

**The Christian Faith of Charles Dickens:  
Virtue Over Doctrine**

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MR. CHARLES DICKENS'S LAST READING.

*“Mr Charles Dickens’s Last Reading” (print)*

*The Illustrated London News - 19 March 1870*

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the religious worldview of Charles Dickens. It is intended as a contribution to the debate around whether Dickens had a truly Christian faith, or alternatively a confused mixture of beliefs, or even no faith at all. The thesis argues that Dickens had a distinctively Christian faith that stressed faith in action and displaying virtues within a Christian framework, rather than focusing on determining correct theology and doctrine. Dickens' reactions to both Evangelicalism and Catholicism are explored to determine the nature of his objections to both and what these objections reveal about Dickens' own beliefs. It is argued that Dickens' criticisms of both faith traditions reveal his concern that Christianity should primarily consist in actively following the example of Jesus by displaying care for others in a spirit of Christian charity, goodness, and compassion. Dickens' attitudes towards women, death, and the afterlife are also explored, and the thesis reveals that Dickens' religious interests went beyond the purely social concern for which he is known. The thesis makes another contribution by breaking with previous research and emphasising Dickens' magazine work and personal correspondence. These elements of Dickens' writing and editing are generally considered secondary to his novels and frequently overlooked. However, this research shows that Dickens' magazines and letters are rich sources of information that provide a more holistic view of Dickens' religious views, since he more often directly addresses religious matters within them than he does in his novels. It is hoped that this thesis will show the importance of looking beyond just the published novels of Dickens, or indeed other authors, and encourage further studies that use other sources.

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## Abbreviations

*A Child's History*

*A Child's History of England*

*ATYR*

*All the Year Round*

*HN*

*The Household Narrative of Current Events*

*HW*

*Household Words*

*Pictures*

*Pictures from Italy*

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## **Section 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Opening words**

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) is often ranked among the greatest writers of the Victorian period. His works have been widely read since their first publication up to the present day, and numerous adaptations exist for both stage and screen. To many he is synonymous with both the nineteenth century and Christmas. As well as his 15 novels, Dickens wrote five novellas and hundreds of short stories. He also produced sketches of daily life and non-fiction articles, edited magazines, put on plays, lectured, and gave dramatized readings of his works. Additionally, he wrote about travelling in Italy and the United States and produced both a children's history book and a New Testament for his own young family. He is also well-known for his social criticism and his highlighting of the darker side of Victorian life for the poor and vulnerable. Dickens' importance to English literature combined with his ongoing influence and popularity makes him a fascinating figure to study. Understandably, then, there is a vast amount of literature analysing him and his work from many different angles, from his friend and official biographer, John Forster (1812-1876), onwards, into the present day. However, much is written from a literary studies viewpoint, whereas I employ a historical approach that considers Dickens' contemporary context, and particularly his religious context.

The subject of Dickens' religious views has been contentious. While some dismiss his faith, others have argued that it is vital to understanding both him and his writing, given that

Christian faith was central to him and his society. Both of these positions are discussed further in the literature review (Section 1.2), but I concur with the second. Those who underplay the religious element in Dickens appear to believe that faith must be displayed in clear statements of doctrine and theology. However, as the first aspect of my argument I assert that Dickens' Christianity prioritised faith in action and expressing virtues over doctrine and theology, and that this is what he meant by his phrase "real Christianity".<sup>1</sup> While virtue is not a specifically Christian concept, much of Dickens' thinking aligned with both the theological virtues as expressed in 1 Corinthians 1.13,<sup>2</sup> and virtues associated with, for example, the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.22.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Dickens himself asserted that he was portraying Christian characters, as I will make clear. Further, we can see Dickens' focus on the need for faith to have practical outworkings as aligning with biblical injunctions such as "faith without works is dead" (James 2.26). Therefore, Dickens' lack of interest in systematic theological or doctrinal thinking should not be used to infer that Dickens lacked faith. Rather, he prioritised both virtues expressed within a Christian worldview and context, and active faith based on what he saw as essential Christian principles.

The second aspect of my argument is that Dickens' magazines, letters, and non-fiction works have been unjustly neglected as they are valuable sources of information about his religious views that can enhance our knowledge of his faith (see Section 1.3). Therefore, I take a new path by considering Dickens' magazine articles and letters equally to his fiction. Dickens initially submitted non-fiction articles to existing publications such as the weekly *The Examiner* (published 1808-1881). He later edited several magazines, most famously *Household Words* (HW) and *All the Year Round* (ATYR) (see Section 1.3). Dickens' articles,

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<sup>1</sup> Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson, *The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Eight 1856-1858*. Pilgrim edition. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 244-245.

<sup>2</sup> Faith, hope, and love (or charity).

<sup>3</sup> Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

whether written or edited by him, were aimed at general readers and covered a huge range of topics. For example, the first issue of *HW* (March 1859) covered chemistry, colonial life, history, popular culture, and religion, as well as poetry and fiction. While not all of Dickens' articles are relevant to his religious views, many do address religious matters, as I will show. Although Dickens does not include sermons or devotional material, apart from poetry written by others and containing religious themes,<sup>4</sup> he does comment on religion by giving his opinions on events, attitudes, or expressions of faith. Using Dickens' magazine articles utilises neglected sources of information and provides a more holistic approach to understanding Dickens than research which focuses almost entirely on his fiction and makes only passing references to his letters and magazines, as is usually the case. The letters especially are helpful for examining how much Dickens' private thoughts matched what he wrote publicly for his audience, and consideration of these shows much (although occasionally not total) consistency. I also widen my sources by using the non-fiction books, *Pictures from Italy* (1844; hereafter, *Pictures*), *A Child's History of England* (1852-1854; hereafter, *A Child's History*; also, see Section 3.4 for more on both these books), and *The Life of Our Lord* (not published until 1934; see Section 4.3). The latter two especially are often overlooked but are useful sources of information on Dickens' faith that require greater consideration.

I begin exploring Dickens' religion by examining his critical reactions to first Evangelicalism and then Catholicism. These have been chosen because of their importance during Dickens' life, as groups which attracted much attention, had strong social influence, or which were controversial for various reasons. I am considering them separately because, while they

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<sup>4</sup> I will not be including the poetry, partly due to space considerations and partly because it expresses only conventional sentiments without any commentary from Dickens.

sometimes attracted the same criticisms from Dickens, they also have unique characteristics and therefore were not always criticised for the same reasons. Firstly, Evangelicalism was a dominant force in English Christianity at the time, due not least to eighteenth-century revivals and an ongoing growth in Dissenting churches, as well as growing numbers of Anglican Evangelicals. Evangelicalism also affected even those outside its bounds, due to its wide-ranging influence, especially on social norms. Secondly, while Catholics were small in numbers, their position was changing due to relaxations on Catholic religious and civil penalties, and they occupied a place in English Protestant thoughts and fears out of all proportion to their actual numbers, based on a history of fear and suspicion between the two groups. Further, Catholicism was also perceived as affecting the Church of England through the Oxford Movement, so looking at Catholicism as a whole allows me to bring in Anglo-Catholics as well, and more of Dickens' commentary revealing his religious views.

