Grange and the heir of Freshitt (a neighboring manor) must make room at the table for another visitor – the rector of nearby Lowick, Edward Casaubon. James and Celia possess a scornful disgust for the aged scholar whose personality they consider dull and lifeless. Dorothea’s propensity toward self-sacrificial duty, however, attracts her to Casaubon. She considers his aspiration of researching and writing the *Key to All Mythologies* to be an exercise of self-sacrifice for the betterment of society’s understanding of religion. In fact, Casaubon has spent years researching his topic but continually fails to decide upon a system of organization so that he can begin writing. Much to everyone’s surprise, after a

---

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 5. Much later in the novel, Dorothea describes the better form of “Christianity” as that which “pardons too much” rather than “condemns too much,” (308) but this description has more to do with her selection of Farebrother over Tyke as the next rector of Lowick than of her own religious disposition.

few more visits to the Grange from Casaubon, he seeks Mr. Brooke's permission to propose marriage to the much younger Dorothea. Mr. Brooke discusses the proposal with Dorothea who readily accepts.<sup>7</sup> Dorothea's acceptance of Casaubon's proposal is a religious action. She will be a secretary and a wife, a disciple and a spouse, forsaking all self-indulgence with the purpose of aiding a noble man to complete a great task. In so doing, she will be enabled to fulfill a life of duty and service to others, despite the social constraints that might otherwise stifle her.

The intensity of [Dorothea's] religious disposition, the coercion it exercised over her life, was but one aspect of a nature altogether ardent, theoretic, and intellectually consequent: and with such a nature, struggling in the bands of a narrow teaching, hemmed in by a social life which seemed nothing but a labyrinth of petty courses, a walled-in maze of small paths that led no whither, the outcome was sure to strike others as at once exaggeration and inconsistency. The thing which seemed best to her, she wanted to justify by the completest knowledge; and not to live in a pretended admission of rules which were never acted on. Into this soul-hunger as yet all her youthful passion was poured; the union which attracted her was one that would deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and give her the

---

<sup>7</sup>The surprise at this engagement is multi-faceted. Not only is James disgusted at the age disparity, but he is also jealous, having hoped to have Dorothea as his own wife. Celia's shock at this engagement results in tears, feeling that the announcement has something "funereal" about it, *Middlemarch*, 32. Mr. Brooke finds it odd that his young niece would desire marriage to the old rector, but he cannot deny that the marriage is a good one financially. Another local vicar, Cadwallader, is married to a woman who serves as Eliot's "matter-of-fact" and "plain-spoken" perspective throughout the novel (similar to Mrs. Poyser in *Adam Bede*). Elinor Cadwallader describes Dorothea, whom she considers quite foolish for agreeing to this engagement, as follows: "... those Methodistical whims, that air of being more religious than the rector and curate together, came from a deeper and more constitutional disease than [Mrs. Cadwallader] had been willing to believe," 39. The overwrought religious conscience of Dorothea, according to Mrs. Cadwallader, has deceived the girl into accepting a bad choice for a husband. Sir James is in agreement with Mrs. Cadwallader with the additional sting of having to now surrender his own marital aspirations for Dorothea.

freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path.<sup>8</sup>

Mr. Brooke recognizes both Dorothea's religious fervor and her strong-willed resolve. Realizing that marriage to a much older man will demand that she relax her firm decidedness, Dorothea attempts to calm her uncle's fears: "I cannot imagine myself living without some opinions, but I should wish to have good reasons for them, and a wise man could help me to see which opinions had the best foundation, and would help me to live according to them."<sup>9</sup>

Although the experience of marriage to Casaubon will greatly change Dorothea, transforming her understanding of religion and duty, one constancy remains throughout *Middlemarch*. Her religion is nameless, and her sense of duty lacks an overarching, defining vision, whether narrative or doctrinal. A religious creature such as Dorothea would have been believable had she lived in the 1870's when Eliot was creating her. In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the influence of Positivism on Europe resulted in many adherents to a religious morality absent a personal god, but Dorothea lives in the English Midlands of the 1820's. A contemporaneous article in the *London Quarterly Review* states that it is an "anachronism that [Dorothea] should not distinctly love Christ, and . . . cast her care on Him."<sup>10</sup> The ambiguous spirituality of Dorothea finds early expression in

---

<sup>8</sup>*Middlemarch*, 19.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>10</sup>*London Quarterly Review*, 47 (1877), 453 (unknown author). See also, T. R. Wright, "Middlemarch as a Religious Novel, or Life Without God," in *Middlemarch: A Norton Critical Edition* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2000), 641.

her reaction to Casaubon's formal letter proposing marriage. Dorothea is unable to "pray under the rush of solemn emotion in which thoughts became vague and images floated uncertainly. . . . She could but cast herself, with a childlike sense of reclining, in the lap of a divine consciousness which sustained her own."<sup>11</sup>

*A Troubled Marriage and a New Friend*

Dorothea and her family visit Casaubon's manor in Lowick parish in order to canvass Dorothea's new home. The citizens of Lowick live with relative ease and prosperity; but because Dorothea desires to better the living conditions of the poor, she "feels some disappointment, of which she is yet ashamed."<sup>12</sup> Dorothea admits to herself a preference for "a parish which has a larger share of the world's misery, so that she might have more active duties in it."<sup>13</sup> Throughout *Middlemarch*, Dorothea's religion never addresses doctrinal and cognitive areas of belief, but instead, religion is always synonymous with performing her ethical duty toward others, most often manifest in some project that will alleviate the plight of the poor.<sup>14</sup> In describing Dorothea's emphasis on moral duty rather than doctrinal knowledge, Eliot again alludes to St. Theresa.

[Dorothea] did not want to deck herself with knowledge—to wear it loose from the nerves and blood that fed her action; and if she had written a book she must have done it as Saint Theresa did, under the command of an authority that constrained her conscience. But something she yearned for by

---

<sup>11</sup>*Middlemarch*, 28.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>The two most obvious such projects are Dorothea's plans for "cottage building" and her later financial support of the new hospital.

which her life might be filled with action at once rational and ardent; *and since the time was gone by for guiding visions and spiritual directors, since prayer heightened yearning but not instruction, what lamp was there but knowledge?* (emphasis mine)<sup>15</sup>

Dorothea seeks religious knowledge from Casaubon only because it might become the means through which she can accomplish the great moral good that is the purpose of her life. Disappointment awaits her in a husband for whom the gathering of religio-historical minutiae is the objective in and of itself, a husband whose religion lacks impetus toward moral duty.

During this initial visit to Lowick, the Brookes meet Will Ladislaw, a second cousin to Casaubon. The story Casaubon recounts concerning Ladislaw is that his grandmother, Casaubon's Aunt Julia, married foolishly and thus her branch of the family tree received no inheritance. Casaubon, therefore, provides financial assistance to Ladislaw, but Ladislaw exasperates Casaubon because the young man has yet to settle on a vocation.

Ladislaw emerges as a pivotal character during Casaubon and Dorothea's honeymoon. When the newly married couple travels to Rome so that Casaubon might continue his research, Dorothea is left alone to explore Rome, a city that overwhelms her "Puritan" sensibilities with its gothic art and religious history.<sup>16</sup> Ladislaw is also in Rome, studying art with a German painter named Naumann. Both men admire Dorothea's beauty. Eliot describes her as an "Ariadne in Quakerish grey drapery;" and after Naumann learns that Dorothea is Ladislaw's

---

<sup>15</sup>*Middlemarch*, 55-6.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 124.

second cousin by marriage, the German exclaims that Dorothea is “the most perfect young Madonna” he has ever seen – “a sort of Christian Antigone – sensuous force controlled by spiritual passion.”<sup>17</sup> Naumann’s lauding of Dorothea’s beauty irritates Ladislav because that beauty is bound to a man whom Ladislav considers repugnant. Ladislav thinks the prosaic Casaubon wicked to have married an innocent woman possessing all the promises and energies of youth. Ladislav, later in the novel, refers to the marriage as “the most horrible of virgin-sacrifices.”<sup>18</sup>

Ladislav does not keep his presence in Rome a secret. Dorothea receives him as a visitor while Casaubon is absent. The conversation is both casual and cordial as it concerns their earlier meeting at Lowick during which Ladislav had been working on a sketch. Ladislav fails to keep his contempt for Casaubon hidden in the content and tone of his conversation with Dorothea. Church historians in Germany, according to Ladislav, have already addressed the issues Casaubon plans to raise in his voluminous text, thus rendering his scholarship repetitive and useless. When Ladislav states that the *Key to All Mythologies* will amount to nothing, Dorothea finds herself in the position of a dutiful wife, protecting Casaubon’s work of scholarship. Ladislav softens his comments, sensing Dorothea’s perturbation as she considers for the first time the possibility that Casaubon may not be the brilliant mind and ecclesiastical servant she thought he was. When Casaubon arrives, he manufactures a polite greeting for his second

---

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 121-2.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 225.

cousin for whom he bears mutual disdain. Plans are made, however, for the three of them to have dinner the next day, and Ladislaw convinces Casaubon that the three of them should visit Naumann's studio.<sup>19</sup>

When Dorothea and Ladislaw meet again while still in Rome, their conversation about religion and morality is more intimate than any moment described between Dorothea and Casaubon. Concerning the manner in which she conceives her purpose, Dorothea states,

I should like to make life beautiful – I mean everybody's life. And then all this immense expense of art, that seems somehow to lie outside life and make it no better for the world, pains one. It spoils my enjoyment of anything when I am made to think that most people are shut out from it.<sup>20</sup>

Ladislaw responds,

I call that the fanaticism of sympathy. . . . The best piety is to enjoy – when you can. You are doing the most then to save the earth's character as an agreeable planet. And enjoyment radiates. It is of no use to try and take care of all the world; that is being taken care of when you feel delight – in art or anything else. Would you turn all the youth of the world into a tragic chorus, wailing and moralising over misery? I suspect that you have some false belief in the virtues of misery, and want to make your life a martyrdom.<sup>21</sup>

Dorothea attempts to temper her self-description, telling Ladislaw that her seemingly self-sacrificial and tragic moral vision is episodic. She must have such "outbursts," and then all seems "glorious" to her again.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 122, 136. Naumann has convinced Ladislaw to lure Dorothea to his studio so that he might paint her. When they visit, Naumann convinces Casaubon to sit for a painting of Thomas Aquinas, thus placating Casaubon in the midst of this interruption to his studies.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 140.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

Although Ladislav's infatuation with Dorothea is already obvious, this conversation marks the beginning of the unfolding love story between the two. Dorothea is committed to doing "the good," understood as self-sacrifice through which those who suffer gain comfort. Ladislav is also committed to doing "the good," understood as a duty to enjoy life, not in a self-seeking, hedonist fashion, but in such a way that his joyful existence diffuses into others' existences. They agree upon a common and simple ethic: We should do what is good with the good defined as that which benefits others. Ladislav and Dorothea differ, however, concerning the means through which this benefit to others is delivered. Ladislav tempers Dorothea's "fanaticism of sympathy" and its morose interpretation of human existence as he "outlines for her benefit a romantic theory of perception."<sup>23</sup>

Ladislav suspects Dorothea and Casaubon's marriage will be a bad one, and his suspicion quickly becomes reality. Naive Dorothea hopes to gain religious knowledge from Casaubon that will allow her to better comprehend and perform her moral duty to others. A new depression swallows this hopeful simplicity as Dorothea begins to realize that Casaubon's mind, though full of knowledge, carries no "interest or sympathy" for her moral ambitions.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup>Wright, 647. Wright comments that the religious philosophy in *Middlemarch* removes God, thus providing a "blank" where God once resided. Ladislav's philosophy "uniting thought and feeling" into a single vision that gives life meaning is Ladislav's (and Eliot's) attempt to fill the "blank."

<sup>24</sup>*Middlemarch*, 126.



In Rome, Dorothea and Casaubon have their first argument. She suggests a way that she might assist him in concluding his research so that he might finally begin writing his *Key to All Mythologies*. Casaubon, irritated by what he interprets as a criticism of his lack of productivity, insults Dorothea, stating that she is incapable of understanding the complexity of his work. Eliot describes not only the young wife's acceptance of this criticism but also her recognition that Casaubon's biting tone indicates that he cannot be completely in the right. Although Dorothea feels some indignation, her moral duty of sympathy toward her husband remains resolute—"her ideal is not to claim justice, but to give tenderness."<sup>25</sup> Eliot comments further on the manner in which Casaubon's harshness and Dorothea's moral constancy are causing the naive girl to grow into the compassionate and kind woman: "We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves. Dorothea had early begun to emerge from that stupidity."<sup>26</sup>

Upon their return from Rome, Dorothea and Casaubon settle into a marital life lacking intimacy. An isolated Casaubon labors in his study, occasionally sending for Dorothea to assist him in recording some notes drawn from his research. She is an amanuensis, not a wife. Dorothea's frustrations and disappointments with married life grow. Although Casaubon distresses Dorothea, her self-sacrificial goodness disallows resentment toward him. Even so she is full of questions.

---

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 135.

When will the days begin of that active wifely devotion which was to strengthen her husband's life and exalt her own? Never perhaps, as she had preconceived them; but somehow – still somehow. In this solemnly pledged union of her life, duty would present itself in some new form of inspiration and give new meaning to wifely love. . . . All existence seemed to beat with a lower pulse than her own, and her religious faith was a solitary cry, the struggle out of a nightmare in which every object was withering and shrinking away from her.<sup>27</sup>

As the distance between Casaubon and Dorothea increases, Ladislaw's role in *Middlemarch* becomes more prominent. Ladislaw takes residence in Middlemarch and begins writing for a local newspaper, the *Pioneer*, under the management of Mr. Brooke. Casaubon attempts to dissuade Ladislaw because Casaubon suspects Ladislaw's feelings for Dorothea. Eliot carefully describes the character of all three members in this developing love triangle. Neither Ladislaw nor Dorothea lacks integrity in the relationship. At this point in the narrative, Dorothea views Ladislaw as a conversation partner for whom she is grateful. Ladislaw's love for Dorothea places her honor above any desire he has for her. He does not entertain any notions of a scandalous affair, not simply because Dorothea would refuse him (which she would) but because Ladislaw would do nothing to tarnish the reputation of the woman whom he exalts. Even Casaubon is treated sympathetically by Eliot. The rector of Lowick is not a heartless despot, but an aged and dull scholar who is nonetheless a jealous husband.

Casaubon counters Ladislaw's move to Middlemarch by refusing to accept him as a visitor at Lowick, offering the explanation that the social rank of

---

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 173.

newspaper man is beneath that of the rector and rector's wife.<sup>28</sup> Although Ladislaw is forbidden from visiting Lowick, he and Dorothea still encounter one another when she visits her uncle at the Grange. They discuss her secluded life at Lowick, which Dorothea insists is not as difficult as Ladislaw imagines because she has a "belief that comforts her." When Ladislaw asks Dorothea about this belief, the conversation that follows is vital to the religious philosophy undergirding Eliot's moral vision in *Middlemarch*. Dorothea describes her "belief:"

That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil – widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower.<sup>29</sup>

When Ladislaw labels Dorothea's belief a "beautiful mysticism," but she interrupts him, insisting,

Please do not call it by any name. . . . It is my life. I have found it out, and cannot part with it. I have always been finding out my religion since I was a little girl. I used to pray so much – now I hardly ever pray. I try not to have desires merely for myself, because they may not be good for others, and I have too much already. I only told you, that you might know quite well how my days go at Lowick.<sup>30</sup>

After Ladislaw thanks Dorothea for her explanation, she asks him, "What is your religion?" Ladislaw answers, "To love what is good and beautiful when I see it. But I am a rebel: I don't feel bound, as you do, to submit to what I don't like."<sup>31</sup> Just as their earlier conversation illustrated a mutual commitment to "the good" –

---

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 231.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 244.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

though in Dorothea's it took the form of self-sacrifice and in Ladislav's the desire to enjoy life so that others might have joy in life – so too does this exchange illustrate two avenues of arriving at “the good” without need of a narrative or a community shaped by God.