Evangelicalism and Catholicism are obviously large categories with much variation among individuals and groups. This perhaps applies especially within Evangelicalism, given Evangelicals' existence within many denominations and the Evangelical focus on personal interpretation of Scripture. However, we can identify some overall trends while bearing these facts in mind, and notably Dickens himself often did not differentiate between members of these groups to any great degree. This may be a side-effect of his lesser focus on doctrine and theology. I am presenting Dickens' views on Evangelicalism and Catholicism primarily as criticisms of these groups for two reasons. Firstly, Dickens' clearest statements about both Evangelicals and Catholics tend to be critical and these thus give us the strongest indications of his opinions. In contrast, he was much less inclined to write specifically about aspects of Christianity that he agreed with. This has again led some to dismiss Dickens as lacking faith. However, we can discover Dickens' Christian beliefs by discerning his promotion of

Christian virtues in his more positive literary characters or seeing what personal characteristics he praised in magazine articles and letters, so these will also be included in the research. Additionally, while speaking so strongly about what he disliked, Dickens also revealed how he understood Christianity, and we can thus develop a picture of his vision of the faith. This is brought together in the final section, which presents Dickens' approach to Christianity in a more positive sense as an action-oriented one focusing on virtues and the common good, alongside a dislike of imposing doctrinal correctness at the expense of displaying virtues important to Christianity – whether this be done by Evangelicals or Catholics.

## **1.2 Literature review**

There is a vast and continually growing amount of literature on Charles Dickens. Therefore, any review of literature regarding him must be highly selective. My research focuses on Dickens' religious faith and opinions, rather than literary considerations, and so this constitutes the primary criterion for selection. Below, therefore, I give a short literature review of works regarding Dickens' faith to provide a flavour of what has been written.

Starting with the earliest commentators, Forster makes few references to Dickens' faith but does assert that Dickens, despite spending some time as a Unitarian, was an Anglican at heart and had an "unswerving faith in Christianity itself".<sup>5</sup> Forster is criticised for flattering Dickens, but nonetheless as a contemporary and close friend his work still has significance today. Further, Forster's own Unitarianism adds credibility to his claim about Dickens'

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<sup>5</sup> John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1892), 137.

denominational allegiances. G.K. Chesterton's 1906 biography of Dickens also paints the author as both Christian and a committed Anglican, dismissing his brief foray into Unitarianism as a moment of anger (see Section 4.3). Chesterton also explains Dickens' attacks on both Protestants and Catholics as arising from the latter's hatred of "religious extravagance", since "his own conception of religion was the quiet and impersonal [Anglican] Morning Prayer".<sup>6</sup> As I will show in this thesis, Dickens did indeed have a fondness for simple, quiet worship and quiet sincerity.

Later biographers have paid varying amounts of attention to Dickens' religious life. Peter Ackroyd's classic biography (1990), for example, says little on the subject despite its breadth of coverage. He also asserts that there are no Christian motives in Dickens' novels, that churches are always shown negatively, and that Dickens appealed to no authority other than his own feelings.<sup>7</sup> However, this skips over Dickens' own comments on these matters, which contradict Ackroyd's claims. This will be revealed within the thesis but, briefly, Dickens wrote in an 1852 letter about his conversion of Scrooge to a more Christian way of life. Dickens stated that he never wrote "merely to amuse or without an object" but wished to persuade people towards a better way of life in accordance with Christian values, adding that if he did not do this he "could die a more contemptible and worthless death in no man's eyes than in my own".<sup>8</sup> Secondly, while Dickens does often attack churches this is to correct perceived abuses and there are occasional positive references, especially to rural churches. Thirdly, Dickens appealed to the New Testament as a source of authority and guide to life (see Section 4). Later biographers have followed Ackroyd's track. For example, Claire

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<sup>6</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens*. Halcyon Biography. (n.p.: Halcyon Press, 2011), 77.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens: A Memoir of Middle Age* (London: Vintage Books, 2012), 279.

<sup>8</sup> Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Nina Burgis, *The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Six 1850-1852*. Pilgrim edition. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 828.

Tomalin (2012),<sup>9</sup> in her significant biography of Dickens, pays little attention to Dickens' faith. She only briefly refers to Dickens' church-going and focuses almost entirely on his criticisms of particular aspects of religion when she mentions religion at all. Michael Slater (2009),<sup>10</sup> in another respected biography, does better by showing, albeit seldom, that faith was important to Dickens and that this was revealed in his writing. However, Slater does not go into detail about Dickens' faith, so there is still a lack in this area.

A more detailed account comes in Keith Hooper's *Charles Dickens: Faith, Angels and the Poor* (2017).<sup>11</sup> Hooper examines the characteristics and development of Dickens' Christian beliefs throughout his life, and how he expressed those beliefs. Hooper has thus made a valuable contribution towards filling a gap in accounts of Dickens' life that has been left by other biographers. However, he describes Dickens' faith almost entirely as a social gospel concern. The term "social gospel" appeared in the late-nineteenth century and refers to attempts to resolve social problems by applying Christian principles such as charity<sup>12</sup> and justice, with the idea that salvation requires social, not just individual, change. It is also often associated with liberal approaches to theology.<sup>13</sup> It is understandable that Dickens should be associated with this, given his interest in social issues, even though the social gospel movement itself did not start until the year of his death. However, Dickens also commented on other aspects of faith, as I shall describe in this thesis.

The general neglect of religion by biographers may reflect the fact that opinions on Dickens' faith have varied widely since his death. Despite early characterisations of Dickens as

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<sup>9</sup> Claire Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Michael Slater, *Charles Dickens* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Keith Hooper, *Charles Dickens: Faith, Angels and the Poor* (Oxford: Lion Books, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> "Charity" in this thesis refers to the theological virtue of charity (love), as referred to in 1 Corinthians 13.13, and involving love of God and love of others, alongside the other theological virtues of faith and hope.

<sup>13</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, "Social Gospel"; <https://www.britannica.com/event/Social-Gospel>.

Christian by people such as Dostoyevsky (himself a Christian writer), who called him a “great Christian”,<sup>14</sup> there has been a tendency, as mentioned above, to dismiss Dickens’ Christianity. This was especially true in the first half of the twentieth century but still continues at times. It is true that Dickens did not set out to write specifically Christian works, apart from *The Life of Our Lord*, but this does not preclude him from including Christian themes within his writings, similarly to many other Victorian authors. Often, dismissals of Dickens’ faith focus on his criticisms of aspects of organised religion, as seen above when discussing biographies, using these to assert that Dickens was not really religious himself. For example, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (1927) claimed that all ideas of religion must be removed in discussing Dickens.<sup>15</sup> Then, most notably, the highly influential Humphry House (1941) asserted that “His practical humanist kind of Christianity hardly touched the fringes of what is called religious experience, and his work shows no indication of any powerful feeling connected with a genuinely religious subject”.<sup>16</sup> However, this ignores the possibility that Dickens was critical precisely because he was distressed by what he saw as perversions of his faith’s true nature.

Outside of biographies, during a 1963 symposium K.J. Fielding drew attention to a lack of research into Dickens’ religious views, something which he considered the largest fillable gap in knowledge then existing in the field of Dickens research.<sup>17</sup> The importance of this was then contradicted by Philip Collins insisting in 1964 that Dickens did not have deep religious beliefs because his novels did not contain sufficient references to faith and worship.<sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, this gap was mentioned again in 1976 by Angus Wilson in a collection of

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<sup>14</sup> Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Diary of a Writer*, trans. Boris Brasol (New York, NY: George Braziller, 1919), 350.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur Quiller-Couch, *Charles Dickens and Other Victorians* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1927).

<sup>16</sup> Humphry House, *The Dickens World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 131.

<sup>17</sup> K.J. Fielding, “Dickens Criticism: A Symposium”, *Dickensian* 59 (340) (1 May 1963), 76.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Collins, *Dickens and Education* (London: Macmillan, 1964).

essays. Wilson then asserted Dickens' essentially Christian nature, although without providing evidence to back up his view.<sup>19</sup> Norris Pope (1978) then soon went some way towards filling this gap with his well-respected *Dickens and Charity*.<sup>20</sup> This study, similarly to Hooper's biography, saw Dickens as propounding a social gospel approach. Pope explored Dickens' tumultuous relationship with Evangelicalism, showing both why Dickens was a fierce critic of it, and how he nonetheless shared some common goals, at least with some Evangelicals, in his interest in social justice and action. The book also gives a good level of detail about the social and historical context of the time. Pope refers to Dickens' magazine articles, as well as pamphlets and other non-fiction, but not in detail. Given the date of this study, over 45 years ago, and the low level of interest in such sources since, revisiting these articles in more detail seems overdue. Additionally, although Pope refers briefly to some Evangelicals promoting charitable works as an expression of their spiritual condition, he does not explore expressing love towards others as a Christian virtue, something which I will show was important to Dickens.

Another social gospel approach appears more recently in Robert Butterworth's (2016) work. He argues that Dickens' Christian faith was central to his writing and focuses on how Christianity informed Dickens' approach to social issues in particular and the ways in which Dickens prescribed Christianity as a cure for social ills.<sup>21</sup> Butterworth rightly identifies both that Dickens was more concerned with active Christian faith than with doctrine or theological arguments, and that this did not mean Dickens lacked seriousness about his faith. However, he glosses over Dickens' interest in debates over religious matters, instead insisting that Dickens only showed an interest in religious discussions when they affected social issues. As

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<sup>19</sup> Cedric Watts, *The English Novel*. Questions in Literature. (London: Sussex Publications, 1976).

<sup>20</sup> Norris Pope, *Dickens and Charity* (London: Macmillan Press, 1978).

<sup>21</sup> Robert Butterworth, *Dickens, Religion and Society* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

I will show, though, Dickens had an interest in various aspects of both Evangelicalism and Catholicism that included but also went beyond social concern. Butterworth also shares the general lack of interest in Dickens' magazines seen in the literature, and only briefly refers to Dickens' letters as sources of information, rather than seeing both magazines and letters as important in their own right.

A different approach was taken in Dennis Walder's *Dickens and Religion* (1981),<sup>22</sup> in a way that showed the beginnings of a changing attitude towards Dickens' faith in the later twentieth century, although Walder did not go so far as to identify it as specifically Christian. Walder identified individual religious themes in selected Dickens novels, relating them to the religious context of the nineteenth century and considering how Dickens' views developed. Importantly, Walder believes that it is not possible to define Dickens' faith as particularly Christian. He sees Dickens as having an imprecise mixture of religious and non-religious beliefs, and Walder prefers to use the term "religious" rather than "Christian". This view that Dickens lacked clear beliefs is common in the literature. However, it does not consider Dickens' own statements about his Christian faith, especially outside the novels, or how he expressed the importance of living in accordance with what he saw as important Christian values. Additionally, as with the earlier works discussed above, Walder takes Dickens' criticisms of aspects of religious beliefs as evidence that he was not truly Christian, rather than considering that Dickens was disturbed by distortions of Christian faith precisely because of his attachment to it. In a recurring theme within the literature, Walder also does not use Dickens' magazines or make more than fleeting references to his letters. Neglecting these sources limits our understanding of Dickens, leaving us only with attempts to read between the lines of his novels. This is made especially difficult by the fact that, as Walder

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<sup>22</sup> Dennis Walder, *Dickens and Religion* (London: George, Allen & Unwin, 1981).

comments and I have already pointed out, Dickens did not publish religious books (*The Life of Our Lord* was apparently overlooked by Walder), and thus did not set out to describe a particular set of beliefs in a systematic fashion. Such difficulty makes it all the more important to widen our sources so that we gain a more holistic idea of Dickens' faith.

Andrew Sanders (1982)<sup>23</sup> contradicted Walder's ideas, though, asserting that Dickens did not ever doubt fundamental Christian thinking. Sanders noted, again, a lack of interest in Dickens' Christian faith among researchers, ascribing this to Dickens not assertively proclaiming it. This links well with Collins' attitude in 1964. Sanders looks at the personal, literary, and social influences on Dickens that mediated his approach to death, undertaking detailed studies of various novels and arguing that in these we can see Dickens developing a fully Christian understanding of death and resurrection. This developmental approach is a useful reminder that we cannot assume Dickens' views were static throughout his life and is a helpful break from focusing only on Dickens' social concern. On the other hand, though, Sanders has the same reluctance to go much beyond the novels as many others researching Dickens and religion.

Robert Newsom asserted in 2000 that Dickens' beliefs lack consistency and are barely religious at all,<sup>24</sup> something which aligns him with Walder. However, despite this, recent decades have generally seen much greater openness to considering Dickens' Christian context. For example, Gary Colledge (2012) gives a convincing account of Dickens' faith, this one in a broader sense than Sanders<sup>25</sup> since he does not just focus on death and resurrection. He also begins to go beyond the novels to use some letters, but these are mainly

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<sup>23</sup> Andrew Sanders, *Charles Dickens Resurrectionist* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982).

<sup>24</sup> Robert Newsom, *Charles Dickens Revisited* (New York, NY: Twayne, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> Colledge, *God and Charles Dickens*.

used to introduce topics discussed more fully by reference to Dickens' novels. Colledge does use *The Life of Our Lord*, a much-neglected text in general, to show Dickens' thinking, seeing it as vital to understanding his Christian life, but only briefly refers to *A Child's History of England* without exploring its full potential. Colledge identifies Dickens' lack of systematic theological thinking but also his deep commitment to living out his Christian faith, an important facet of understanding the novelist's Christianity. Thus, he argues that Dickens promoted "a practical Christianity grounded in the sublime simplicity of the New Testament versus mere professions of religion and the audacious interposition of vain and ignorant men", and not "only profession and intellectual assent to a body of data".<sup>26</sup> Colledge also makes some attempts to use magazine articles to draw out aspects of Dickens' underlying theology, but he does not apply this method to specific examples of things that Dickens criticised as I do in this research.