Eliot biographers<sup>32</sup> fail to locate any awareness Eliot might have had of the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher. Even if this be the case, I must underscore the affinity of the philosophical vision of *Middlemarch* with the theology of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century German oft labeled the Father of Liberal Theology.<sup>33</sup> The similarity between the theology of Schleiermacher<sup>34</sup> and the novels of George Eliot

---

<sup>32</sup>The standard biography is Gordon Haight's (chapter 2, footnote 2). The most recent three being Hughes, Ashton and Karl (See chapter 2, footnotes 3, 16 and 17 respectively).

<sup>33</sup> Although the recognition of the affinity between Eliot and Schleiermacher is quite obvious, I must note that Peter Hodgson makes the same observation in the final chapter of *The Mystery Beneath the Real: Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 168. I will address Hodgson further in my conclusion. For now it will suffice to state that Hodgson cites the similarity between Schleiermacher and Eliot as a positive contribution toward interpreting Eliot as having adopted a revisionist Christian theology. I will make a counter-argument that the similarity instead exemplifies the manner in which Eliot is thoroughly liberal (and not postliberal) as evidenced by her adherence to a theological vision grounded in experience and intuition rather than the gospel narrative of grace that shapes and sustains the community of faith that is the Church. Hodgson also identifies the similarity between Schleiermacher and Eliot as stemming from the influence of Spinoza rather than Kant. Spinoza and Kant are both integral to Schleiermacher and Eliot; but because Spinoza's model for ethics is structured around monistic rationalism (Spinoza's *Ethics* was translated by Eliot), Kant would appear the more potent influence upon Schleiermacher and Eliot in the realm of ethics. Interestingly, Spinoza's ethical assertion that to work for one's own advantage is to work toward the advantage of all resembles Ladislav's pursuit of the good.

<sup>34</sup>Schleiermacher's two most important works are his mature systematic theology, *The Glaubenslehre (The Christian Faith)* (London: T & T Clark, 1999, originally published in 1821-22) and his earlier volume *On Religion: Speeches to its*

is a consequence of their mutual reliance on Kant's philosophy, specifically the manner in which it caused both Schleiermacher and Eliot to refuse all rationalist means for describing or defining religion.

Schleiermacher recognized that the educated and "cultured" sneered at religious faith as something for the ignorant. (Had not Hume and Kant shown that there was no rational way of *knowing* anything religious?) Schleiermacher agreed that the rationalist and the empirical projects of proving religious belief had crumbled; but rather than abandoning religion, Schleiermacher sought to recast and redeem the Christian faith by grounding it in the *Gefühl*, the intuition or experiential feeling of being absolutely dependent on something beyond ourselves. Schleiermacher's theology – in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the *Glaubenslehre* – identifies this "something" as the God of Israel, Jesus and the Church. Scripture, for Schleiermacher, is not a collection of empirically verifiable propositions, but expressions of human intuition enlightened to God's presence.

Eliot's religious philosophy, as conveyed in *Middlemarch*, agrees with Schleiermacher's emphasis on the role of intuition or the interior personal feeling as the seat for religious faith. Dorothea's religion does not have a name. It does not offer nor does it claim to have the rationalist's proof or the empiricist's evidence that it is an accurate depiction of a spiritual reality, but stronger than such nonexistent verifications is the *feeling* deep within her being that demands her self-sacrifice for the sake of "the good." Ladislav also intuitively and pursues

---

*Cultured Despisers* (Cambridge: University Press, 1988, originally published in 1799).

what is “good and beautiful.” He differs from Dorothea in that he senses an exaggerated romanticizing of self-sacrifice in her religion. While Ladislaw’s appraisal of Dorothea’s religion holds some merit, the worth of his criticism can hardly be grounded in his own religion. Although Eliot details the integrity of Ladislaw in relationships of love, friendship and business, he lacks Dorothea’s potential greatness because his religion does not demand any great sacrifice for a possible greater good.

As Casaubon and Dorothea’s marriage continues its degeneration, Casaubon blames much of their trouble on Ladislaw’s influence upon Dorothea. The moment that most enrages Casaubon against Ladislaw comes one evening when Dorothea makes a seemingly simple request of her husband. Feeling that Ladislaw has been wronged financially,<sup>35</sup> Dorothea requests that her husband allow Ladislaw to receive a substantial inheritance from Casaubon. Dorothea cares nothing about losing some of what would have been hers as sole heiress of Casaubon’s estate. Casaubon refuses. He also misinterprets Dorothea’s request as being driven by a scheme of Ladislaw to benefit from Casaubon’s death and possibly take the widow Dorothea as his own bride. Casaubon adds a codicil to his will to guard against this prospect, the details of this change remaining a secret until after his death.

Casaubon suspects that Dorothea is “judging” him as her confidence in him as a great scholar daily wanes.<sup>36</sup> Dorothea’s feelings toward Casaubon are indeed

---

<sup>35</sup> See page 116.

<sup>36</sup> *Middlemarch*, 260.

growing into disdain. After suffering a mild stroke, Casaubon's diagnosis is precarious. Dorothea attempts to draw near to him, but he continues to isolate himself from her. In the solitude of her own boudoir, Dorothea's thoughts exclaim, "What have I done – what am I – that he should treat me so? He never knows what is in his mind – he never cares. What is the use of anything I do? He wishes he had never married me."<sup>37</sup> For the first time, Dorothea settles on a verdict concerning her miserable marriage: "It is his fault, not mine," to which Eliot's omniscient narrator adds, "In the jar of her whole being, Pity was overthrown. . . . In such a crisis as this, some women begin to hate."<sup>38</sup>

Although her thoughts now at times turn against her husband, Dorothea is still a faithful and dutiful wife in her every action. As the day of Casaubon's death looms near, he asks Dorothea if she will make him a final promise; but he wants her to commit herself to this secret covenant while not being aware of its content. We the readers are left to surmise that he wants Dorothea to swear that she will not marry Ladislaw after Casaubon's death. As Dorothea enters the garden at Lowick, she is ready to consent to her husband's request to make this blind promise so that she might then discover the content of her pledge; but in the garden, she discovers that she is already a widow. The promise is not made.<sup>39</sup>

After Casaubon's death and ensuing funeral, Mr. Brooke, Celia and several other friends of Dorothea discover something alarming in Casaubon's will.

---

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 265.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 298-9.

Although Dorothea inherits Casaubon's wealth and Lowick manor, the codicil Casaubon had added to his will states that Dorothea must forfeit everything if she and Will Ladislaw ever marry. Dorothea's friends and family attempt to keep Dorothea unaware of this addition to the will. They know that anyone outside their circle of family and friends would view the statement as a scandalous suggestion that something improper had already taken place between Dorothea and Ladislaw. Celia, however, chooses to inform her sister of the codicil rather than having Dorothea discover it herself while reading Casaubon's will. Upon hearing the news about her deceased husband "behaving badly" toward her, Dorothea experiences a transformation.

She might have compared her experience at that moment to the vague, alarmed consciousness that her life was taking on a new form, that she was undergoing a metamorphosis in which memory would not adjust itself to the stirring of new organs. Everything was changing its aspect: her husband's conduct, her own duteous feelings toward him, every struggle between them—and yet more, her whole relation to Will Ladislaw. Her world was in a state of convulsive change; the only thing she could say distinctly to herself was, that she must wait and think anew. One change terrified her as if it had been a sin; it was a violent shock of repulsion for her departed husband, who had had hidden thoughts, perhaps perverting everything she said and did. Then again she was conscious of another change which also made her tremulous; it was a sudden strange yearning of heart towards Will Ladislaw.<sup>40</sup>

For the first time in her life, Dorothea's character has been denigrated. Although Casaubon's slander makes no explicit accusation, the implication that Dorothea had considered an affair with Ladislaw or would now rush into a marriage with him wrongly denounces Dorothea as an unfaithful wife. As a victim of these false

---

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 304-5.



assumptions, she “yearns” for Ladislav whose character has also been called into question by the codicil in Casaubon’s will.

### *Dorothea’s Surrounding Cast of Characters*

*Middlemarch* has two other major narratives alongside Dorothea’s story. In the first half of the novel, Eliot develops these narratives separately from the story of Dorothea’s marriage. After the death of Casaubon, however, Dorothea will enter into one of these two stories running parallel to her own.<sup>41</sup>

Rosamond Vincy is the daughter of the mayor of Middlemarch, Walter Vincy. Although her father holds this prominent political position, he is not wealthy. Rosamond, whom Eliot describes as quite beautiful, considers local Middlemarch suitors unworthy of her affections. When an aspiring young physician, Tertius Lydgate, moves to Middlemarch, Rosamond decides that he would be a suitable husband for herself. Although Lydgate is not wealthy, Rosamond knows that he comes from a wealthy family; and his high level of ambition suggests to Rosamond that Lydgate will one day make his own wealth. Against the protestations of Rosamond’s father, the two wed. Lydgate busies

---

<sup>41</sup>In the interests of being thorough yet wishing to avoid an abundance of extraneous material, I am providing a brief summary of the story into which Dorothea will enter. For those like myself who have great appreciation for *Middlemarch*, it is here that I must (with some regret) explain why the Garths, Fred Vincy, Mr. Farebrother, Mr. Featherstone and others will not receive attention. Although their stories (especially those of Caleb Garth, Mary Garth and Fred Vincy) are integral parts of *Middlemarch*, the focus of this chapter is Dorothea and the impact her life has on others. Dorothea is familiar with some of these other characters and certainly draws great admiration from Caleb Garth, but her influence on others is concentrated in her relationships with Ladislav, Rosamond and Lydgate.

himself with work at a new hospital that is sponsored by a wealthy Middlemarch banker, the puritanically evangelical Nicholas Bulstrode. As Lydgate falls into great financial debt because of Rosamond's expensive habits, their marriage begins to crumble under the weight of Lydgate's anxiety concerning the debt and Rosamond's embarrassment at descending the social ladder in clear view of her fellow Middlemarchers.

Lydgate had served as Casaubon's physician after his stroke. Because of Lydgate's encounters with Dorothea during this time he begins to compare the manner in which she attended to her husband with the way he himself is treated by Rosamond. Dorothea had cried out to Lydgate to know "what would best comfort [Casaubon] as if she must quell every impulse in her except the yearnings of faithfulness and compassion."<sup>42</sup> By contrast, Lydgate wonders if Rosamond might "kill him because he wearies her."<sup>43</sup> A self-centered Rosamond never considers the possibility that she is responsible for their debt. Rosamond thinks Lydgate handles her in a harsh and unjust manner, while she considers her "every action [as having] been for the best."<sup>44</sup>

A desperate Lydgate must finally pursue a course of action that he dreads. Both Rosamond and Lydgate's families have refused them any assistance out of their debt. Lydgate turns to Bulstrode as his last viable option for a loan. As a man of science, desiring only to increase knowledge in the medical field, Lydgate

---

<sup>42</sup>*Middlemarch*, 366.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 409.

does not want to be financially obligated to any other man financially, thus retaining his independence. Bulstrode is the worst man to whom Lydgate can be so tied because of their mutual commitment to the new hospital. If Lydgate becomes indebted to Bulstrode, Bulstrode will have power to make the work at the hospital more about evangelical religion than scientific discovery.<sup>45</sup> Lydgate makes his request to Bulstrode for the loan, and the banker sermonizes about irresponsible living before denying assistance to Lydgate.

Bulstrode plays an important role as the young Mr. and Mrs. Lydgate's situation worsens. The wealthy banker is hypocritically self-righteous.<sup>46</sup> As a young man, Bulstrode began working in London with a merchant who sold stolen goods. Bulstrode profited greatly in this business; and when the merchant died, Bulstrode recognized that he could become even wealthier through a marriage to the merchant's widow. The widow and Bulstrode married, but she insisted that Bulstrode assist her in finding her daughter who had been turned out by her husband because the girl had made a disagreeable marriage. If the daughter could

---

<sup>45</sup>Bulstrode had already shown his power in this area in securing enough votes from the hospital board to have Mr. Tyke, an evangelical, hired as chaplain, rather than Mr. Farebrother, who is rector of the parish in which the hospital is located.

<sup>46</sup>Matthew Rich identifies Bulstrode as the anti-Dorothea in *Middlemarch*. "For Dorothea Brooke, religion means reconnection with other human beings, in the form of an ardent desire to do something for her fellow creatures to mitigate their suffering. . . . For Bulstrode, religion isn't doing for others or feeling for others, as it is for . . . Dorothea; rather it is a tool or device used to build and maintain power all under the specious claim of acting in the name of God." Matthew Rich, "'Not a Church, but an Individual Who Is His or Her Own Church:' Religion in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*," in *Middlemarch: A Norton Critical Edition* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2000), 650.

be found, Bulstrode's wife would secure some of the family's wealth for her.

Bulstrode did locate the daughter but never informed his wife because Bulstrode coveted the entirety of the inheritance. Only one other person knew Bulstrode's secret: a business partner named John Raffles. After the death of his wife, the affluent Bulstrode left London for Middlemarch and remarried.

The staunchly evangelical Bulstrode thinks he has successfully escaped this seedy part of his past, but Raffles becomes a frequent visitor to Middlemarch, blackmailing Bulstrode lest the "Christian" banker have his neighbors discover his past treachery. The daughter of the London merchant, who was a rightful heir to much of Bulstrode's wealth, has now died; but Raffles has discovered something about her that will cause two *Middlemarch* narratives to collide. Before she died, the daughter gave birth to a son who would have inherited his mother's wealth that instead has been stolen by Bulstrode. Her son is Will Ladislaw.

The perpetually intoxicated Raffles is prone to unveil Bulstrode's past between blackmail payments. Worried by the possibility of Raffles' disclosure, Bulstrode confesses his past sin to Ladislaw and offers the wronged heir<sup>47</sup> a yearly allowance and an inheritance. Ladislaw's integrity remains intact. He refuses to profit from the immoral dealings of Bulstrode and his deceased grandfather.

When Raffles suffers a bout of alcohol poisoning, Bulstrode calls for Lydgate to act as physician. Lydgate prescribes strict orders as Raffles' treatment – small doses of opium and absolutely no alcohol. Lydgate receives a

---

<sup>47</sup>The legalistic and self-righteous Bulstrode is careful to stress that he is under no "legal" obligation to Ladislaw. *Middlemarch*, 385.

pleasant surprise when Bulstrode, under the stress of dealing with Raffles and desperately seeking amiability from Lydgate, rescinds his denial of the loan and gives Lydgate the funds he had requested. Bulstrode hopes that Raffles will die, but he nonetheless obeys Lydgate's orders, fearing that going against them would make him a murderer. As the illness continues, a servant of Bulstrode's relieves him of watching Raffles for an evening. Raffles continues pleading for liquor; and when the servant asks if she can please give some relief to the suffering man by allowing him some brandy, Bulstrode remains silent. Raffles drinks the brandy and dies the next day. Bulstrode enters into a series of self-justifications until he finally convinces himself that he cannot be blamed for Raffles' death. A self-absolved Bulstrode thinks his scandalous secret from the past has died in the bed with Raffles. Bulstrode, however, is about to discover that Raffles, while acquiring his alcohol poisoning in a tavern, had divulged the entire story of Bulstrode's past to certain members of the city council of Middlemarch who were tavern clientele.

Bulstrode and Lydgate experience a mighty downfall at the next council meeting. The many men who had been business partners with Bulstrode make a public declaration that they shall no longer associate with a man of such poor character. After a feeble attempt to demand some evidence for this public embarrassment, Bulstrode recognizes that his fellow Middlemarchers have already indicted him as a thief and possibly a murderer. A despondent Lydgate realizes that the loan received from Bulstrode now appears as "hush-money" to the Middlemarch eye. The ambitious healer of the sick will find few patients in the city that considers him an accomplice in a possible murder. Bulstrode fades

from the pages of *Middlemarch*, the embodiment of a religion that has failed to result in right living. Eliot ascribes the deficiency in Bulstrode's rigid evangelicalism to his too heavy emphasis upon "doctrine" and not enough weight given to "fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men."<sup>48</sup> Eliot's narrator continues to offer peremptory judgment: "religion can only change when the emotions which fill it are changed; and the religion of personal fear remains nearly at the level of savage."<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 384

<sup>49</sup>Ibid. Matthew Rich's identification of Bulstrode as the anti-Dorothea (see footnote 46) allows for Eliot's statements concerning Bulstrode's failed religion to be helpful in understanding the manner in which Dorothea's religious path is more desirable. Below are two descriptions of Bulstrode's religion provided by Eliot's narrator:

[Bulstrode] was doctrinally convinced that there was a total absence of merit in himself; but that doctrinal conviction may be held without pain when the sense of demerit does not take a distinct shape in memory and revive the tingling of shame or the pang of remorse. Nay, it may be held with intense satisfaction when the depth of our sinning is but a measure for the depth of forgiveness, and a clenching proof that we are peculiar instruments of divine intention (324).