Other researchers have focused on specific aspects of Dickens and Christianity, such as Dickens and women (most importantly, Michael Slater's *Dickens and Women*,<sup>27</sup> discussed in Section 4.6), or how Dickens uses the Bible. Dickens' works are full of biblical allusions, although rarely direct quotations. This is a vast subject in its own right which falls outside the scope of this thesis, although I will note where biblical allusions are important to my argument. Jennifer Gribble (2021), for example, has focused particularly on the idea of providence, something which was widely discussed in Dickens' time.<sup>28</sup> She carefully considers the development of Dickens' thinking on this subject, as shown through his novel-writing and how he tried to understand providence through engaging with Scripture. Gribble uses letters from time to time to back up claims, and does mention that Dickens carried out

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<sup>26</sup> Gary Colledge, *God and Charles Dickens: Recovering the Christian Voice of a Classic Author* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012), 107.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Slater, *Dickens and Women* (Brighton: Edward Everett Root, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Jennifer Gribble, *Dickens and the Bible: 'What Providence Meant'* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021).

journalistic work, but again leaves the full potential of these sources untapped. Gribble also refers to Janet Larson's *Dickens and the Broken Scripture* (1985), a comprehensive study of allusions to the Bible, focusing on five novels in particular. Larson additionally makes a rare appeal to Dickens' *The Life of Our Lord*,<sup>29</sup> adding an important dimension to her discussion that I also use.

Another area of research has concerned science and religion.<sup>30</sup> The impact of science on Victorian religious sensibilities is a well-trodden path and not one that this thesis covers. However, it has often been noted that Dickens was generally enthusiastic about scientific discoveries and did not see them as a threat to Christianity (see Section 4.4 for an example of this). My research differs from works focusing on one area by taking a wider approach that covers aspects of both Evangelicalism and Catholicism. The aim of this is to gain an overview and discover common themes and consistent threads in Dickens' religious thinking via the ways in which he reacted to these expressions of Christianity.

Finally, a recent collection of essays on Dickens, *The Theological Dickens* (2022),<sup>31</sup> provides an eclectic selection of views on his faith. This collection, edited by Brenda Ayres and Sarah Maier, begins with Ayres discussing what she calls Dickens' "non-Christian theology", aligning with the tradition of seeing Dickens' faith as unclear. She bases her argument on claims that Dickens did not recognise the divinity of Christ, rejected the Old Testament, and did not have a concept of sin or redemption. However, while Dickens may have been influenced by Unitarianism (see Section 4.3), it is not altogether clear how he positioned

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<sup>29</sup> Janet L. Larson, *Dickens and the Broken Scripture* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 10-12.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Peter J. Bowler, *Reconciling Science and Religion: The Debate in Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), 2001.

<sup>31</sup> Brenda Ayres and Sarah Maier (eds), *The Theological Dickens*. Routledge Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Literature. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022).

Jesus in relation to God given his reluctance to make clear doctrinal statements. He did also have a dislike of the Old Testament (see Section 4.4) but in this he is hardly alone in Christian history. Further I, along with others, do see a concept of sin and redemption in Dickens' writing (see Section 4). Other essays look at a wide range of individual topics concerning Dickens and religion, with no overarching theme by which to characterise them, other than the assertion, once again, that Dickens had an incoherent set of religious views, something which this thesis refutes.

### 1.3 Magazines and letters

All of the aforementioned literature neglects to fully utilise Dickens' magazine articles or letters when discussing Dickens and religion. While articles edited or authored by Dickens and his letters are sometimes referred to in wider literature, they are not used so as to realise their full potential. Instead, the focus is primarily on Dickens' fiction, and especially his full-length novels. However, there is a vast amount of underused writing and information in Dickens' magazine work and letters. I have not found any studies regarding Dickens' faith that focus primarily on either Dickens' magazine work or his letters in order to better understand his religious views, and so this thesis attempts to fill some of this gap. William Axton asserted that Dickens' magazine work is significant in better understanding him,<sup>32</sup> and Humphry House has also pointed to the usefulness of these publications.<sup>33</sup> However, the amount of research carried out on Dickens as journalist and magazine editor is comparatively small in general, and religion is further neglected within this area of study. One reason for

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<sup>32</sup> <sup>32</sup> William Axton, "Religious and Scientific Imagery in Bleak House", *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 22 (4) (March 1968), 349-359.

<sup>33</sup> House, *Dickens World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 14.

this may be the relatively short-lived nature of magazine issues, which are generally not designed with a long life in mind, making it harder to find original sources from which to work. However, the digitisation of Dickens' magazines, *The Household Narrative of Current Events (HN)*, *The Household Words Almanac*, and *ATYR*, alongside the abovementioned *HW*, by the *Dickens Journals Online*<sup>34</sup> project (2006-2012) has helped to remove such obstacles in this case and opened up new possibilities. Overall, deeper research into what we can learn from the articles and short stories Dickens included in the magazines with which he was associated can be immensely valuable, not least for discovering his religious views.

The significance of Dickens' magazine articles is clarified by considering the importance of such publications in his era. The size, nature, and influence of the magazine market grew dramatically in Victorian England, with Linda Hughes describing this as "the first mass-media era".<sup>35</sup> The public, states Matthew Rubery, were offered a choice between more than 25,000 different magazines, which were the most commonly read form of writing, spanning a wide range of literary forms.<sup>36</sup> As Robert Patten puts it, "The British Empire ran on print", and "Periodicals attracted every kind of reader and interest".<sup>37</sup> Also, "The circulation of periodicals and newspapers is thought to have been larger and more influential than that of books in Victorian society".<sup>38</sup> More concretely, Huett gives figures for the period 1800-1870. The average circulation numbers for the 15 magazines she mentions range from 500 for *The*

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<sup>34</sup> See: [djo.org.uk](http://djo.org.uk).

<sup>35</sup> Linda Hughes, "SIDEWAYS!: Navigating the Material(ity) of Print Culture", *Victorian Periodicals Review* 47 (1) (Spring 2014), 1; for more on the reasons behind this growth see, for example, Lorna Huett, "Among the Unknown Public: 'Household Words', 'All the Year Round' and the Mass-Market Weekly Periodical in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: 2004 Van Arsdel Prize Essay", *Victorian Periodicals Review* 38 (1) (Spring 2005), 69, and Susan Bernstein, "Short Forms", in *The Routledge Companion to Victorian Literature*, edited by Dennis Dennisoff and Talia Schaffer (London: Routledge, 2019), 33.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew Rubery, "Journalism", in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Culture*, edited by Francis O'Gorman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 177-194.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Patten, "The New Cultural Marketplace: Victorian Publishing and Reading Practices", in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture*, edited by Juliet John (Oxford: University Press, 2016), 481.

<sup>38</sup> J. Don Vann and Rosemary VanArsdel, "Introduction", in *Victorian Periodicals and Victorian Society*, edited by J. Don Vann and Rosemary VanArsdel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), [3].

*English Woman's Journal* to 250,000 for *The Penny Magazine*. Peak circulations range between 3,000 for *The Westminster Review* and 570,000 for *Once a Week*. Among these, Dickens' *HW* had an average circulation of 40,000 and a peak circulation of 100,000. *ATYR*, meanwhile, had an average circulation of 100,000 and a peak of 300,000.<sup>39</sup> These numbers do not tell us the whole story of magazines' influence, either. Tammy Ho Lai-Ming has explored how reading aloud to groups of people was common in the Victorian era, both within the home as a family and in public gatherings, allowing even the illiterate to consume writing and taking readership far beyond circulation figures. Lai-Ming further explains that Dickens was very aware of this practice, indeed participating in it with his own public readings, and wrote with that in mind.<sup>40</sup> Given both the circulation figures and the wide readership beyond them, it is clear that magazines potentially provide many valuable insights into daily Victorian life and thought, and so not using them fully risks missing many significant insights into Dickens' thinking. Overall, magazines are a vast, relevant, and immensely important source of information on the Victorians. Therefore, studying the magazine work of Charles Dickens represents a valuable opportunity to gain greater insight into him and his beliefs.

Patten also points to the importance of the religious context within this explosion of print culture, saying,

It was probably helpful to British print culture that Protestantism encouraged literacy: the Bible was read, memorized, and discussed in private, in public, in schools, in assemblies and committees, in periodicals, in novels, and in Parliament.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Lorna Huett, "Among the Unknown Public", 69.

<sup>40</sup> Tammy Ho Lai-Ming, "Reading Aloud in Dickens' Novels", *Oral Tradition* 23 (2) (2008), 185-186.

<sup>41</sup> Patten, "The New Cultural Marketplace", 502.

Although not all devout Protestants were necessarily literate, especially among the poor and women, open discussion of religion and knowledge of the Bible were considered normal, as well as integral to public life. Given this, and the strong sense of Britain as a Protestant culture found throughout much of Victorian society (see Section 3.2), it is reasonable to expect that writing from this time will include both overt and subtle references to Christian ideas and topics. This is not only the case when looking at one of the many specifically religious magazines in circulation, such as Roman Catholic newspaper *The Tablet* (founded in 1840) or the Evangelical newspaper *The Record* (founded in 1828). It also applies to writing in secular magazines, unsurprisingly given the importance of faith and religion to Victorian society. Given that my interest is in Dickens I will not be considering specifically religious publications, as he did not edit or write for any of them. Instead, I aim to discover the religious attitudes that can be discerned in his everyday writing on a variety of topics, outwardly religious or otherwise.

Dickens did not write all of the articles he published in his magazines but was known for his tight editorial control of his magazines' content and made clear his desire to direct magazines in his preferred manner from the start. This is backed up by the difficulties he faced due to his desire for total control. Dickens' first editorial position, for example, was at *Bentley's Miscellany* (1836-39). However, he was frustrated by what he saw as interference by the publishers hindering his efforts to "shape and adapt it to his artistic vision".<sup>42</sup> Further, in 1839 he wrote to John Forster with an idea for a new publication which he wanted to be "as much under my own control, and subject to as little interference, as those of a number of

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<sup>42</sup> Dickens Journals Online, "Background"; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-i.html>.

Pickwick or Nickleby”.<sup>43</sup> The magazine proved to be short-lived (April 1840-December 1841), partly because while Dickens enjoyed having full power, he was “unable or unwilling to share it in such a way as to make the labour sustainable”.<sup>44</sup> Another short-lived attempt at producing a magazine (*The Cricket*) came in 1845 and was again a victim of Dickens’ tightness of grasp, being “too bound up with Dickens’s voice, and only sustainable by him at huge expense of effort and ingenuity”.<sup>45</sup>

It was not until *HW* (1850-1859) that Dickens saw significant success with magazine editing. In fact, *HW*, and its successor, *ATYR*, have been described as “two of the most prominent periodicals in the Anglophone world”, and they

serialised many of the nineteenth century’s most notable works of fiction... together with well over seven thousand original short stories, poems, non-fiction articles, essays, reports and exposés, the majority of them commissioned, cajoled and copy-edited (at times, entirely rewritten) by Dickens and his trusty subeditor, W.H. Wills.<sup>46</sup>

Also, the journalist George W. Curtis, an American contemporary of Dickens, said of his work:

... there is no doubt that among the most vigorous forces in the elevation of the character of the Weekly Press had been *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*;

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<sup>43</sup> Madeline House and Graham Storey, *The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume One 1820-1839*. Pilgrim edition. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 564.

<sup>44</sup> Dickens Journals Online, “Background”.

<sup>45</sup> Dickens Journals Online, “Background”.

<sup>46</sup> John Drew, “Dickens and the Middle-class Weekly”, in *Journalism and the Periodical Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, edited by Joanne Shattock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 301.

and since the beginning of the publication of *Household Words*, the periodical literature of England has been born again.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, Dickens' work with these magazines should be included in any attempt to further understand him.

Dickens had written to Forster in 1849 about beginning a new magazine, saying, "my notion is a weekly journal... matter in part original and in part selected...".<sup>48</sup> Forster expressed some doubts that the project was "practicable",<sup>49</sup> but Dickens firmly quashed his caution.<sup>50</sup>

The magazine was to be:

a weekly miscellany of general literature... to contribute to the entertainment and instruction of all classes of readers, and to help in the discussion of the more important social questions of the time. It was to comprise short stories by others as well as himself; matters of passing interest... subjects suggested by books that might most be attracting attention; and poetry in every number if possible, but in any case something of romantic fancy.<sup>51</sup>

Despite Forster's doubts, *HW* first appeared on 30 March 1850, with Dickens as editor and William Henry Wills as sub-editor. It set a tone of intimacy and domesticity in its opening leader:

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<sup>47</sup> Speech by George William Curtis at Dickens Banquet, Delmonico's Restaurant, New York, 1868, in Frederic Hudson, *Journalism in the United States, from 1690-1872* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1873), 664.

<sup>48</sup> Graham Storey and K.J. Fielding, *The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Five 1847-1849*. Pilgrim edition. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 621-622.

<sup>49</sup> Forster, *Life*, 257.

<sup>50</sup> Storey and Fielding, *Letters Five*, 621-622.

<sup>51</sup> Forster, *Life*, 257.

We aspire to live in the Household affections, and to be numbered among the Household thoughts, of our readers. We hope to be the comrade and friend of many thousands of people, of both sexes, and of all ages and conditions... We seek to bring into innumerable homes... the knowledge of many social wonders, good and evil, that are not calculated to render any of us less ardently persevering in ourselves, less tolerant of one another, less faithful in the progress of mankind, less thankful for the privilege of living in this summer-dawn of time.<sup>52</sup>

This desire to be close to his readers differentiates Dickens from other newspaper and periodical editors of the time, who tended to adopt a more distant and formal style. For example, *The Athenaeum* began its first issue in 1828 without introduction but simply an opening article.<sup>53</sup>

Dickens also clearly rejected any kind of utilitarian approach:

No mere utilitarian spirit, no iron binding of the mind to grim realities, will give a harsh tone to our Household Words...we would tenderly cherish that light of Fancy... which, according to its nurture, burns with an inspiring flame, or sinks into a sullen glare, but which (or woe betide that day!) can never be extinguished.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Charles Dickens, "A Preliminary Word", *Household Words* I (1) (30 March 1850), 1; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-i/page-1.html>.