The spiritual kind of rescue was a genuine need with [Bulstrode]. There may be coarse hypocrites, who consciously affect beliefs and emotions for the sake of gulling the world, but Bulstrode was not one of them. He was simply a man whose desires had been stronger than his theoretic beliefs, and who had gradually explained the gratification of his desires into satisfactory agreement with those beliefs. If this be hypocrisy, it is a process which shows itself occasionally in us all, to whatever confession we belong, and whether we believe in the future perfection of our race or in the nearest date fixed for the end of the world; whether we regard the earth as a putrefying nidus for a saved remnant, including ourselves, or have a passionate belief in the solidarity of mankind. . . . And to Mr. Bulstrode God's cause was something distinct from his own rectitude of conduct: it enforced a discrimination of God's enemies, who were to be used merely as instruments, and whom it would be as well if possible to keep out of money and consequent influence (383-4).

*One Love Blossoms While Another Begins to Wilt*

The two relationships that receive the most attention in the latter chapters of *Middlemarch* are the budding romance between Dorothea and Ladislaw and the looming disaster of Rosamond and Lydgate's marriage.<sup>50</sup> Ladislaw is the last to become aware of Casaubon's shameful codicil that implied a scandalous affair between himself and Dorothea. For the sake of her reputation, Ladislaw determines to leave Middlemarch. On more than one occasion, Ladislaw appears ready to depart, only to continue lingering in Middlemarch. He cannot leave the woman he admires and loves although he considers a marriage to Dorothea impossible because his integrity prohibits him from being the cause of Dorothea's losing her inheritance and her standing in the Middlemarch community.

After becoming a widow, Dorothea had determined never to remarry, but instead, to dedicate her life to self-sacrificial acts for the sake of others, such as her continued ambition of improving the cottages of villagers and donating funds to the new hospital. Upon realizing the possibility that Ladislaw could be leaving Middlemarch never to be seen by her again, Dorothea begins to suspect that her feelings for him might go well beyond appreciation for the intimacy of the conversations they had with one another.

She did not know then that it was Love who had come to her briefly, as in a dream before awaking, with the hues of morning on his wings – that it was Love to whom she was sobbing her farewell as his image was banished by the blameless rigour of irresistible day. She only felt that there was

---

<sup>50</sup>The relationship between Fred Vincy and Mary Garth receives due attention in the concluding chapters of *Middlemarch*; but as stated previously, because Dorothea is not integrally tied to their relationship, their mention here is unnecessary.

something irrevocably amiss and lost in her lot, and her thoughts about the future were the more readily shapen into resolve. Ardent souls, ready to construct their coming lives, are apt to commit themselves to the fulfillment of their own visions.<sup>51</sup>

The uncertainty of her newly discovered feelings for Ladislav startle Dorothea into a more steadfast decision to live her life for others and not herself. The “Love” Dorothea experiences is more than “fellow-feeling” with Ladislav, her most felicitous conversation partner. A romantic love for a singular man is beginning to blossom within Dorothea, but this love frightens her because she cannot reconcile love for one man with love for humankind. She thinks she must choose between the two. For Dorothea, romantic love is selfish love whereas philanthropy is selfless love.

Dorothea’s family and neighbors begin to slander Ladislav because he continues to delay his departure from Middlemarch. Their denouncements of him are grounded in what they perceive as selfishness. If he really cares about Dorothea, then he must protect her reputation and hasten his exit from their society. Dorothea finds herself set against her family and on the side of Ladislav in the midst of the accusations. She puts no “blame” on him but continues to believe as she has always believed — “he is good.”<sup>52</sup> Finally, Ladislav cannot avoid the inevitable. He has one last conversation with Dorothea before departing from Middlemarch. Knowing that this is most likely the last time he will see her, he comes closer than he ever has in the past to confessing his romantic love to her:

---

<sup>51</sup>*Middlemarch*, 339.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 389.



What I care more for than I can ever care for anything else is absolutely forbidden to me – I don't mean merely out of my reach, but forbidden me, even if it were within my reach, by my own pride and honour – by everything I respect myself for. Of course I shall go on living as a man might do who had seen heaven in a trance.<sup>53</sup>

Ladislaw leaves. He and Dorothea think they have seen one another for the last time, but because Ladislaw has developed a friendship with the young Lydgate, he will see Dorothea again when he returns to visit Lydgate and Rosamond.

The romance between Ladislaw and Dorothea that seemed ready to ignite just as it was extinguished stands beside a marriage that seems ripe for failure. Although Lydgate and Rosamond enjoyed a brief reprieve from their marital difficulties after receiving the loan from Bulstrode, the shame of Bulstrode's past attaches itself to Lydgate. Rosamond's previous disdain for her debt-ridden husband metamorphoses into revulsion against a failed physician who might well be a criminal. Rosamond begins to hope for a visit from Ladislaw as her mind begins to flirt with the possibility of an affair with someone she considers a better man than Lydgate.

Rosamond's discontent in her marriage was due to the condition of marriage itself, to its demand for self-suppression and tolerance, and not to the nature of her husband; but the easy conception of an *unreal Better* had sentimental charm which diverted her ennui. . . . [Eliot's narrator then interprets Rosamond's thoughts:] Men and women make sad mistakes about their own symptoms, taking their vague uneasy longings, sometimes for genius, sometimes for religion, and oftener still for a mighty love. [emphasis mine, Rosamond envisions bachelor Ladislaw as the "unreal Better."] <sup>54</sup>

Lydgate enters into a deep depression. Middlemarch thinks the worst of him, and

---

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 391.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 465.

his wife, rather than being a comforting companion, becomes his greatest enemy. This newest “trouble, like all the rest, she seems to regard as if it is hers alone. [Lydgate] was always to her a being apart, doing what she objected to.”<sup>55</sup>

*Dorothea as an Embodiment of Divine Compassion for Lydgate*

Dorothea, unlike the other Middlemarchers, refuses to believe that Lydgate acted treacherously in the death of Raffles. Having become acquainted with Lydgate during Casaubon’s illness, Dorothea trusts that Lydgate is a man of integrity who is being judged falsely by his neighbors. Eliot describes Dorothea’s allegiance to Lydgate.

Some of [Dorothea’s] intensest experiences in the last two years had set her mind strongly in opposition to any unfavourable construction of others. . . . She disliked this cautious weighing of consequences, instead of an ardent faith in efforts of justice and mercy, which would conquer by their emotional force. [Eliot continues by narrating Dorothea’s thoughts:] What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult to each other? I cannot be indifferent to the troubles of a man who advised me in *my* trouble, and attended me in my illness. [emphasis Eliot]<sup>56</sup>

Each chapter of *Middlemarch* begins with an epigraph thematically related to the content of the chapter. The chapter in which Dorothea is most clearly an embodiment of divine compassion toward Lydgate begins with the incarnational imagery in William Blake’s “The Divine Image:”

For Mercy has a human heart,  
Pity a human face;

---

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 468.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 453.

And Love, the human form divine;  
And Peace, the human dress.<sup>57</sup>

Though Dorothea is “haunted” by her feeling that she can do some good for Lydgate, she remains ensconced in her “luxurious home.”<sup>58</sup> A restless Dorothea invites Lydgate to visit her at Lowick. She will be the voice of reassurance that still believes in him and the compassionate listener that will sympathetically hear the truth about what transpired with Raffles. Lydgate demonstrates his good character by avoiding conjecture pertaining to Bulstrode’s role in Raffles’ death, and Lydgate assures Dorothea that he carries a nefarious reputation in the affair only because the loan from Bulstrode appears suspicious. Dorothea zealously exclaims her trust in Lydgate and what she hopes to do for him:

I know that you are not in any way guilty. Mr. Farebrother would believe me, and my uncle, and Sir James Chettam. Nay, there are persons in Middlemarch to whom I could go; although they don’t know much of me, they would believe me. They would know that I could have no other motive than truth and justice. I would take any pains to clear you. I have very little to do. There is nothing better that I can do in the world.<sup>59</sup>

Relieved by her words of comforting support, Lydgate “gives himself up, for the first time in his life, to the exquisite sense of leaning entirely on generous sympathy, without any check of proud reserve.”<sup>60</sup> The presence of Dorothea’s “noble nature” allows Lydgate to “see things again in their larger, quieter masses, and to believe that [he] too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of [his]

---

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 469. Borrowed from William Blake, *Songs of Innocence* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971. Originally published in 1789).

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 471.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

character.”<sup>61</sup> Lydgate expresses his gratitude to Dorothea, thanking her for returning his “courage” and for clearing his reputation with other Middlemarchers.<sup>62</sup> Dorothea receives Lydgate’s obliged permission to repay his debt to Bulstrode so that Lydgate will no longer carry any burdensome yoke attaching him to the corrupt banker. Lastly, Dorothea tells Lydgate that she will speak to Rosamond the next day so that his wife will know that her husband retains his integrity and is not a wretch. A blissful peace floods through Lydgate as he departs from Lowick and reflects upon Dorothea’s greatness:

This young creature has a heart large enough for the Virgin Mary. She evidently thinks nothing of her own future, and would pledge away half her income at once, as if she wanted nothing for herself but a chair to sit in from which she can look down with those clear eyes at the poor mortals who pray to her. She seems to have what I never saw in any woman before—a fountain of friendship towards men—a man can make a friend of her.<sup>63</sup>

Eliot’s narrator describes a Virgin Mary who could just as easily be Kantian as Christian. Rather than acting as a maternal mediator between Church and God,<sup>64</sup> Dorothea’s Marian duty consists of befriending the suffering individual by willing herself toward an action that will better the sufferer’s lot. J. Hillis Miller writes that for Eliot, the Madonna was “to be venerated not because she was the

---

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 470.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 474.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Although Catholic Christianity affirms Christ as the sole mediator, Mary is identified as a *secundum quid*---“a mediator between God and man, in so far as she, by preparing or serving, cooperates in uniting men to God,” Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford, Illinois: TanBooks, 1974) Book 3, Part 3, Section 3, § 7. Mary is the co-redemptrix, not one equal with the Redeemer but the one who is *with* the Redeemer. See also John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 21, 39.

Mother of God but because a Madonna embodies the ideal of human motherhood.”<sup>65</sup> The influence of Kant so evident in *Romola* appears here even more substantially than before. Kant’s moral philosophy describes the categorical imperative as the possibility of a universal ethic, or universally recognized moral action, as derived from a will motivated by an inherent law that can be identified by all rational beings.<sup>66</sup> Kant binds morality to rationalism and individualism.<sup>67</sup>

Eliot’s protagonist Dorothea champions this aspect of Kant’s moral vision. She needs no personal god nor does she accept any community of faith less than the entirety of humanity. For Eliot, Dorothea is an incarnation<sup>68</sup> of divine compassion because she submits to a universal law, and in this good action, Dorothea makes a way for others to be good. Eliot provides the following description of the Dorothea who has healed Lydgate:

There are natures in which, if they love us, we are conscious of having a sort of baptism and consecration: they bind us over to rectitude and purity by their pure belief about us; and our sins become that worst kind of sacrilege which tears down the invisible altar of trust. ‘If you are not good, none is good’ – those little words may give a terrific meaning to responsibility, may hold a vitriolic intensity for remorse.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup>J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 69.

<sup>66</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (Raleigh, North Carolina: Alex Catalogue, 1999. Originally published in 1785), see especially 16-38.

<sup>67</sup>See Chapter Four, page 85-6, especially footnotes 59 and 60.

<sup>68</sup>In the next chapter, I will address why this univocal utilization of “incarnation” is an inadequate interpretation of the Incarnation of Christ, in which the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Trinity not only becomes human, but takes humanity into himself.

<sup>69</sup>*Middlemarch*, 476.

Thus Eliot describes human love with distinctly religious, if not Christian, concepts and practices such as “baptism,” “consecration,” “sacrilege,” “purity” and “altar;” but can such terms retain their right meaning when divorced from the confessional, liturgical and ecclesial life that gave birth to them?<sup>70</sup>

*Dorothea as an Embodiment of Divine Compassion for Rosamond*

Dorothea travels to Lydgate and Rosamond’s home the next day. As planned, Lydgate is working at the hospital while Dorothea visits Rosamond alone to redeem Lydgate in the eyes of his wife. Dorothea enters and requests to see Mrs. Lydgate. The Lydgates’ servant, Martha, invites Dorothea to enter the drawing room to wait for Rosamond. Dorothea discovers a horrifying scene in the drawing room. Rosamond is already there, but she is not alone. Ladislav has returned to Middlemarch and is clasping Rosamond’s hands, whispering to her in what appears to be an intimate moment. Although the text of *Middlemarch* is ambiguous, it appears that Rosamond has perhaps made a romantic advance toward Ladislav. He appears equally culpable to Dorothea as she witnesses this scene, but Ladislav is, in fact, refusing Rosamond’s attempt at making love. A distraught Dorothea apologizes for her interruption, lays down a letter for Mr. Lydgate informing him that Bulstrode has been paid and makes a hasty exit. She had left that morning with the aspiration of healing a marriage, but now she returns home realizing fully for the first time both her love for Ladislav and the

---

<sup>70</sup>This question will be answered in the conclusion. Whereas liberalism divided metaphysics and linguistics, the postliberal emphasis upon words *creating* rather than *describing* disallows this separation.

pain of having this love betrayed. Will Ladislaw is not the good man that she believed him to be.

Back at the Lydgates' home, Rosamond, convinced of her ability to "soothe and subdue" any man's anger or disappointment, reaches out to touch Ladislaw's sleeve.<sup>71</sup> Ladislaw lashes out with an animosity of which the beautiful and vain Rosamond has never encountered before. Because Ladislaw knows that Dorothea will never accept him now, the experience of this loss provokes him to build up her greatness while tearing down Rosamond with a barrage of insults. Ladislaw's words shock Rosamond into a new existence.

. . . while these poisoned weapons were being hurled at her, [Rosamond] was almost losing the sense of her identity, and seemed to be waking into some new terrible existence. She had no sense of chill resolute repulsion, of reticent self-justification such as she had known under Lydgate's most stormy displeasure: all her sensibility was turned into a bewildering novelty of pain; she felt a new terrified recoil under a lash never experienced before. What another nature felt in opposition to her own was being burnt and bitten into her consciousness.<sup>72</sup>

Rosamond, for the first time, is facing the evidence of a moral indictment — she is shallow, empty and self-indulgent.<sup>73</sup>

Dorothea's emotional agony continues through the rest of the day and into the evening. She lies on the floor as the "night grows cold around her," and with "bitter cries, she discovers her passion to herself in the unshrinking utterance of despair."<sup>74</sup> She did love Will Ladislaw, but it means nothing because she now

---

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 479.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 480.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 484-5.

wrongly believes that he is an adulterous scoundrel. For Dorothea, Ladislav has become “a changed belief exhausted of hope.”<sup>75</sup>

When Dorothea wakes the next morning, she is as changed as she had been the previous morning when she witnessed Ladislav and Rosamond’s embrace. Her soul is free from the torments of yesterday. She still carries her grief, but she no longer fights against it. Grief is now a “lasting companion” and a “sharer in her thoughts.”<sup>76</sup> Dorothea speaks to her own “irremediable grief,” informing the sadness that it shall “make her more helpful, instead of driving her back from effort.”<sup>77</sup>

Although God remains absent, Dorothea alludes to a providential understanding of the self-sacrificial duties that await her. These tasks are “chosen for her” as she “yearns toward the perfect Right, that it might make a throne within her, and rule her errant will.”<sup>78</sup> Dorothea gazes out her window into her world, as Eliot describes what Dorothea sees.

On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving – perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. [Dorothea] was part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 485.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 486. Certainly the implications of Kant’s categorical imperative are evident here yet again.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.



Wright offers two insightful interpretations of this text. He first notes that the modifier “pearly” (light) is “full of biblical resonance” describing heaven, and Dorothea is thus “achieving the secularized heaven of solidarity” with her fellow man and woman.<sup>80</sup> Secondly, Wright describes this somewhat mystical viewing of people through the window as a “Positivist form of prayer” during which Dorothea “strengthens her altruistic instincts by meditation” on the needs of these unnamed members of her community.<sup>81</sup> After the restless night of little sleep, the Madonna imagery returns with Eliot’s description of Dorothea’s face having the “pale cheeks and pink eyelids of a *mater dolorosa*.”<sup>82</sup> This mother of sorrows resolves to do something that will be quite difficult—to return to the home of the Lydgates so that she might “see and save Rosamond.”<sup>83</sup> T. R. Wright highlights the similarities between Rosamond and *Adam Bede*’s Hetty Sorrel.<sup>84</sup> Both are self-centered, expressing this trait through their penchant for admiring their own reflections. Wright also points to the similarity between Dorothea and *Adam Bede*’s Dinah Morris, both of whom exemplify self-sacrifice for others. They both look out windows to see the world they serve rather than looking at themselves in the mirrors.

---

<sup>80</sup>Wright, 645.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>*Middlemarch*, 486.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 487. The selfless Dinah reaches out to redeem Hetty just as Dorothea is seeking to save Rosamond.

<sup>84</sup>Wright, 642.

A trepid Rosamond greets the visiting Dorothea. Much to Rosamond's relief, Dorothea does not chastise her but immediately begins to defend Lydgate against the false gossip concerning his possible involvement with Raffles' death. Dorothea shows no concern with the events of the prior day, only asking Rosamond to forgive Lydgate for the pain his ordeal has brought upon her. Dorothea says, "Trouble is so hard to bear, is it not? – How can we live and think that any one has trouble – piercing trouble – and we could help them, and never try?"<sup>85</sup> These words, demonstrating Dorothea's utter lack of concern for herself, joined with a selfless commitment to help others, astound Rosamond.

[Rosamond] was under the first great shock that had shattered her dream-world in which she had been easily confident of herself and critical of others; and this strange unexpected manifestation of *feeling* in a woman whom she had approached with a shrinking aversion and dread, as one who must necessarily have a jealous hatred towards her, made her soul totter all the more with a sense that she had been walking in an unknown world which had just broken in upon her.<sup>86</sup>

A vulnerable trust in Dorothea bursts forth from Rosamond. The two women weep and embrace as Rosamond confesses that nothing of yesterday's events had been Ladislav's fault. Rosamond tells Dorothea that Ladislav loves only her. Rosamond, having experienced the brunt of Ladislav's vehemence, performs a kind of penance. In humbling herself through an honest confession, she removes the overbearing weight of Ladislav's resentment from her

---

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 489. Here Dorothea is sermonizing her own commitment to self-sacrificial action toward those who are hurting. She is not braggadocious but naive, taking for granted that Rosamond must share the same sentiment. Although not intentional, Dorothea's moralism bullies Rosamond into submission.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 490.

conscience. Rosamond's act appears selfless, rekindling the hope of love between Dorothea and Ladislaw. Rosamond, however, confesses Ladislaw's innocence for a self-serving purpose—to dismantle his scorn against her.<sup>87</sup>

Matthew Rich describes the effect of Dorothea's embodiment of divine compassion on the lives of both Lydgate and Rosamond:

[Dorothea's] sympathy is transformational: it causes Lydgate to forget himself and his pride for a moment and rely on the strength and the energy of her feeling. This is also the case when she goes, out of sympathy, to see Rosamond Vincy, who 'taken hold of by an emotion stronger than her own—hurried along in a new movement which gave all things some new, awful, undefined aspect—could find no words, but involuntarily . . . put her lips to Dorothea's forehead.'<sup>88</sup>

How efficacious and enduring is Dorothea's impact on the lives of the Lydgates, and to what heights will this loving and suffering new Madonna climb? The magnitude of Dorothea's dutiful self-sacrifice inspired by "fellow-feeling" becomes finally evident in the conclusion of *Middlemarch*.

#### *Conclusion: Dorothea as a Religious Reformer*

Having learned of Ladislaw's love for and faithfulness to her, Dorothea can now embrace this love she feared she had lost as soon as she had discovered it. Having consistently cared but little for financial prosperity throughout *Middlemarch*, Dorothea does not shrink from forfeiting Casaubon's inheritance as a

---

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 492. Dorothea's appraisal of Rosamond's changed nature is as follows: "With her usual tendency to over-estimate the good in others, [Dorothea] felt a great outgoing of her heart towards Rosamond for the generous effort which had redeemed her from suffering, not counting that the effort was a reflex of her own energy."

<sup>88</sup>Rich, 653.

consequence of marrying Ladislaw. As shocked and surprised as Dorothea's family and friends had been at her acceptance of Casaubon's marriage proposal, they are equally dismayed at Dorothea's seemingly foolhardy and poverty-making love for Ladislaw.

The conclusion of the novel discloses the future of three romances,<sup>89</sup> and they are all strikingly ordinary. The Lydgates move to London where Tertius Lydgate continues his scientific work and dies at age 50, leaving Rosamond and their children provided for through life insurance benefits. Rosamond had remained faithful to Lydgate during their marriage, but widow Rosamond marries again, this time to a wealthy physician who accepts her children as his own. Rosamond remains self-centered and spoiled, referring to her second marriage as a "reward" for patiently enduring the exasperating Tertius Lydgate.<sup>90</sup>

After Dorothea and Ladislaw marry, he becomes a "public man" and is eventually elected to Parliament. Dorothea becomes a mother; and although the Ladislaws never become a wealthy family, Dorothea's son grows up to inherit the Grange in Tipton after the death of Mr. Brooke. The gossip in Middlemarch about Dorothea is quite critical. She is the woman who married foolishly twice, first to an old clergyman and then to his second cousin who cost her an inheritance. Dorothea, however, never regrets her decision. The great love in her soul had to

---

<sup>89</sup>Only two of the three were pertinent to this chapter, Fred Vincy and Mary Garth's romance and marriage being the third.

<sup>90</sup>*Middlemarch*, 512-13.

be spent on someone. She could not simply be a “nice woman.”<sup>91</sup> She spends her love in the traditional manner for a woman—as a wife and mother. Yet we are still left with a sense of despair. Dorothea’s extraordinary willingness to sacrifice herself for the sake of others suggests that her love was intended to stretch and break the ropes of tradition, that she was a new St. Theresa who possessed a love with the potential to nurture her life into an epic one. Eliot’s verdict concerning Dorothea’s life admits both its unrealized potential and the unknown future possibilities it might inspire.

Certainly those determining acts of [Dorothea’s] life were not ideally beautiful. They were the mixed result of young and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state, in which *great feelings* will often take the aspect of error, and *great faith* the aspect of illusion. . . . Her full nature spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the *growing good of the world* is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs (emphaiss mine).<sup>92</sup>

“Great feelings” and “great faith” are made synonymous. Faith is interior, an existential struggle for meaning and purpose. *Middlemarch* appears to conclude in a subdued and melancholy mood, but Eliot’s optimistic liberalism remains: Although Dorothea lies in an unvisited tomb, her self-sacrificial life served the “growing good of the world.”

---

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 514.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 514-15.

*Middlemarch* is a “novel of religious yearning without religious object.”<sup>93</sup>

Concepts and language of self-sacrifice, love, goodness and moral duty prevail throughout, but these terms, though rooted in Christian tradition, describe relationships in a city from which Christ has been evicted. T. R. Wright contends that the didactic voice of Eliot is stronger in *Middlemarch* than in any of her other novels, necessarily so because “it is a voice of authority and comfort, benevolently avuncular, soothing the reader for the loss of an even greater and more authoritative figure.”<sup>94</sup>

In this world without the God of Jesus Christ, Dorothea as wife and mother registers despair and disappointment in the reader<sup>95</sup> who yearns for her to be a new St. Theresa or a new Madonna, a figure who brings forth a redemption through suffering. With this hope squashed, Eliot leaves us with only the hope that Dorothea’s goodness might channel its way into future generations. For Eliot, however, Dorothea is a new St. Theresa, a new Madonna and a new Christ. Simply because Dorothea’s life will not be world-renown and celebrated, simply because she poured her self-sacrificial love into Ladislav and her children does not abolish the value of her “incarnational” life. Eliot, as the somber proclaimer of

---

<sup>93</sup>Wright, 640-1. See also, Mark Schorer, “Fiction and the ‘Matrix of Analogy,’” in *Kerryon Review* 2 (1949): 539-60.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 648. See also, U. C. Knoepfelmacher, “*Middlemarch*: An Avuncular View,” in *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 30 (1975): 53-81.

<sup>95</sup>In an 1881 issue of *Scribner’s Monthly* (vol. 21, 791) “reported the case of a thoughtful and sensitive young man, who rose from the perusal of *Middlemarch* wit his eyes suffused with tears, exclaiming, ‘My God! and is that all!’” Cited from David Carroll, *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), 129.

a reformed religious philosophy, whispers an altar call to those who will surrender orthodox Christianity with her.

With no Incarnate God, with no suffering and atoning Christ, with no Father who resurrects His Son and with no community filled with the Holy Spirit, Eliot still insists on the possibility of being good. *Middlemarch* presents “a world unredeemed by revelation in which religious needs must be met by entirely human means.”<sup>96</sup> Matthew Rich summarizes the religious vision of *Middlemarch* with great acumen.

At the heart of *Middlemarch* is the issue of reform, and the largest, most telling and effective reform seems to be, for Eliot, religious reform. But the religious reform for Eliot has nothing to do with churches or dogmas; rather, it has to do with how one connects oneself to the world. . . . Putting self at the center of those beliefs and working only for self proves to be self-destructive. Working and feeling for others seems to be the way to personal salvation, as well as the way in which we can remake our world. Perhaps the religion that belongs to churches can participate in this good work. . . . By filling churches with honor, hard work, duty, love, and radiant sympathy, we can recreate what George Eliot might think of as true religion.<sup>97</sup>

But is such a recreation of “true religion” necessary or even possible? The necessity of a religion of morality absent substantial theology will be addressed in the next chapter where we will be joined by a contemporary of Eliot’s, the Anglican theologian, F. D. Maurice. Whether such moral religion is even possible

---

<sup>96</sup>Wright, 649.

<sup>97</sup>Rich, 656. Thus Eliot reduces the Church and the Gospel to instruments. She presents a universally recognizable “good work” and hopes for a reformed church that will be instrumental in achieving the “good work.” But what is this “good work”? If the Church does not define it, who does? And can the community of Christ’s disciples rightly be called the Church if they are mere tools of a work rather than the continuance of the Incarnation that is the Person and work of Jesus Christ?

without theology is the concern of the conclusion where we address the following question: Are particular virtues, morals and ethics comprehensible without grounding them in the community and narrative from whence they were born?



## CHAPTER SIX

### Frederick Denison Maurice, Theologian of the Incarnate God of Suffering Love

George Eliot was especially sensitive to criticism against her literary works. While writing *Romola*, Eliot confessed her own premonitions that the novel would not be popular with a Victorian British audience far removed from Renaissance Florence.<sup>1</sup> True to Eliot's apprehensions, a disinterested and impatient audience skewered *Romola*. Eliot's common-law husband, G. H. Lewes worked ardently to shield Eliot from the critics' daggers. Lewes wrote to Eliot's friend, Sara Hennell, informing her that *Romola*, though criticized by many, had received "wonderful eulogies . . . from learned Florentines and Englishmen of high culture," one of whom was the Anglican preacher and theologian, Frederick Denison Maurice.<sup>2</sup> In her journal, Eliot wrote that Maurice's letter of praise was "the greatest, most generous tribute ever given to [her] in [her] life."<sup>3</sup> Eliot further described this praise from Maurice in one of her own letters to Sara Hennell.

A very deep delight, which I think you will share with me, has come to me in the unexampled beauty of Frederick Maurice's conduct towards me. I should think there are very few men living who would do just as fine a thing as he did in writing a certain letter which you shall see some time. I don't like the

---

<sup>1</sup>George Haight, *The George Eliot Letters*, 9 volumes (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 1955), 4: 58.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 94. Eliot's widower, J. W. Cross, was unable to locate the letter written by Maurice.

thing talked about, because it seems as if I cared to tell it for my own glorification . . . .<sup>4</sup>

Eliot's acquaintance with Maurice and his theological works began sometime around 1850 and continued after his death in 1872, much of his work being published posthumously. Although Eliot's first impression of Maurice was quite negative,<sup>5</sup> she later counted it a great privilege to hear him preach because she found his sermons more appealing and certainly more tenable than those of the doctrinaire evangelicals. Four years prior to Maurice's death, Eliot wrote to him, thanking him for his "Lectures on Casuistry" which he authored after being named the Knightsbridge Professor of Casuistry, Moral Theology and Moral Philosophy at Cambridge.<sup>6</sup>

#### *The Common Ground Shared by Eliot and Maurice*

Maurice's high praise of *Romola* likely comes from his appreciation for the depth with which Eliot engaged human suffering and fellow-feeling. A cursory introduction to Maurice's theology reveals why Eliot, who was reluctant to listen to many of England's pulpiteers, was eager to hear the sermons of Maurice. Although there is a tremendous theological divide between the mystically unorthodox Eliot and the orthodox Maurice, we must first examine similarities

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>5</sup>Concerning Maurice's *Theological Essays*, the work cited as the major reason for his dismissal from Kings College, Eliot writes that it is, "muddy . . . dim and foggy." Eliot is here countering the appraisal of her friend Charles Bray who, perhaps euphemistically, described *Theological Essays* as "the divine vapour of a noble mind." Haight, 2: 125. Bray's review of Maurice's *Theological Essays* is found in *Prospective Review* 9 (1853): 560-599.

<sup>6</sup>Haight, 4: 471.

between Eliot and Maurice, thus casting them as good conversation partners in the complex religious milieu of Victorian Britain.

By the time Eliot matured into a novelist, her earlier brash cynicism against Christian faith had softened into a sympathy toward Christian people who sincerely engaged the existential search after purpose and duty.<sup>7</sup> Eliot's intolerance was directed against persons who reduced Christian faith to a collection of doctrines or systematic dogma. In this regard, Maurice was her equal. Maurice is most remembered for decrying the many "systems" of theology that sought to usurp Christian faith rather than serve as an expression of Christian faith situated in a particular time and culture. Maurice was, in fact, a contextual theologian a century prior to the bevy of contextual theologies. Readers of Maurice, however, rightly point to his antipathy for "systems" as the reason why his own theological works lack clarity and coherence.<sup>8</sup>

Claude Welch designates Maurice a theologian of "critical orthodoxy," which is to say that his theology was "highly orthodox in its Christocentrism, but critical in respect of authority and Scripture . . . whose driving force was not completeness or rigorous systematization, nor philosophical interconnections, but a more immediate relation to the social needs" of the community.<sup>9</sup> Although

---

<sup>7</sup>See page 26 (Chapter Two).

<sup>8</sup>Alec Vidler, *Witness to the Light: The Message of F. D. Maurice for Today* (New York: Scribner's, 1948), 9ff. Vidler records the varied opinions of Maurice's contemporaries, one of whom, Benjamin Jowett, complained that Maurice "was misty and confused, and none of his writings appear to me worth reading." See also, Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 2 volumes (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1972), 1: 241-2.

<sup>9</sup>Welch, 242. Welch identifies Maurice and Horace Bushnell as the

highly orthodox in his Christology, Maurice distanced himself from both evangelicals and Tractarians<sup>10</sup> when, in *Theological Essays*, he rejected both the substitutionary theory of atonement and the notion of “eternal” as temporality without end.<sup>11</sup> Agreeing with Maurice, Eliot also found a substitutionary theory of atonement problematic, interpreting it as the story of an angry God whose wrath can be appeased only by the death of his innocent Son. In addition, Eliot’s discontentment with the evangelical emphasis upon an afterlife of reward or punishment would have piqued her interest in Maurice’s view of the eternal as lying beyond, rather than within, time.<sup>12</sup>

Maurice did not embrace the positivist philosophy of Comte to the degree that Eliot did, but he did express gratitude to Comte for the changes his philosophy forced upon the theological landscape of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Maurice

---

primary examples of critical orthodoxy, differentiating between the two by pointing to Maurice’s concerns for the nation as community and Bushnell’s emphasis upon the church as community. I will later argue that Maurice’s ecclesiological focus underscores his own emphasis upon the church as the only ontologically “real” community.