<sup>53</sup> "Characteristics of the Present State of English Literature", *The Athenaeum* 1; [https://archive.org/details/sim\\_athenaeum-uk\\_1828-01-02\\_1/page/n1/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/sim_athenaeum-uk_1828-01-02_1/page/n1/mode/2up).

<sup>54</sup> Dickens, "A Preliminary Word", 1.

As Anne Lohrli explains, the contents of *HW* can be separated into “material of social import, informational articles, and material for entertainment”.<sup>55</sup> In the first category, a wide range of social and political abuses were condemned. It was not the first magazine to explore these matters but Dickens’ manner of presenting them brought wider attention than previous attempts in more serious publications. Secondly, articles also covered factual topics including science, geography, history, industry, invention, institutions, social life, food and drink, sport, crime, the arts, mythology and superstition, biographies, important events of the day, and religion. Neither were these articles confined to Britain but also encompassed the colonies, Europe, and the USA. However, *HW* did not include discussions of national or international policy; thus, there were, for example, no reasoned articles on the Crimean War (1853-1856). In the third category Dickens included short stories, serialised novels, and poetry, as well as additional Christmas special issues but even here there could be attempts at teaching or edification of the readership.<sup>56</sup>

Dickens further followed the widespread convention of having anonymous articles, even though this could render him unpopular with potential contributors. For example, the Dickens biographer F.B. Perkins described the dramatist and writer Douglas Jerrold’s objection to it:

The rule of contributing anonymously had of course its disagreeable side; and it prevented (for instance) Douglas Jerrold from writing for the weekly: ‘But the periodical is anonymous throughout’, remonstrated Dickens, one day, when he had been suggesting to Mr. Jerrold to write for it. ‘Yes’, replied the caustic wit, opening a

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<sup>55</sup> Anne Lohrli, *Household Words: A Weekly Journal 1850-1859 Conducted by Charles Dickens: Table of Contents, List of Contributors and their Contributions Based on the Household Words Office Book in the Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists, Princeton University Library* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 4.

<sup>56</sup> Lohrli, *Household Words*, 5-7.

number, and reading the title, “Conducted by Charles Dickens.” I see it is -  
*mononymous* [*sic*] throughout’.<sup>57</sup>

This anonymity also obviously creates problems around knowing who wrote for Dickens. Such knowledge can potentially give insight into Dickens’ attitudes, likes, and dislikes based on who he favoured, as well as showing us how much his personal feelings influenced his editorial decisions. This includes shedding light on whether his likes and dislikes extended to refusing or severely editing articles by those he disagreed with including, for my purposes, those with differing religious views. However, the issue of identifying contributors to *HW* has been comprehensively addressed by Anne Lohrli, based on the *HW* office book held in Princeton University Library.<sup>58</sup> While this office book is extremely helpful, Lohrli points out that it has some problems. These include variations in titles between the book and the magazine, articles published but not listed in the book (15 items), unclear or incorrect naming of authors, and sometimes no name being given at all (36 of these last). Also, of the 3000 items in the Office Book, over 200 are attributed to two people, most often Wills, Morley, or Dickens and one other. The reasons for this vary from recording who provided the information for the article, to joint writing, to, most often, editorial reworking.<sup>59</sup> Despite the abovementioned issues, though, which are not frequent, the office book and Lohrli’s work in identifying and laying out the contributors to *HW* are both extremely useful.

The use of anonymous articles, while common at the time, also prompts consideration of the issue of power and how it is wielded, according to *Dickens Journals Online*, bringing us on to

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<sup>57</sup> F.B. Perkins, *Charles Dickens: A Sketch of His Life and Works* (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1870), 88.

<sup>58</sup> Lohrli, *Household Words*.

<sup>59</sup> Lohrli, *Household Words*, 37-41.

considering Dickens as “conductor”.<sup>60</sup> This was his preferred title for his editing role, as shown by the fact that “Conducted by Charles Dickens” was a running header in each issue. The significance of this is revealed by an article in *The Daily News*, published on the occasion of Dickens’ death. (The newspaper was founded by Dickens in 1846, and he briefly edited it before passing control to John Forster.) The newspaper commented:

... every article in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* passed under the conductor’s eye, and... every proof was read and corrected by him. It was at one time the fashion to assume that “Conducted by Charles Dickens” meant little more than a sleeping partnership – as if Dickens could have been a sleeping partner in any undertaking under the sun, but those behind the scenes know better...<sup>61</sup>

This reveals that Dickens was known among industry insiders for maintaining strong control over all aspects of his magazine work. He was not inclined to sit back and let others go their own way, but instead wished to make sure everything fitted together into a single, harmonious approach that ultimately reflected his own voice. Dickens himself made this clear by announcing in *ATYR* that, “The statements and opinions of this journal generally are, of course, to be received as the statements and opinions of its conductor”.<sup>62</sup> He does add that this is not applicable to works of fiction by well-known writers that are serialised in his magazine. However, he says nothing about what the criteria are for selecting the authors, leaving open the question of whether authors were chosen on the basis of how closely they aligned with Dickens’ views. This means that looking at what Dickens produced in his magazines is a fruitful way of understanding Dickens better, definitely in terms of non-fiction

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<sup>60</sup> Dickens Journals Online, “Background”.

<sup>61</sup> “Recollections of Charles Dickens”, *The Daily News* (11 June 1870), 5.

<sup>62</sup> Charles Dickens, “Note”, *All the Year Round* X (26 December 1863), 419; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-x/page-419.html>.

articles and to some extent at least in the fictional stories. Considering Dickens' editorial work thus allows us to gain a fuller picture of his attitudes, views, and approaches to the issues and concerns of his day, including religion.

Further evidence of Dickens' hands-on approach can be found from early in his career onwards in his letters, reinforcing their importance in learning more about him. For example, he wrote in December 1837 that,

I am getting on with Grimaldi, and I think I am bringing the points out as well as it is possible to do from Mr Wilk's dreary twaddle.

Did Wilson cast off the MS [count the length in pages]? The pages look to me as if they were too heavy. Let him be as quick as possible on Cruikshank's account.<sup>63</sup>

Other examples are seen in letters relating to *HW*, including: "Mrs. Crowe's story... is horribly dismal; but with an alteration in that part about the sister's madness (which must not on any account remain) I should not be afraid of it".<sup>64</sup> Also: "The introduction to "Soldiers' Wives must be entirely rewritten, and should be a plain and earnest representation of an obvious impropriety. Pray take out of the correspondent's part the message about 'quivering at the smell of gin'".<sup>65</sup> Dickens continued his close inspection of every issue even while travelling abroad, writing from Paris: "The No. having arrived this morning, I have gone over it, and here it is. It wants careful correction (as usual) for pointing, avoidance of confusion in meaning, and making clear".<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> House and Storey, *Letters: One*, 337.