<sup>10</sup>Tractarians were members of the Oxford Movement such as John Henry Newman and Edward Pusey, several of whom converted to Roman Catholicism.

<sup>11</sup>F. D. Maurice, *Theological Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1853), chapters 7, 12. See also, Gerald Parsons, *Religion in Victorian Britain*, 5 volumes (New York: St. Martin’s, 1988-97), 1: 39-40. Maurice rejected substitutionary atonement, arguing that it contained an inherent disunity within the Trinity. Eternality for Maurice was a state of existence outside of temporality, and thus, any understanding of eternality as a mere extension of time is insufficient. *Theological Essays* brought about Maurice’s dismissal from King’s College although his earlier involvement with Christian Socialism hastened the termination.

<sup>12</sup>Although Eliot’s sentiments were with Maurice on both of these issues, she did not necessarily agree with his theological formulations challenging them. See footnote 5.

wrote, “[Comte] has cleared the ground of much rubbish. . . . He has compelled us to abandon all apologies for our faith, and simply ask ourselves what we suppose it can do for humankind.”<sup>13</sup> Theology is irrevocably joined to ethics when faith must answer what it can accomplish in and for the community; and for Maurice, theology and ethics remained inseparable.

Maurice’s involvement with Christian Socialism was connected to his emphasis upon Christian ethics. Although Eliot did not concur with Maurice’s Trinitarian and Christocentric vision as the definitive reality for humankind, the implications encompassed by this theological exaltation of the community are present in much of the selfless sacrifice incarnated in Eliot’s novels. Eliot, like Kant and Comte, identified the Christian narrative and community as an unnecessarily narrow attempt to provide society with morality. This purpose could now be accomplished more proficiently either through the means of a universal (Kant) or else a scientific (Comte) vision of morality. Maurice, on the other hand, continued to see ethics and morality as defined by the witness of the Christian gospel. For Maurice, to relinquish the uniqueness of Christ and the mystery of the God who is three persons was tantamount to surrendering morality.

#### *Introduction to Frederick Denison Maurice*

Born the only son of a Unitarian minister, Maurice was reared in a progressive and eclectic household. Maurice, as well as his mother and sisters,

---

<sup>13</sup>F. D. Maurice, *Social Morality* (London: Macmillan, 1869), 416.

would later renounce Unitarianism. He eventually submitted to the 39 Articles and was ordained an Anglican priest. Maurice's own theology developed from a thoroughly Johannine view of Jesus Christ. Unlike the Unitarian appraisal of Jesus as the good man who behaved as God would have us all behave, Jesus Christ was, for Maurice, the Incarnate second person of the Godhead, God in the flesh, the head and source of humanity.<sup>14</sup>

Maurice understood himself first and foremost as a theologian: "I have felt as a theologian, thought as a theologian, written as a theologian."<sup>15</sup> All other subjects were subordinate to theology and could only be comprehended through their relation to the being and nature of God. Maurice connected theology with ethics, thus defining theology as a social practice that established the way to relate rightly with fellow men and women. Seeing all persons as having their true identity in Christ, Maurice stated, "Except I could address all kinds of people as members of Christ and children of God, I could not address them at all."<sup>16</sup> Maurice concluded that theology provided the best "meeting ground" between himself and others.<sup>17</sup> Whether persons attacked his convictions or were indifferent about their own convictions, Maurice credited theology as the "mode and habit of

---

<sup>14</sup>The incarnational theology throughout John's gospel is, for Maurice, coupled with the Pauline emphasis on Christ as the Second Adam (Romans 5).

<sup>15</sup>F. D. Maurice, *Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1862), 1: ix.

<sup>16</sup>Frederick Maurice (son), ed., *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice Chiefly Told in His Own Letters*, 2 volumes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884), 2: 236. Future citations to this work will read "Life of FDM."

<sup>17</sup>F. D. Maurice, *The Conflict of Good and Evil* (London: Smith and Elder, 1865), 182.

thought” that allowed him the most genuine personal engagements within society.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the theologian functions in society as a witness to the divine “Being,” assuring the community of the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as “closely connected with the commonest practical life.”<sup>19</sup>

If Maurice was to act as a credible witness to such transcendent “Being,” the most crucial aspect of his theology would be the manner in which he understood and communicated a doctrine of revelation in a philosophical culture that had reduced truth to things empirically verifiable. After describing Maurice’s role in some of the major theological controversies of his day, I will outline in detail Maurice’s doctrine of revelation, thereby elucidating the great difference between Maurice and Eliot in this chapter’s conclusion.

*The Anomalous Maurice: Neither Conservative nor Liberal*

For Maurice, knowledge of God is both “personal” and “relational” in the manner that it addresses human needs and desires.<sup>20</sup> Persons are made for God and carry a “spirit” that “demands the knowledge of God, demands the perception of Eternal Truth and Goodness.”<sup>21</sup> This demand has already been granted in Jesus Christ. Maurice’s emphasis upon the Incarnation as accomplishing a recapitulation of humankind presents all persons as already in

---

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Bernard Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, 1995), 122.

<sup>20</sup>F. D. Maurice, *What is Revelation?* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1859), 262.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

Christ, and therefore, “being in Christ” is the only ontological reality.<sup>22</sup> No other reality exists other than the one created and redeemed by the Triune God. Rather than viewing the Church as filled with the elect who are in Christ and the rest of the world as the citizenry outside of Christ, Maurice believed that the entire world, indeed, all of creation, has its real life in Christ.<sup>23</sup>

This heterodox soteriology stirred the ire of many Victorian Christians, including evangelicals, Tractarians and Broad Churchmen. Yet Maurice could not be easily branded a liberal. On other theological issues, he remained quite traditional. He held strongly to biblical authority despite the challenges of German historical criticism. Jeremy Morris identifies Maurice’s paradoxical role in Victorian Christianity:

[Maurice] was seen by critics as an ally of unbelief, protesting his orthodoxy while cutting away central planks of traditional Christianity. But his effect, as well as his intention, was far from this. Like Coleridge before him, and the central tradition of Anglican theology afterwards, he sought to defend

---

<sup>22</sup>While asserting humanity in Christ as the only ontological reality, Maurice avoided the naive, utopian optimism associated with liberalism. Although evil was ontologically an absence of good (similar to Augustine’s view of evil as a parasite or Barth’s *das Nichtige*), Maurice never discredited the existential struggle with evil. Concerning the “Deliver us from evil” petition in the Lord’s Prayer, Maurice writes, “. . . how hard, when evil is above, beneath, within, when it faces you in the world, and scares you in the closet, when you hear it saying in your heart, and saying in everyone else, ‘Our name is Legion,’ when sometimes you seem to be carrying the world’s sins upon yourself . . . oh how hard, most hard, to think that such a prayer as this is not another of the cheats and self-delusion in which we have worn out our existence,” *The Lord’s Prayer* (London: Macmillan, 1880), 318.

<sup>23</sup>If Maurice avoids universalism, he does so narrowly. *Theological Essays* presents God’s redemptive work as continuing after the earthly life of an individual, 323. Welch cites this essay as the one leading to Maurice’s dismissal from Kings’ College, 253, footnote 25. See also *Life of FDM*, 2: 575-6: “I cannot believe that he will fail with any at last . . . His will must surely be done, however long it may be resisted.”



orthodox belief by demonstrating the depth of its theological and devotional roots. . . . He was convinced that Christianity need not fear the consequences of historical criticism. It did not need radical reinterpretation. But it did need careful, considered elaboration and defense.<sup>24</sup>

Leslie Stephen, a contemporary of Maurice, criticized Maurice's naivety concerning the threat of historical criticism to the Bible, arguing that Maurice never confronted the implications of historical criticism but merely ignored them.<sup>25</sup> Stephen's own recent biographer, N. G. Annan, defends Maurice against Stephen's unfavorable judgment. Annan shows how present day theologians have undermined the supposed certainties of historical criticism.<sup>26</sup> Although Maurice did not wrestle with the challenges posed to the historicity of biblical events by historical criticism, he justified his disinterest on theological grounds. Maurice remained convinced that God's self-revelation had a historical character and that the Bible functions as a witness to this revelation. The Bible, however, presents a testimony of theological truth and is not concerned with meeting the criteria of empirical accuracy established by modern-day historians.

The controversies in which Maurice was embroiled disclose a theologian who could not be accurately labeled a conservative or a liberal. Perhaps no controversy illustrates this with greater clarity than Maurice's debate with H. L.

---

<sup>24</sup>Jeremy Morris, *F. D. Maurice and the Crisis of Christian Authority* (Oxford: University Press, 2005), 168.

<sup>25</sup>Leslie Stephen, "Mr. Maurice's Theology," in *Fortnightly Review* 15 (1874): 595-617.

<sup>26</sup>N. G. Annan, *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), 248. Annan specifically addresses the "illusory" endeavors of the quest for the historical Jesus.

Mansel and his Bampton Lectures on the *Limits of Religious Thought Examined*.<sup>27</sup> In his lectures, Mansel, thoroughly Kantian, argued for a radical division between knowledge gained through reason and knowledge gained through revelation. First, Mansel adopted the metaphysics presented in Immanuel Kant's *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Second, accepting that God could not be known in a "meaningful sense," Mansel proposed that he had salvaged the veracity of Christian faith, stating that its truth was not found in reason but only in revelation – the Christian must accept the truth of biblical revelation with blind fideism.<sup>28</sup> For Maurice, God is known in a meaningful sense precisely because of the "communion" God has created between Himself and humankind through Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup> Morris describes Maurice's aversion to Mansel:

Thus the essential ground of Maurice's opposition to Mansel was his understanding of Revelation as the communication and reception of human beings to God. Creatureliness, despite the Fall, entailed the possibility and longing of the human being for union with God.<sup>30</sup>

Mansel's audience received his lectures as a new gospel that returned authority to the Good News about Jesus Christ.<sup>31</sup> Maurice, however, correctly

---

<sup>27</sup>H. L. Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought Examined in Eight Lectures* (London: Sheldon and Co., 1859).

<sup>28</sup>Morris, 162. "Kant denied both the possibility of natural knowledge of God, and the notion that religious ideas, as held by human beings, could reflect religious truth representatively," 171.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid*, 162.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 171-2.

<sup>31</sup>Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: SCM Press, 1987), 1: 556. "The audience could be felt breathless with excitement. The undergraduates . . . watched fascinated, as though before their eyes the greenhouse of liberal divinity was battered and crumbled into dust by the

identified the danger in Mansel's acceptance of Kant's epistemological boundaries. The fideism present in Mansel's proposal forged an unbridgeable chasm between God's revelation and human reason. Maurice insisted that God's revelation did not dispense with human reason, but instead, redeemed human reason. The patterns of thought within any culture are not to be dismissed in favor of God's revelation; rather, these patterns of thought are to be transformed by God's revelation into a meeting place between the Triune God and the creatures He has redeemed.

### *Maurice's Doctrine of Revelation*

Discourses about the doctrine of revelation often make a division between "specific revelation" and "general revelation." Specific revelation refers to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as attested through Scripture and the Church whereas general revelation concerns the unveiling of the God within the creation through personal observations of the natural world. In generalized terms, it is fair to say that conservative theologians gravitate toward specific revelation, doubting the reliability of human interpretations of the natural world as revealing God, while liberal theologians opt for the primacy of general revelation, arguing that its greater accessibility predicates greater value.<sup>32</sup>

---

hammer-blows of reason."

<sup>32</sup>Perhaps the best known example of this division is the differing theological visions of 20<sup>th</sup> century theologians, Karl Barth and Paul Tillich. For Barth, the devastating effects of sin impair human reason too much to see the God of Jesus Christ revealed in the natural world. Tillich, however, phrases his entire theology in existentialism, a philosophy that proposes a way of understanding human life (as existence moving toward essence). From the general revelation of existentialism, Tillich moves toward the utilization of

Maurice refused this distinction between types of revelation, arguing that the two means of knowing God are complementary to such an extent that they should not be separated from one another.<sup>33</sup> Revelation, for Maurice, was a “dynamic, communicative process, expressed through the use of a dynamic vocabulary of ‘discovery’ and ‘education.’”<sup>34</sup> A “discovery” of God is given through the unveiling of God in Christ as witnessed in the biblical narrative, and this “narrative” continues through “education” as the “creation’s experience of God and its growth in spiritual understanding.”<sup>35</sup>

Maurice presented the interactions between persons within the wide array of societal and cultural environments as a general revelation of God to humankind but *only* when these interactions are viewed through the redeemed vision given to humankind in the specific revelation of God in Christ. Thus, we do have knowledge of God in the natural world but only when that natural world is known as the creation redeemed by God through Christ, not a fallen world forsaken by God. Morris aptly describes the manner in which Maurice connected the natural history of the world to the providential history of the creation:

History possessed a provisional, rather than absolute, autonomy: human beings made their history themselves, but their history was also a history of God’s relations with his creation. . . . [Maurice’s] understanding of history as

---

uniquely Christian themes and symbols (specific revelation).

<sup>33</sup>Maurice, *Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy*, 1: xx.

<sup>34</sup>Morris, 170.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.* Morris describes the connection between specific and general revelation in Maurice’s theology as the “interwoven strands of narrative in Revelation.”

the field of God's providence was closely connected with his understanding of Revelation as revelation *in* history (emphasis Morris).<sup>36</sup>

For Maurice, Christian theology was always a "devotional exercise" that takes place within the community of faith, not an attempt to provide evidence for Christian faith from a supposedly objective viewpoint, but an "exploration of the consequences of believing."<sup>37</sup> Against Mansel, Maurice argued that faith does yield actual knowledge of God, not as a form of natural religion, but as the outpouring that comes from faith in the Christ of the Gospel.<sup>38</sup> In a poignant analogy Maurice expressed his theology not as "digging" for the truth, but "digging down into the truth in which he stood already."<sup>39</sup>

The dichotomy between natural knowledge and revealed knowledge proposed by Mansel, as well as the pessimistic limitations of knowledge presented by Kant, were rejected by Maurice because in the former, knowledge of God had been reduced to fideism, and in the latter, a universal system of morality had replaced religious faith. To accept either Mansel or Kant was to reject the Gospel. Maurice was fighting to keep alive a conception of humankind that was being threatened by Mansel's doctrine of revelation. Maurice wrote,

Revelation must be restored to the meaning which it has in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and everywhere else in St. Paul's writings; must therefore no longer stand in contrast to the supposed proofs derived from Nature. Revelation must be the discovery of God to a creature formed to

---

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 168.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 168-9.

<sup>38</sup>F. D. Maurice, *Sequel to the Inquiry, What is Revelation?* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1860), 48.

<sup>39</sup>*Life of FDM*, 2: 136.

know Him and be like Him, a revelation therefore to the reason and conscience of men, a revelation of the Will that is every moment acting on his will.<sup>40</sup>

Maurice's doctrine of revelation, therefore, moves freely between an emphasis upon the Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ and a subsequent theological anthropology that seeks to show how, because of what humankind has become in Christ, persons can have knowledge of God.<sup>41</sup>

### *On the Trinity and the Incarnation*

Maurice remarked that both Catholic and Protestant theologies begin their proclamations of the Gospel with a faulty starting point. Rather than starting with a statement about who persons are – men and women redeemed and recapitulated in Christ – Catholics and Protestants begin with humanity in its former state, men and women lost in sin as a consequence of the Fall.<sup>42</sup> Maurice argued that Paul's language about the "mystery of Christ as the ground of all things in heaven and earth" should be the prolegomena for persons' theological understanding of themselves.<sup>43</sup> Doctrinal systems err when they make "sinful man and not the God of all Grace the foundation of Christian theology."<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 2: 511.

<sup>41</sup>Maurice, *What is Revelation?*, 93, 100, 102.

<sup>42</sup>Reardon, 126. Theologians of the Eastern Orthodox traditions also see this as an error of Catholic and Protestant theologies. They, like Maurice, begin with the Incarnation rather than the Fall.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Maurice, *Theological Essays*, xvi.

The gap between fallen humankind and God was overcome in Christ as “God himself communicated his inmost life to us through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>45</sup> Humanity, therefore, consists not only of those who have been created by God and felled by sin, but finally and fully of those who are redeemed by the Incarnate God. For Maurice, “mankind stands not in Adam but in Christ, and [mankind’s] proper constitution is his constitution in Christ.”<sup>46</sup> As Maurice expressed it in one of his own sermons,

Thou belongest to the head of thy race; thou art a member of His Body; thou dost not merely carry about with thee that divided nature which thou has inherited from the first Adam – a nature doomed to death, with death stamped upon it – thou hast the nature of the Divine Son, thou art united to Him in whom is life, and from whom the life of thee and all creatures comes.<sup>47</sup>

This union with God is accomplished through the Incarnation which occurs in human history and effects human history.<sup>48</sup> Through the Incarnation, humankind encounters God, is taken into God and is redeemed by God. Revelation, or knowledge of God, can come only through God as a Person – through the Incarnation – because persons are the object of God’s redemption.<sup>49</sup> This Incarnation reveals a Triune God to the creation. The communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is a communion that is extended to the creation through the

---

<sup>45</sup>Morris, 175.

<sup>46</sup>Reardon, 125.

<sup>47</sup>F. D. Maurice, *Sermons Preached at Lincoln Inn’s Chapel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Smith and Elder, 1860), 81.

<sup>48</sup>F. D. Maurice, “Dr. Lushington, Mr. Heath and the Thirty-Nine Articles,” in *Macmillan’s Magazine* 5 (1862): 156.

<sup>49</sup>Morris, 178.

Incarnation.<sup>50</sup> Humankind is thus social and communal on the basis of redemption by the Triune and thus communal God. Rather than allotting the phenomenon of community to a long historical process of “self-sufficient, natural individuals” orienting themselves into people groups, Maurice proclaimed that human community itself is a witness of the Triune God.<sup>51</sup>

*On Connecting the Incarnation and the Cross*

Although Maurice emphasized the theological implications of the Incarnation more than any other aspect of Christian faith and doctrine, he avoided overshadowing the indispensable significance of the Cross. For Maurice, the Incarnation continues throughout Jesus’ life, culminating in the sacrifice of that life on the cross and the resurrection of that life from death.<sup>52</sup> Jesus Christ recapitulates humankind in the Incarnation so that his Cross might become their cross and his resurrection their resurrection. Maurice connected the accomplishments of the Incarnation and the Cross through underscoring the Son’s obedience to and unity with the Father:

The giving up of His Son to take upon Him their flesh and blood, to enter their sorrows, to feel and suffer their sins; that is, ‘*to be made sin*,’ the perfect sympathy of the Son with His loving will towards His creatures, His entire sympathy with them, and union with them; His endurance, in His inmost

---

<sup>50</sup>F. D. Maurice, *The Ground and Object of Hope for Humankind* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1868), 54-78. Maurice conceives of God as a “Unity of loving relations, a holy family, whose outpouring of love within himself” is received by his creation through the Incarnation (Morris, 176).

<sup>51</sup>Morris, 177.

<sup>52</sup>In a later section of this chapter, I will demonstrate how Maurice’s theology emphasizes the Incarnation as continuing even after the resurrection through the Church as inhabited by the Holy Spirit.



heart and spirit, of that evil which He abhorred; this is God's method of reconciliation; by this He speaks to the sinful will of man; by this He redeems it, raises it, restores it.<sup>53</sup>

Maurice's high Christology presented the Son of God as seeing, knowing and enduring the necessity of the Cross.<sup>54</sup> As both divine and human, Jesus Christ remains pure and holy while also being "sympathetic, . . . feeling the sins of others."<sup>55</sup> Only this One who is without sin can recognize its utter darkness and bear its gruesome penalty. Maurice, however, did not present Christ as suffering the penalty as humankind's *substitute*, but instead, as their *representative*.<sup>56</sup> Maurice argued against a forensic interpretation of the atonement: Christ's death does not merely justify us through an act of substitution but brings us into the life of justification through his representation.<sup>57</sup> Christ represents a new humanity – the Church, those who live self-sacrificially. Sacrifice, therefore, has its ground in the Triune God "as manifested in that perfect unity of will and substance between the Son and the Father which is the only possible source of the obedience and fellowship of a new restored humanity."<sup>58</sup> In Christ's sacrifice, sin and death are vanquished; but, in addition, through that sacrifice, the Church has been taught

---

<sup>53</sup>F. D. Maurice, *The Doctrine of Sacrifice, Deduced From Scriptures: A Series of Sermons* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1854), 192.

<sup>54</sup>Against Maurice, I would argue that Christ need not have "knowledge" of the necessity of the Cross. He need only remain obedient and trusting to the Father's will regardless of his comprehension of the purpose behind that will.

<sup>55</sup>Reardon, 139.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>57</sup>Maurice, *Theological Essays*, chapters 7 and 10.

<sup>58</sup>Reardon, 141.

that self-sacrifice, not selfishness is the “principle of their being, for through [Christ’s sacrifice] they are transformed after his likeness.”<sup>59</sup>

*The Bible as the Church’s Story*

Maurice’s equivocal role in the Victorian debate concerning German biblical criticism has already been introduced. After George Eliot’s translation of D. F. Strauss’ *Life of Jesus* was digested by Britain’s churches, many laypeople implored their priests, pastors and theologians to debunk the notion of “biblical myths” that appeared to “dissolve Christian revelation.”<sup>60</sup> Maurice did not respond by challenging the historical critics’ proposed reconstructions of the biblical texts because he did not perceive any threat to biblical authority.<sup>61</sup> The Bible, for Maurice, was not inspired in a “narrow, verbalist sense” because the biblical authors were not inspired to record a faultless historical retelling of events – they were inspired to author a unique work that defines the creation rather than merely rendering a precise and detailed regurgitation of past happenings.<sup>62</sup>

The inspiration of Christian Scriptures was an ongoing event. Inspiration was not to be allotted to a singular moment when a text was written, but

---

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Morris, 166-7. Karl Barth wrote of *Leben de Jesu*, “Strauss offered to his time the sight of the theologian who has become an unbeliever, for all to behold and without denying it,” (*Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, new ed. [London: SCM Press, 2001], 533).

<sup>61</sup>Reardon, 132.

<sup>62</sup>F. D. Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 2 volumes, revised ed. (London: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1842), 2: 162.

inspiration continues as the Church reads and interprets the text. In this sense, the text was “sacramental: its language expressed metaphysical truth through ordinary words, pointing to the deepest sacred realities.”<sup>63</sup> The Church and the Bible are interdependent – “The Church exists as a fact, the Bible shews what the fact means. The Bible is a fact, the Church shews what that fact means.”<sup>64</sup> For Maurice, reading Scripture rightly was an “ecclesial activity” through which the Spirit reveals to the Church the communion God has established between Himself and His creatures.<sup>65</sup>

When Scripture is read wrongly, the result is not only that something unbiblical enters into the Church but that it enters because one part of the biblical witness has been emphasized at the expense of the entire biblical witness. Maurice identified such selective and one-sided emphases on biblical themes as the reason for the many divisions within Christendom. Welch presents this as the central ecclesiological idea in Maurice’s *The Kingdom of Christ*:

The partiality [of the Church’s different sects] of which [Maurice] spoke was rather the limitation and corruption of every perspective on a truth to which the beliefs of men and parties may witness but which they do not contain. It is the greatness of the truth that defines the partiality of every man’s view of it.<sup>66</sup>

Maurice offered several examples of this “limitation and corruption” of the “parties” in *The Kingdom of Christ*: The Quaker errs in emphasizing the divine light

---

<sup>63</sup>Morris, 182.

<sup>64</sup>Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 2: 214.

<sup>65</sup>Morris, 183.

<sup>66</sup>Welch, 245.

in every man to the extent that the gravity of human sinfulness is not taken seriously enough; the Catholic emphasizes the efficaciousness of the sacraments within the Church in such a way that the freedom of God is compromised; and the Unitarians insist on the oneness of God while denigrating the great truth that the one God is three Persons.<sup>67</sup>

Maurice thought that a corrective to these theological imbalances could be discovered if the Bible were read as a “narrative, as a record of God’s education of the human race, and not as a set of specific doctrinal and moral propositions.”<sup>68</sup> The Christian faith presents persons with a central existential challenge: to decide for or against the God of Scripture. To overlook the narrative nature of the Bible, however, is to hide, rather than discover, the God who creates and redeems as witnessed in the stories of ancient Israel and the early Church.<sup>69</sup>

The community of faith – the Church – formed by this inspired narrative about God and His creation continues the story through the practice of sacraments. Maurice described baptism and eucharist as signifying participation in the

living and perpetual communion that has been established between God and man; between earth and heaven; between all spiritual creatures; that

---

<sup>67</sup>These are Maurice’s arguments and not my own. A Catholic understanding of the sacraments does not imply manipulation and control of God. The Unitarians’ error is not so much their insistence on a oneness of God that makes the Trinity untenable but, instead, their acceptance of the Enlightenment (and later Transcendentalist) critique of truth and knowledge.

<sup>68</sup>J. W. Rogerson, *The Bible and Criticism in Victorian Britain: Profiles of F. D. Maurice and William Robertson Smith* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 17-18.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 52.

the bond of this communion is that body and blood which is the Son of God and the Son of Man offered up to His Father, in fulfillment of His will, in manifestation of His love.<sup>70</sup>

For Maurice, the eucharist was both “sacrifice and presence.”<sup>71</sup> Christ did not descend into the elements, but the body and the blood bring the worshiper into greater unity with the Christ who is man’s and woman’s true source of being. The bread and the cup are a celebration of the sacrifice of Christ which has been completed; yet, paradoxically, the self-sacrifice of Incarnate One continues in the life of the Church as Christ’s followers eat his flesh and drink his blood.

### *The Church’s Mission in the World*

Concerning the relationship between the community of faith which testifies to the biblical story and the rest of the world’s population, Maurice wrote, “The world is the Church without God; the Church is the world restored to its relation with God, taken back by Him into the state for which He created it.”<sup>72</sup> The Church exists to show the world what it really is – God’s creation, redeemed by God, reconciled to God. The difference between the Church and the world is that persons in the Church have been “penetrated by a uniting, reconciling power.”<sup>73</sup> The Church does not have an ontological reality that is different from the rest of the world; however, Christians in the Church participate more fully in that salvific reality which is the Church universal. Because all human beings have been

---

<sup>70</sup>Maurice, *Kingdom of Christ*, 1: 279.

<sup>71</sup>Reardon, 129.

<sup>72</sup>Maurice, *Theological Essays*, 403.

<sup>73</sup>Reardon, 127.

formed to know God, Maurice believed that unchurched peoples of the world had natural insight into God. This insight, however, because it remains partial creates a hunger to know God fully. The only means of satiating the hunger was to complete the truth of the natural insights with the Truth, who is Christ.<sup>74</sup>

Maurice's theological anthropology faces accusations of liberalism both then and now because it seems too optimistic in its appraisal of how much of God can be known through human experience rather than divine revelation alone.<sup>75</sup> Although Maurice is liberal in other areas,<sup>76</sup> his openness to general or natural revelation cannot rightly be dismissed as optimistic liberalism because any such knowledge of God is only possible through the prior revelation of God in Jesus Christ:

To know God does not depend on our feelings, but our feelings [depend] upon God, to know that we must claim a certain spiritual position as our right *before* we can realize it in our apprehensions . . . this is most necessary for us (emphasis mine).<sup>77</sup>

In claiming our "rightful spiritual position," we see ourselves as we really are, as the communion of the faithful. The Church is a communion that reflects "God's

---

<sup>74</sup>Morris, 170. Morris here draws his conclusion from Maurice's Boyle Lectures entitled *The Religions of the World*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan, 1886).

<sup>75</sup>Welch, 241-2. Also, Maurice's involvement in Christian Socialism was never forgotten by many of his detractors; and in their estimation, his involvement with this movement made him forever a liberal.

<sup>76</sup>Maurice's anthropology, defining humanity as recapitulated in Christ, never adequately engages the continued dominance of evil and sin in world cultures. In this regard, he remains liberal.

<sup>77</sup>*Life of FDM*, 2: 246.

own inner being as a union of three persons.”<sup>78</sup> The Church is not composed of separate individuals but of persons created to have fellowship with one another.<sup>79</sup> Thus, Maurice’s theology comes full circle as every man and woman is told of their true source and being which is the Incarnate God who has both saved them from their sin *and* revealed their authentic character.<sup>80</sup>

### *Conclusion: The Divide Between Maurice and Eliot*

Although Maurice was overlooked by many of his contemporaries, he has been rediscovered in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries as one whose theology holds much promise for the modern and postmodern world. In fact, H. Richard Niebuhr recognized the value of Maurice’s close connection between the Incarnation and theological anthropology; and in Niebuhr’s well-known *Christ and Culture*, the Neo-Liberal theologian and ethicist praises Maurice’s description of Christ as One whose fundamental relationship with culture is that of “transformation.”<sup>81</sup>

Eliot and Maurice appeared to have a similar desire for a transformation in their Victorian culture, one in which persons give of themselves and ultimately their very selves for the sake of others. Fellow-feeling, self-sacrifice and selfless

---

<sup>78</sup>Morris, 189. See also, A. M. Ramsey, *F. D. Maurice and the Conflicts of Modern Theology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1951), 23, 37. Maurice’s anthropology is a reflection upon the God in whose image and likeness, humankind is made. If this God is the relational Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so also are the men and women he has created intended to live in communion with God and with one another.

<sup>79</sup>Maurice, *The Lord’s Prayer*, 46.

<sup>80</sup>Morris, 191.

<sup>81</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 218-29.

suffering are prevalent in both Eliot's novels and Maurice's theological writings and sermons. The theological differences between Eliot and Maurice stem from their presuppositions concerning the relationship between ontology and ethics. Whereas the dismantling of religious truth begun in the Enlightenment and its consequent philosophies proved to be a fatal verdict against Christian faith to Eliot, Maurice's Christocentric ontology disallowed any such Kantian or Comtean appraisal of being and existence absent the God revealed in Jesus Christ. As best illustrated in *Middlemarch*, Eliot attempted to construct a moral world without a god. For Maurice, a moral world exists only because it exists within the redeemed creation of the Triune God.

In the conclusion of Chapter Five, we encountered the question whether Eliot's dismissal of Christian orthodoxy was necessary. F. D. Maurice answers this question. For Maurice, a re-creation of the world without God was not only unnecessary but also impossible. Maurice knew well the 19<sup>th</sup> century challenges posed against Christian faith and biblical authority; but he did not agree with those who, like Eliot, found it necessary to abandon faith in a God rendered otiose by modern science and epistemology. Such an abandonment was not, for Maurice, an indictment of Eliot because he saw that she remained committed to ethical ideals which she felt could be discovered in their embryonic form in the antiquated Christian faith. Maurice did insist, however, that ethical practices and virtues brimming with ideas and images of self-sacrifice and selfless service to others are present in the human heart only because men and women have been morally no less than spiritually recapitulated in the Incarnation. A theology of



suffering love is not a mere creation of enlightened individuals who embody fellow-feeling but is, instead, the gift of an Incarnate God who suffered to redeem.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Conclusion: A Christian, Postliberal Reading of George Eliot's Novels

In *Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot*, Peter Hodgson describes theology as “a kind of fiction that creates imaginative variations on what history offers as *real* in order to bespeak the *mystery* beneath the *real*” (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup> Hodgson postulates that historical revelations,<sup>2</sup> such as the ones claimed in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, divulge more about the cultures that venerate the revelations than the god they claim to reveal. As a traditionally liberal theologian, Hodgson presents a God who is more “Mystery” than “Revealed,” for only glimpses of that “Mystery” can be gained through a creative exploration of the empirical “Real” that surrounds us. Eliot is a favorite explorer of the “Real” for Hodgson.