<sup>64</sup> Storey, Tillotson and Burgis, *Letters: Six*, 50.

<sup>65</sup> Storey, Tillotson and Burgis, *Letters: Six*, 467.

<sup>66</sup> Storey and Tillotson, *Letters: Eight*, 32.

Sometimes, changes were made because of Dickens' sensibilities about impropriety. For example, when Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* first appeared in *HW* in 1851, it referred to both *The Pickwick Papers* (1837) and *A Christmas Carol* (1843). Dickens then changed these to books by Thomas Hood. Given that Dickens had made major changes to her work, Gaskell wished to withdraw it but was told that it was too late, along with an explanation that Dickens "felt an impropriety in so mentioning myself".<sup>67</sup>

The above evidence of Dickens' strong editorial control provides confidence that what he allowed to be printed was in line with, or at least did not outright contradict, his own views. This makes his magazines a valuable source of information on Dickens' opinions, even though he did not write all the articles within them, and thus a useful resource for discovering his religious views. Additionally, his articles provide information on a wider range of issues than his fiction alone, given the broad range of subjects covered across many aspects of Victorian life and society. This again increases our ability to gain deeper insight into Dickens' thinking.

Dickens also produced the *HN* as a monthly companion to *HW*, from 1850-1855. (The other companion, *The Household Words Almanac*, published 1856-57, is not included in this research, as it does not contain information relating to Dickens' religious views.) Less well-known than *HW*, the *HN* was briefly considered significant in the 1940s as a source of information about how Dickens put together his fiction,<sup>68</sup> most commonly regarding *Bleak House* (1853), with some further interest through the 1950s and early-1960s.

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<sup>67</sup> Storey, Tillotson and Burgis, *Letters: Six*, 548-549.

<sup>68</sup> Dickens Journals Online, "Household Words Narrative"; <https://www.djo.org.uk/indexes/journals/household-words-narrative.html>.

The *HN* was announced in *HW* on 13 April 1850 in the following way:

We purpose publishing, at the end of each month as a supplementary number to...  
Household Words, a comprehensive Abstract or History of all the  
occurrences of that month, native and foreign... It will form a complete Chronicle of  
all that year's events...<sup>69</sup>

This new initiative is further described by *Dickens Journals Online* as:

a twopenny monthly retrospect of national, international news, and other information,  
published from April 1850 to December 1855 (including numbers for January - March  
1850)... aimed to extend the scope of the main journal in new directions, making the  
suite of publications a complete, cheap and widely available compendium to the life  
of the times.<sup>70</sup>

Being sold at the same price as *HW*, the *HN* could also reach “an audience eager for  
information that could not afford more expensive publications...”.<sup>71</sup>

The *HN* covered current affairs, politics, law and order, accidents and disasters, social  
progress, important figures of the day, overseas news, reviews of literature and art, and  
commercial news. Given that much of this magazine comprises factual reporting, rather than  
articles putting forward personal opinions, I will be using it less than *HW* and *ATYR*.

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<sup>69</sup> Charles Dickens, “The Household Narrative”, *Household Words* I (13 April 1850), 49;  
<https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-i/page-49.html>.

<sup>70</sup> Dickens Journals Online, “Household Words Narrative”.

<sup>71</sup> Koenraad Claes, “‘Serviceable Friends’: The Two Supplements to *Household Words*”, in *Charles Dickens and the Mid-Victorian Press*, edited by Hazel Mackenzie and Ben Winyard (Buckingham: University of Buckingham Press, 2013), [115].

However, where it reports on religious questions and controversies of the day it can throw further light on Dickens' views by revealing how he reports on these matters.

Dickens' final magazine was the already mentioned *ATYR*, which he edited from 1859 until his death in June 1870. (The magazine itself continued until 1895.) The decision to end *HW* and begin this new magazine arose following a dispute with his publishers regarding Dickens' separation from his wife. His publishers (Bradbury and Evans) refused to print Dickens' notice about the separation in *Punch*, which they also published. After a subsequent court case over who controlled *HW*'s trade name, which Dickens won, he ended the magazine, broke with Bradbury and Evans, and started *ATYR*. Notwithstanding this difficult beginning, however, *ATYR* was more successful than *HW* in terms of circulation. As mentioned above, *ATYR* had an average circulation of 100,000, while its predecessor's average circulation was 40,000.<sup>72</sup> *HW* did do well at Christmas, with Christmas special issues selling over 80,000 copies, but even this was dwarfed by *ATYR*'s Christmas circulation of 300,000 in 1867.<sup>73</sup>

*ATYR* was intended to be a direct continuation of *HW*, and in many ways, it was the same. However, it now began with a piece of serial fiction, complete with the author's name. This replaced the "investigative reports and satirical broadsides that had characterised leaders in the earlier incarnation".<sup>74</sup> This change signalled a greater emphasis on fiction, not least that by Dickens himself. For example, the first issue of *ATYR* started with the first instalment of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Serialised stories were also reissued in monthly combined issues of the magazine, further emphasising fiction. In continuity with its predecessor, however, other than

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<sup>72</sup> Lorna Huett, "Among the Unknown Public", 69.

<sup>73</sup> Philip V. Allingham, "Household Words"; <https://victorianweb.org/periodicals/hw.html>.

<sup>74</sup> Dickens Journals Online, "All the Year Round"; <https://www.djo.org.uk/indexes/journals/all-the-year-round.html>.

the leading story, no other authors were named, and “Conducted by Charles Dickens” was still prominent. *ATYR* also kept the same layout and price. Obviously, the limited number of named contributors leads to the same problems discussed regarding *HW*. However, work done by Jeremy Parrott, based on an annotated set of *ATYR* volumes, has helped to identify many contributors.<sup>75</sup>

Dickens’ letters, as mentioned above, are also neglected, being mainly used to make passing references or for secondary support for wider arguments. However, given that there are over 14,000 known letters, ranging from c.1820 to 1870, they represent a huge potential source of information from across most of Dickens’ life. He wrote to a wide range of people, including family members, friends, admirers and critics of his work, colleagues, his publishers and magazine article contributors, members of the theatrical and literary worlds, religious figures, and some important persons of the day. The letters also represent his personal opinions and feelings away from the reading public, and so we can expect a certain level of honesty unhindered by fears about how a wider audience might react. Dickens’ letters reveal many facets of his Christian faith and views as he discussed such things with correspondents and can thus help to fill in some of the gaps in knowledge caused by relying too heavily on his fiction.

This thesis is guided by several research questions. These are designed to enable me to consider Dickens and his context fully, the significance of both Evangelicalism and Catholicism to him and Victorian society, and what Dickens’ reactions show about his faith.

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<sup>75</sup> Jeremy Parrott, “The Skeleton out of the Closet: Authorship Identification in Dickens’s ‘All the Year Round’”, *Victorian Periodicals Review* 48 (4) (Winter 2015). Special Issue: Waterloo and Its Afterlife in the Nineteenth-Century Periodical and Newspaper Press, 557-568.