Hodgson portrays Eliot as a postmodern novelist a century ahead of her time. Admitting the difficulties associated with the term postmodernity, Hodgson presents three types of postmodernity in order to clarify his interpretation of Eliot's religious vision.<sup>3</sup> According to Hodgson, Eliot is neither a “radical

---

<sup>1</sup>Peter Hodgson, *Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 149.

<sup>2</sup>The Father revealed in Christ / Allah revealed in the Qur'an / Yahweh revealed in Torah.

<sup>3</sup>Hodgson, 151. Hodgson credits Paul Lakeland for providing this three-fold division (*Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997], 8-12, 42-3, 45).

postmodern” who invalidates the possibility of theology<sup>4</sup> nor is she a “countermodern” who celebrates the downfall of modernity as providing a means of revitalizing confessional communities.<sup>5</sup> Instead, Hodgson believes that Eliot most closely resembles the “critical postmodern” or the “revisionist postmodern.”<sup>6</sup> Unlike the radical postmodern, Eliot retains validity for a type of theology in her fiction; but she does not agree with the countermodern Christian assertion that the old stories, creeds and practices simply need a “renewal” for the community to continue living faithfully.<sup>7</sup> For Hodgson, Eliot seeks to transform rather than renew: if the Christian tradition is to survive, its “traditional forms must be allowed to pass over into new and often quite different forms.”<sup>8</sup>

In his own re-constructive theological work, Hodgson himself exemplifies what he credits Eliot with accomplishing. Hodgson dispenses with the supposedly archaic language of the Definition of Faith<sup>9</sup> that describes Christ as one

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. Although Hodgson does not list them, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault’s philosophies represent examples of what Hodgson means by “radical postmodernity.”

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. Again, Hodgson does not list examples here, but Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre’s theologies epitomize the countermodern approach for the Church. More importantly, Fritz Oehlschlaeger’s *Love and Good Reasons* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003) also represents a countermodern model and will be utilized later in this conclusion to offer a postmodern Christian reading of Eliot.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 151-2.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 152.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Written in conjunction with the 4th ecumenical council (Chalcedon 451 AD).

person with two natures, one divine and one human. Instead, Hodgson describes the Incarnation as a symbol representing the “Christ-gestalt:” the person of Christ is *transformed* by Hodgson into a “pattern or integrated structure.”<sup>10</sup> Just as Eliot populated her fiction with protagonists who were incarnational because they embodied “fellow-feeling” and selfless sacrifice, Hodgson too identifies the importance of the Incarnation as establishing a moral example worthy of imitation.

Hodgson believes he has discovered in Eliot a 19th century Christian who, because of the philosophical limitations of Victorian Britain, has been misinterpreted as an atheist. The “revisionist” similarities between the theologies of Hodgson and Eliot reveals that Hodgson has provided an acute theological reading of Eliot’s novels. My argument, however, is that this revisionist theological vision retains much of the liberalism associated with modernity. Hodgson describes Eliot’s novels, as well as his own “Christ-gestalt,” as *transformations* of words and symbols that enable communication of the Gospel to ever-changing cultures. I am arguing that these well-intentioned *transformations* are indeed diminishments of Christian words and symbols. Eliot’s novels brim with words and symbols that are distinctly Christian; but when these words and symbols are severed from the Gospel and the Church, can they still inspire men and women to participate in the kingdom of God?

---

<sup>10</sup>Peter C. Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Christian Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 167, 252-4.

In *Love and Good Reasons*, Fritz Oehlschlaeger addresses this very important question raised by Hodgson's reading of Eliot.<sup>11</sup> Oehlschlaeger borrows an important philosophical assertion made by Christian ethicists Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas: Moral decisions cannot be made from a "universal standpoint" but are, instead, formed by the vision and virtues of a particular community and narrative.<sup>12</sup>

Oehlschlaeger describes the present-day university as a community divided between liberal foundationalists who cling to a universal conception of what it means to be human and postmoderns who insist that there is no "tradition-free" account of what it means to be human.<sup>13</sup> *Love and Good Reasons* is primarily concerned with demonstrating that reading literature is an ethical activity; and in the postmodern milieu, Oehlschlaeger insists that no ethic is universal. Ethics must always carry a modifier, whether Christian, Marxist, or Western liberal bourgeois.<sup>14</sup> Although Eliot is not one of the novelists treated by Oehlschlaeger, I am implementing his distinctly Christian way of reading for my reading of Eliot's

---

<sup>11</sup>Fritz Oehlschlaeger, *Love and Good Reasons* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 9. Oehlschlaeger cites Alasdair MacIntyre, "Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?" in *The Monist* 67 (1984): 499 and Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 12.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 255-7. To strengthen his position, Oehlschlaeger references not only Christian scholars with whom he is sympathetic, i.e., Hauerwas and MacIntyre, but also postmodern political theorists and philosophers Richard Rorty and Jeffrey Stout.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 9. Oehlschlaeger cites Stanley Fish, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech and It's a Good Thing* (New York: Oxford, 1994), 41.

novels to clarify whether or not these novels present an ethical vision that can rightly be called Christian.

Oehlschlaeger references several others who also maintain that traditions and community-defined understandings of virtues precede our reading of literature. With the presentation of these other scholars, however, Oehlschlaeger points out a way that their reading is insufficient for him as a *Christian* reader. Mark Schwehn argues for a reading community committed to the virtue of “humility” while Wayne Booth envisions readers and authors as “friends” who seek to be sympathetic rather than antagonistic toward texts.<sup>15</sup> For Oehlschlaeger, virtues of “humility” and “friendship” are grounded in the Christian narrative and cannot simply be excised from the Christian community and transplanted into another community.

Oehlschlaeger agrees with J. Hillis Miller’s deconstructionist refusal to deduce the ethical from texts so as to systematize the “real” meaning through the use of philosophy or one of the social sciences.<sup>16</sup> Miller’s insistence that the ethical meaning of a text is inextricably woven into the narrative undergirds Oehlschlaeger’s own conviction that Christian ethics is not a moral system to be formulated out of the Gospel – Christian ethics is imbedded in the Good News of Jesus. According to Miller, “radically inaugural” moments occur when the ethical

---

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 10-20. Mark Schwehn, *Exiles from Eden* (New York: Oxford, 1993) and Wayne Booth, *The Company We Keep* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 23. J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading* (New York: Columbia University, 1987). Interestingly Miller’s book does include a chapter on Eliot that is quite beneficial in understanding her philosophical relationship to Kant.

is discovered in the narrative, moments that cannot be recast through more systematic and deductive means.<sup>17</sup> Oehlschlaeger, however, states that ethical moments in narratives cannot be “radically inaugural” for the Christian.

‘Radically inaugural moments’ would be resistant to exhaustion by technique, but they would presumably be unrelated to moments preceding or following and thus uninterpretable. Some measure of coherence and continuity of phenomena – guaranteed for Christians by God’s action as creator, sustainer and redeemer – is necessary for all interpretation.<sup>18</sup>

Lastly, Martha Nussbaum receives Oehlschlaeger’s gratitude for assisting the development of his distinctly Christian way of reading. Nussbaum’s interpretation of the Greek tragedies leads her to conclude that dramas and novels are not only adequate means for communicating the ethical, but, similar to Miller, she argues that they are the superior conduit for expressing moral visions.<sup>19</sup> Nussbaum credits literature as the catalyst inspiring the readers’ growth into moral excellence. A coward can read about a hero and become courageous, and a liar can read the tale of a suffering truth teller and become honest himself. The more excellent man and woman become through reading, the more worth can be attributed to humanity. This coupling of moral excellence and worth generates Oehlschlaeger’s disagreement. As a Christian reader, Oehlschlaeger cannot define human worth as dependent on moral excellence: human worth is, instead, a gift provided by the creating and gracious God.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 24. Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge* (New York: Oxford, 1990), 36.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 27.

Having acknowledged his dependence upon and differences with Schwehn, Booth, Miller and Nussbaum, Oehlschlaeger next elucidates the unique manner in which a Christian will read literature.<sup>21</sup> Oehlschlaeger agrees with Hauerwas' assertion that the answer to the question "What are we to do?" can never rightfully be severed from the question "Who are we?"<sup>22</sup> Christian ethics must be decidedly *Christian*. The Christian does not seek to rid himself of the theological presuppositions of his faith so that he can reach a more universal and objective ethical vision. This universal and objective standpoint is the failed project of a liberalism that wrongly hypothesized a pseudo-universal plane of human existence that transcended the particularities of various cultures. The Christian must never surrender the biblical-ecclesial narrative that provides his ethical vision because these stories and symbols do not approximate some other reality; rather, for the Christian, they describe the singular reality of God's kingdom and create pathways of participation into that kingdom.

For Oehlschlaeger, narrative is the "first-order language" of the Christian faith.<sup>23</sup> The narrative language of the Bible and the Church does not need to be shaped into dogmas or metaphysical assertions that are supposedly more substantially cognitive. Propositions about the Christian faith, whether theological or philosophical, are, in fact, "second-order language," reflecting on

---

<sup>21</sup>Much of Oehlschlaeger's way of Christian reading is dependent on the postliberal Christian theologies of Hauerwas and MacIntyre (see footnote 12).

<sup>22</sup>Oehlschlaeger, 30. Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 23.

<sup>23</sup>Oehlschlaeger, 38.



the first-order story of Israel, Christ and the Church.<sup>24</sup> Christian ethics is not primarily rules or laws deduced from Christian doctrine, not primarily a deontological endeavor. Instead, Christian ethics is the vision of virtue and character grounded in and flowing from the story of Creation, Covenant, Exodus, Exile, Messianic hope, Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Pentecost and Parousia – a story authored by the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This story that defines and continues to shape the Church's identity was also recognized by Maurice as the kingdom that is the only existing reality. If placed in our context, Maurice would not raise the question, "Which story will you choose?" but would ask, "How fully will you participate in the *one* story?" Maurice was neither imperialistically blind to the other stories nor to the differing denominational versions of the Christian story. He interpreted them as partial truths falling short of the one truth – the kingdom of Christ.<sup>25</sup>

I have argued that Eliot was a Victorian liberal whose Comtean and Kantian sympathies engendered the following convictions: (1) religious faith was philosophically and scientifically untenable, (2) religious stories were partial and inadequate expressions of a universal morality. In her novels, therefore, Eliot appropriated events and symbols from the Christian story and sought to universalize these symbols in order to express what were for her ubiquitous virtues of "fellow-feeling" and self-sacrifice. In *Scenes from Clerical Life*, Janet "repents." Adam undergoes a "baptism" of suffering. The orthodox Dinah

---

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>See page 169-70.

speaks of the “cross,” “cup,” and “Divine Love.” Romola is a new “Madonna” who clings to a “crucifix” and experiences a “new baptism.” Dorothea, the new “Saint Theresa” and another “Virgin Mary,” inspires “great faith” in others.

The orthodox Dinah has faith in the Incarnate God of the Gospel, but Eliot, as Dinah’s creator, molds Dinah herself into an incarnation of divine compassion. Dinah is a follower of Christ who understood her ministry as a continuance of God’s presence in the world as exemplified in the unique event of the Incarnation. Eliot reduces the cosmic and historical event of the Incarnation to a moral lesson learned by and embodied by Dinah—Dinah is another Christ. The theological complexity increases in *Romola*. The duty-bound daughter of Bardo escapes from a treacherous husband that she cannot love, but the “Gospel” words of Savonarola turn her back toward Florence. She embraces Christ and his Church as the vision that empowers her to remain dutiful. This transformation, however, is followed by another. Savonarola’s politically expedient decisions disappoint her. For Romola, the Christ preached by Savonarola is joined to a corrupt and fallible Church. Christ and the Virgin Mary become ideals to embody rather than redeemers of humankind. Finally, in *Middlemarch*, heterodox theology becomes mystic philosophy. Dorothea embodies divine compassion through her “fellow-feeling” and self-sacrifice. She needs no gospel, no Church and certainly no Christ. She, like Dinah and Romola, is a Christ. For Eliot, the biblical story of Jesus’ death on the cross is the tale of one whose life seemed pointless until now when, later in history, we can see the effects of his death in those who choose to follow his example of joining others in their suffering. Dorothea’s burial in an

“unvisited tomb” also appears the end of a purposeless life until Eliot leaves us with the hope of “the growing good of the world” that comes through “unhistoric” lives such as Dorothea’s.<sup>26</sup> For Eliot, no resurrection awaits either Jesus or Dorothea.

At the end of Chapter Five, I asked whether Eliot’s re-creation of a “true religion” was necessary or even possible. In Chapter Six, I demonstrated, through the writings of her contemporary F. D. Maurice, that Eliot’s new religion was both unnecessary and impossible. A Christian, postliberal reading of Eliot assists us in further clarifying the impossibility of Eliot’s “true religion.” The postmodern criticisms of foundationalist philosophies reveal the impossibility of a universal morality that usurps particular religious stories and their respective communities. Oehlschlaeger states that “virtues are settled dispositions learned within communities committed to embodying particular narratives.”<sup>27</sup> Eliot attempts to extract universally understood moral principles from crucifixion, baptism and the Incarnation. The ancient stories introducing these events and symbols are, for Eliot, superstitions that must be discarded. Oehlschlaeger insists that the stories themselves give the events and symbols their meanings and, in so doing, form the communities of faith that continue to tell the stories. The cross of Jesus Christ is good news of salvation for all people, but the symbol is not universally accessible. The cross can only be received from the community that has been formed by it. Likewise, the Incarnation is a story that belongs to the Church which describes this

---

<sup>26</sup>*Middlemarch*, 515.

<sup>27</sup>Oehlschlaeger, 47.

event as God becoming flesh, taking all of humanity into himself, recapitulating the creation through becoming the Second Adam. The Church protests any diminishment of the Incarnation into a moral myth admonishing us to suffer with others as Jesus did.

Eliot seeks to persuade her readers to be “good” without God. Convinced that Christian faith could no longer remain viable with antiquated dogmas such as the resurrection from the dead and the Triune God, Eliot invited readers to see the moral worth beneath the myths. She could not believe in a God who became flesh, but she sought to salvage a moral vision from the Christian story of the Incarnation through creating characters who embodied divine compassion. Thus, Eliot provides a theology of suffering love. Whatever god might exist cannot be known; and rather than having faith in the God revealed in Jesus Christ, Eliot encourages us to discover the divine presence in our “fellow-feeling” for one another. For Eliot, this intuition compelling us toward compassionate acts of self-sacrifice is the foundation of true religion, the source of virtues such as love and goodness. According to Oehlschlaeger, Christian faith promises a greater goodness.

We are not good because of anything we are in ourselves but only insofar as we are related to the One who has persuaded us that he is good and who, we hope, will persuade you too – but only in his own way, by offering you his free and abundant and eternal life.<sup>28</sup>

The ethical vision that is distinctly Christian cannot be comprised of universal principles that diminish the importance of the gospel narrative. For the Christian,

---

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 270.

Love, Goodness, Peace, Joy, Hope and Faith are inextricably bound to the God who has revealed himself in the history of Israel and the Church, the God made flesh, the crucified God, the risen Son of God and the returning Christ.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## Works of George Eliot

- Eliot, George. *Adam Bede* (1859). London: Penguin Books, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Daniel Deronda* (1876). London: Penguin Books, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866). London: Penguin Books, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe* (1861). London: Penguin Books, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). London: Penguin Books, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Lifted Veil; Brother Jacob* (1859/1864). London: Penguin Books, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Romola* (1863). London: Penguin Books, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Middlemarch* (1872). London: Penguin Books, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Scenes from Clerical Life* (1857-8). London: Penguin Books, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Agatha* (1869). London: Thomas J. Wise, 1889.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *How Lisa Loved the King* (1869). Boston: Fields, Osgood and Company, 1869.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879). London: Hurst and Company, 1879.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Legend of Jubal, and Other Poems* (1874). London: W. Blackwood, 1874.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Spanish Gypsy, a Poem* (1868). Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1868.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "On Dr. Cumming's Teaching." In *Westminster Review*. October 1855. Located in *Religion in Victorian Britain; Volume III: Sources*. James R. Moore, ed. 214-27. Manchester: University Press, 1988.

\_\_\_\_\_. "R. W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect, as Exemplified in the Religious Development of the Greeks and Hebrews*." In *Westminster Review* (January 1851): 353-68.

\_\_\_\_\_. "J. A. Froude's *The Nemesis of the Faith*." In *Coventry Herald and Observer* (March 16, 1849). Located in Rosemary Ashton, ed. *Selected Critical Writings: George Eliot*, 15-17. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Cross, John W., ed. *George Eliot's Life as Related in her Letters and Journals*. 3 Volumes. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1885.

Haight, Gordon S. *The George Eliot Letters*. 9 Volumes. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1954-78.

Harris, Margaret and Judith Johnston, eds. *The Journals of George Eliot*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

#### Eliot as Translator

Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The Essence of Christianity*. New York: Harper and Row, 1957.

Strauss, David Friedrich. *Leben Jesus (The Life of Jesus)*. Bristol, England: Thoemmes, 1998.

#### Eliot Biographies

Ashton, Rosemary. *George Eliot: A Life*. London: Penguin Books, 1997.

Haight, Gordon S. *George Eliot: A Biography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Hughes, Kathryn. *George Eliot: The Last Victorian*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1999.

Karl, Frederick. *George Eliot: A Biography*. London: HarperCollins, 1995.

Uglow, Jennifer S. *George Eliot*. New York: Pantheon, 1987.

Williams, Blanche Colton. *George Eliot*. New York: MacMillan, 1936.

Monographs on Eliot, Victorian Christianity and Literature

- Adams, Kimberly VanEsveld. *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2001.
- Anger, Suzy. *Knowing the Past: Victorian Literature and Culture*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Annan, N. G. *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1984.
- Armstrong, Heather. *Character and Ethical Development in Three Novels of George Eliot: Middlemarch, Romola and Daniel Deronda*. Lewiston, New York: Edward Mellen Press, 2001.
- Ashton, Rosemary. *George Eliot*. New York: Oxford, 1983.
- Atkins, Dorothy. *George Eliot and Spinoza*. Salzburg, Austria: University Press, 1978.
- Barth, Karl. *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*. New ed.. London: SCM Press, 2001.
- Bebbington, D. W. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: a History from the 1730's to the 1980's*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.
- Beer, Gillian. *George Eliot*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Bellringer, Alan W. *George Eliot*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- Blake, William. *Songs of Innocence*. New York: Dover Publications, 1971.  
Originally published in 1789.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. *George Eliot*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986.
- Bodenheimer, Rosemarie. *The Real Life of Mary Anne Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Booth, Wayne. *The Company We Keep*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1988.



- Bradley, Ian C. *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians*. New York: Macmillan, 1976.
- Brady, Kristin. *George Eliot*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.
- Brucker, Gene. *Renaissance Florence*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1983.
- Carpenter, Mary Wilson. *George Eliot and the Landscape of Time*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University Press, 1986.
- Carroll, David. *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971.
- Chadwick, Owen. *The Victorian Church*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.. London: SCM Press, 1987.
- Coulson, John. *Religion and Imagination*. Oxford: University Press, 1981.
- Cunningham, Valentine. *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel*. Oxford: University Press, 1975.
- Davis, Richard W., ed. *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society: Essays in Honor of R. K. Webb*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Dentith, Simon. *George Eliot*. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1986.
- Dodd, Valerie A. *George Eliot: An Intellectual Life*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- Ermath, Elizabeth Deeds. *George Eliot*. Boston: Twayne, 1985.
- Fish, Stanley. *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech and It's a Good Thing*. New York: Oxford, 1994.
- Gill, Frederick C. *The Romantic Movement of Methodism; a Study of English Romanticism and the Evangelical Revival*. New York: Haskell House, 1966.
- Glover, Willis Borders. *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century*. London: Independent Press, 1954.
- Green, Laura Morgan. *Educating Women: Cultural Conflict and Victorian Literature*. Athens, Ohio: University of Ohio Press, 2001.

Grugel, Lee E. *Society and Religion During the Age of Industrialization: Christianity in Victorian England*. Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1979.

Haight, Gordon S. and Rosemary VanArsdel, eds. *George Eliot, a centenary tribute*. Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1982.

Hauerwas, Stanley. *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University Press, 1981.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Peaceable Kingdom*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University Press, 1983.

Haught, James A., ed. *2000 Years of Disbelief*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1996.

Henry, Nancy. *George Eliot and the British Empire*. New York: Cambridge, 2002.

Hibbert, Christopher. *Florence: The Biography of a City*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993.

Hodgson, Peter C. *Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Christian Theology*. Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Westminster, 1994.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot*. London: SCM Press, 2001.

Johnstone, Peggy Fitzhugh. *The Transformation of Rage: Mourning and Creativity in George Eliot's Fiction*. New York: New York University Press, 1994.

Lakeland, Paul. *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.

Lefew-Blake, Penelope. *Schopenhauer, women's literature, and the legacy of pessimism in the novels of George Eliot, Olive Schreiner, Virginia Woolf, and Doris Lessing*. Lewiston, New York: Edward Mellen Press, 2001.

Lewis, Donald M. *Lighten Their Darkness: The Evangelical Mission to Working-Class London, 1828-1860*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.

Lovesey, Oliver. *The Clerical Character in George Eliot's Fiction*. Victoria, British Columbia: Victoria University Press, 1991.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.. Translated by Norman Kemp Smith. New York: St. Martin's 1965.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by Allen W. Wood. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Critique of Practical Reason*. Translated by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: University Press, 1997.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University Press, 1980.
- Mansel, H. L. *The Limits of Religious Thought Examined in Eight Lectures*. London: Sheldon and Co., 1859.
- McSweeney, Kerry. *George Eliot (Marian Evans): A Literary Life*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.
- Melnyk, Julie. *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Transfiguring the Faith of Their Fathers*. New York: Garland, 1998.
- Miller, J. Hillis. *The Ethics of Reading*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.
- Morris, Jeremy. *F. D. Maurice and the Crisis of Christian Authority*. Oxford: University Press, 2005.
- Nardo, Ann K. *George Eliot's Dialogue with John Milton*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2003.
- Nestor, Pauline. *George Eliot*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.
- Newton, K. M., ed. *George Eliot*. New York: Longman, 1991.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. New York: Harper, 1956.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Twilight of the Idols*. Oxford: University Press, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Cambridge: University Press, 2002.
- Noll, Mark A. and D. W. Bebbington. *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *Love's Knowledge*. New York: Oxford, 1990.
- Oehlschlaeger, Fritz. *Love and Good Reasons: Postliberal Approaches to Christian Ethics and Literature*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Ott, Ludwig. *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*. Rockford, Illinois: TanBooks, 1974.

- Oulton, Carolyn. *Literature and Religion in Mid-Victorian Britain*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Ramsey, A. M. *F. D. Maurice and the Conflicts of Modern Theology*. Cambridge: University Press, 1951.
- Rauch, Alan. *Useful Knowledge: the Victorians, Morality and the March of Intellect*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Rignall, John, ed. *George Eliot and Europe*. Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2000.
- Reardon, Bernard. *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age: A Survey from Coleridge to Gore*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.. New York: Longman, 1995.
- Robbins, Marguerite. *Interpretations of Evangelicalism in Victorian Women's Fiction*. Russelleville, Arkansas: Arkansas Tech University, 1992.
- Rogerson, J. W. *The Bible and Criticism in Victorian Britain: Profiles of F. D. Maurice and William Robertson Smith*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.
- Pangallo, Karen L. *The Critical Response to George Eliot*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994.
- Parsons, Gerald, ed. *Religion in Victorian Britain*. 5 volumes. New York: St. Martin's, 1988-97.
- Perkin, J. Russell. *A Reception History of George Eliot's Fiction*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1990.
- Schiefelbein, Michael E. *The Lure of Babylon: Seven Protestant Novelists and Britain's Roman Catholic Revival*. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2001.
- Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *The Christian Faith*. London: T & T Clark, 1999. Originally published in 1821-2.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. Cambridge: University Press, 1988. Originally published in 1799.
- Schlossberg, Herbert. *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000.
- Schwehn, Mark. *Exiles from Eden*. New York: Oxford, 1993.
- Spittles, Brian. *George Eliot: Godless Woman*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

- Stockton, Kathryn Bond. *God Between Their Lips*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994.
- Symondson, Anthony. *The Victorian Crisis of Faith*. London: S.P.C.K., 1970.
- Taylor, Ina. *A Woman of Contradictions: The Life of George Eliot*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1989.
- Thompson, Andrew. *George Eliot and Italy : literary, cultural, and political influences from Dante to the Risorgimento*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.
- Toon, Peter. *Evangelical Theology, 1833-1856: A Response to Tractarianism*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979.
- Vidler, Alec. *Witness to the Light: F. D. Maurice's Message for Today*. New York: Scribner's, 1948.
- Welch, Claude. *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century: Volume 1 (1799-1870)*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1972.
- Weinandy, Thomas. *Does God Suffer?* Notre Dame, Indiana: University Press, 2000.
- Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*. Princeton, New Jersey: University Press, 1970.
- Willey, Basil. *Nineteenth Century Studies*. New York: Columbia University, 1950.
- Wilson, S. Law. *The Theology of Modern Literature*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1899.
- Wolffe, John. *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain, 1780-1980*. London: S.P.C.K., 1995.
- Wood, Ralph. *The Comedy of Redemption*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University Press, 1998.
- Woodhead, Linda. *Reinventing Christianity: Nineteenth-Century Contexts*. Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2001.

## Works of Frederick Denison Maurice

Maurice, F. D. *The Kingdom of Christ: or, Hints to a Quaker Respecting the Principles, Constitution, & Ordinances of the Catholic Church in Letters to a Member of the Society of Friends*. Rev. ed. London: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1842.

\_\_\_\_\_. *An Address to the Clergy: What Christian Socialism Has to Do with the Question Which is Now Agitating the Church*. London: G. Bell, 1850.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Theological Essays*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1853.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Warnings of Advent: A Course of Sermons*. London: J. Whitaker, 1853.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Word 'Eternal' and the Punishment of the Wicked: A Letter to the Rev. Dr. Jelf, Canon of Christ Church and Principal of King's College*. Cambridge: Macmillan, 1853.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Doctrine of Sacrifice, Deduced from Scriptures: A Series of Sermons*. Cambridge: Macmillan, 1854.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Patriarchs and Lawgivers of the Old Testament*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.. London: Macmillan, 1855.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Eucharist: Five Sermons*. London: John E. Taylor, 1857.

\_\_\_\_\_. *What is Revelation? A Series of Sermons on the Epiphany; to Which are Added Letters to a Student of Theology on the Bampton Lectures of Mr. Mansel*. Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1859. Also, *Sequel to the Inquiry, What is Revelation?* 1860.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Sermons Preached at Lincoln' Inn Chapel*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.. London: Smith Elder, 1860.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy*. 2 vols. London: Macmillan and Co., 1862.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Dr. Lushington, Mr. Heath and the Thirty-Nine Articles." In *Macmillan's Magazine* 5 (1862), 156.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Conflict of Good and Evil in our Day*. London: Smith and Elder, 1865.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Ground and Object of Hope for Mankind: Four Sermons Preached before the University of Cambridge in November 1867*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1868.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Social Morality: Twenty-One Lectures Delivered in the University of Cambridge*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1869.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Gospel of John: A Series of Discourses*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.. London, Macmillan, 1878.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Lord's Prayer: Nine Sermons and Prayer-Book*. London: Macmillan, 1880.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Religions of the World and Their Relations to Christianity*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed.. London: Macmillan, 1886.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Friendship of Books*. London: Macmillan, 1893.

Maurice, Frederick (son), ed. *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice, Chiefly Told in His Own Letters*. 2 volumes. London: Macmillan and Company, 1884.

#### Articles and Essays

Andrews, John S. "German Influence on English Religious Life in the Victorian Era." In *Evangelical Quarterly* 44 (October-December 1972): 218-33.

Anger, Suzy. "George Eliot and Philosophy." *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*. George Levine, ed. Cambridge, University Press, 2001.

Birks, T. R. "On the Bible And Modern Thought (1861)." *Religion in Victorian Britain*, 3. Gerald Parsons and James Moore, eds. 174-8. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1988.

Bonaparte, Felicia. "Carrying the Word of the Lord to the Gentiles: Silas Marner and the Translation of Scripture into a Secular Text." In *Religion and Literature* 23 (Summer 1991): 39-60.

Culbertson, Eric. "Victorian Evangelical Theology." In *Churchman* 106, no. 4 (1992): 308-22.

Davies, Brian A. "George Eliot and Christianity." In *Downside Review* 100 (January 1982): 47-61.

Davies, C. M. "On Dr. Cumming in Crown Court." *Religion in Victorian Britain*, 3. Gerald Parsons and James Moore, eds. 210-4. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1988.

Hammond, Paul. "George Eliot's ersatz Christianity." In *Theology* 84 (May 1981): 190-6.

- Helmstadter, Richard J. "The Nonconformist Conscience." *Religion in Victorian Britain*, 4. Gerald Parsons and James Moore, eds. 61-95. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1988.
- Jacobs, Alan. "George Eliot: Good Without God." In *First Things* 102 (April 2000): 50-3.
- Kinney, K. B. "George Eliot and 'The Real Drama of Evangelicalism.'" In *Crux* 32 (December 1996): 31-40.
- Law-Viljoen, Bronwyn. "Midrash, Myth, and Prophecy: George Eliot's Reinterpretation of Biblical Stories." In *Literature and Theology* 11 (March 1997): 80-92.
- Leavis, F. R. "George Eliot's Novel." In *Commentary* 30 (1960).
- Lewis, Donald M. "'Lights in Dark Places': Women Evangelists in Early Victorian Britain, 1838-1857." *Women in the Church*. Studies in Church History Series, 27. 415-27. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.
- Lewis, Robert P. "The Pilgrim Maggie: Natural Glory and Natural History in the Mill on the Floss." In *Literature and Theology* 12 (June 1998): 121-34.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. "Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?" In *The Monist* 67 (1984): 499.
- Marks, Clifford J. "George Eliot's Pictured Bible: Adam Bede's Redeeming Methodism." In *Christianity and Literature* 49 (Spring 2000): 311-30.
- Miller, J. Hillis. "Theology and Logology in Victorian Literature." In *Journal of the American Academy of Religion Thematic Studies* 47 (June 1979): 345-61.
- "On the Present Position of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England." Anonymous authorship. In *Christian Observer* 73 (February 1873): 83-96.
- Ormond, Leonée. "George Eliot and Her Critics." In *Romola*. London: Everyman, 1999.
- Paris, Bernard J. "George Eliot's Religion of Humanity." *George Eliot*. George R. Creeger, ed. 11-36. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970.
- Parrinder, Geoffrey. "The Great Novelist of English Religion." In *Epworth Review* 19 (Summer 1992): 79-87.



- Payne, David. "The Serialist Vanishes: Producing Belief in George Eliot." In *Novel* 33 (Fall 1999): 32-50.
- Rich, Matthew. "'Not a Church, but an Individual Who Is His or Her Own Church:' Religion in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*." *Middlemarch: A Norton Critical Edition*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2000.
- Robson, Geoffrey. "The Failures of Success: Working Class Evangelists in Early Victorian Birmingham." *Religious Motivation*. Derek Baker, ed. 381-91. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978.
- Scotland, Nigel. "Evangelicals, Anglicans and Ritualism in Victorian England." In *Churchman* 111, no. 3 (1997): 249-65.
- Schorer, Mark. "Fiction and the 'Matrix of Analogy.'" In *Kerryon Review* 2 (1949): 539-60.
- Stephen, Leslie. "Mr. Maurice's Theology." In *Fortnightly Review* 15 (1874): 595-617.
- Turner, Frank M. "The Victorian Crisis of Faith and the Faith that was Lost." *Victorian Faith in Crisis*. Richard J. Helmstadter, ed. 9-38. Stanford University Press, 1990.
- Wall, James M. "No Sense of the Sacred." In *The Christian Century* 112 (15 March 1995): 283-4.
- Wright, T. R. "*Middlemarch* as a Religious Novel, or Life Without God." *Middlemarch: A Norton Critical Edition*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2000.