## 1.4 Research questions

- What were the characteristics of nineteenth-century Evangelicalism and Catholicism in England, and how did they affect Dickens' views of these groups?
- Why were Evangelicalism and Catholicism important topics to Dickens?
- What elements of Evangelicalism and Catholicism did Dickens particularly object to, and what do his criticisms tell us about his faith?
- What exceptions are there to Dickens' general criticisms of Evangelicalism and Catholicism?
- How can we characterise Dickens' own faith in the light of his criticisms and his particular references to Christianity?

In order to address these questions, the thesis is divided into the following main sections.

## 1.5 Main thesis sections

### *Section 2: Evangelicalism*

I begin by establishing what is meant by Evangelicalism in this thesis. I also discuss developments within Evangelicalism from the eighteenth century onwards that are relevant

for understanding the position and importance of Evangelicalism in Victorian society. Having set the context and established why Evangelicalism was important to Dickens, and society as a whole, I then cover his primary criticisms. I use Sabbatarianism, temperance, and the theatre as examples because these were all significant to society in his time. I argue that Dickens' criticisms reveal that he was mainly concerned about four different areas. First, ideas and beliefs being imposed on others instead of living out an active Christian faith by displaying virtue. Second, social injustice in terms of how rules were imposed on the poor compared to the rich. Third, hypocrisy and negativity as opposed to freedom and joy. Fourth, how all of the above might drive people away from faith. However, the section also establishes that Dickens was not entirely hostile to all aspects of Evangelicalism, and indeed sometimes showed sympathy with Evangelicals and worked with them.

### *Section 3: Catholicism*

I briefly survey the history of English Catholicism from the Reformation to the end of the eighteenth century to help develop an understanding of the legal, political, social, and religious positions of English Catholics and why they were often viewed with suspicion or outright hostility. I combine with this discussing the conflation between English national identity and Protestant identity. I then look at how things began to change for Catholics during the nineteenth century via the lessening of social, political, and religious restrictions, alongside immigration from Ireland. Other important changes covered here are Catholic emancipation, the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy, the Oxford Movement, and the revival of religious orders. Such changes reignited deep-rooted Protestant fears, including in Dickens, and he responded by criticising Catholicism for authoritarianism, superstition, ritualism, hypocrisy, being backwards-looking, and violence, as well as critiquing its art and

architecture. However, I also show that Dickens sometimes defended Catholics from prejudice, based on his understanding of real Christianity as including the virtue of tolerance.

#### *Section 4: Dickens' Faith*

This section takes a positive turn by discussing what the criticisms discussed in the previous sections show us about what Dickens believed and valued. It begins by addressing Dickens' religious upbringing and the evidence we have of his personal beliefs, including the potential influence of Unitarianism. I then consider Dickens' approach to the Bible, angels, death, and women, as important aspects of his writing relating to religion, and draw out how he approached these topics. The section then finally looks at how Dickens' criticisms show that his vision of real Christianity was one in which following the example of Jesus and developing and living out virtues in a Christian context was more significant than doctrinal or theological conformity. This reveals an approach aligned with virtue ethics placed into a Christian context, and a way of approaching Christian living that pre-dates the post-Reformation emphasis on duty and rules.

## **Section 2: Evangelicalism**

### **2.1 Introduction and research questions**

The Victorian era was marked by a strong and socially pervasive Evangelicalism. Even for someone like Dickens, generally considered hostile to Evangelicalism, it could not be ignored as it composed much of the Victorian world. Its significance to both Victorian society and Dickens is why my discussion begins here. Even non-Evangelicals were influenced by its patterns of behaviour, which were often synonymous with respectable and/or middle-class values. This influence was a lasting legacy of the eighteenth-century Evangelical revival, which led to increasing numbers of Evangelicals within many denominations, helped to form important characteristics of nineteenth-century Evangelicalism, and created a greater involvement in social and political life that continued into the Victorian era. Additionally, as I will show in this section, Victorian Evangelicalism's societal effects helped form Dickens' attitudes, as he saw it as often having negative effects on ordinary people. Dickens' criticisms can be linked to his well-known social criticism. However, he also saw Evangelical attitudes as distorting Christianity by imposing conformity with little or no regard for living out virtues. Given Evangelicalism's importance, Dickens' critique comprises a significant part of his thinking that needs consideration to understand his religious worldview. Based on the above, it is also unsurprising that some of Dickens' most memorable and satirical characters are Evangelicals, reflecting the importance of the topic. It is similarly unsurprising that

Evangelical figures and discussions of Evangelical thinking and actions appear multiple times in his magazine articles and personal correspondence.<sup>76</sup>

Having established the importance of Evangelicalism to understanding Dickens' religious worldview, the following questions will be considered:

- What were the characteristics of nineteenth-century Evangelicalism and how did they affect Dickens' view of Evangelicals?
- Why was Evangelicalism an important topic to Dickens?
- What elements of Evangelicalism did Dickens particularly object to, and what do his criticisms tell us about his faith?
- What exceptions are there to Dickens' general criticisms of Evangelicalism?

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<sup>76</sup> There are obviously differences between Dissenting and Anglican Evangelicals but, as Dickens often does not distinguish between them, I mostly consider them together.

## 2.2 Characteristics of Evangelicalism

### 2.2.1 Definition

An in-depth consideration of all of Evangelicalism's history and characteristics is beyond the scope of this research, given the former's complex nature.<sup>77</sup> However, some kind of definition is useful to aid in recognition. For this, I will use David Bebbington's well-known quadrilateral:

There are the four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism.<sup>78</sup>

It is true that these principles "... do not exist in the same proportions or exert the same effects in all times and places",<sup>79</sup> but they are still useful for clarifying what I mean by Evangelicalism in this thesis.

As I have previously remarked, Dickens did not focus primarily on doctrinal concerns such as those expressed in Bebbington's quadrilateral. In this, he differed from the emphasis on

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<sup>77</sup> For more on this, see, for example, Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys*. A History of Evangelicalism. (Leicester: IVP, 2004).

<sup>78</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 2.

<sup>79</sup> Noll, *Rise*, 17-18.

doctrine often found among Evangelicals. However, he was very interested in the outworkings of faith that arose from such doctrinal foundations. Additionally, despite being known as a critic of Evangelicals, Dickens shared some of their emphases in his approach to faith. One noticeable example of this is Pietism, an example of conversionism in action given its focus on the need for internal change.

### 2.2.2 Pietism

Pietism's interest in "the religion of the heart" is important in nineteenth-century Evangelicalism, as well as being seen in many renewal movements, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>80</sup> Pietism can be difficult to pin down and has had many different expressions throughout history. However, Ted Campbell outlines three main characteristics:

... heartfelt repentance and heartfelt faith in Christ... devotion to the humanity of Christ, especially to the wounds and sufferings of Christ... [and] the use of small groups for discipline in the Christian community.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, there is an emphasis on faithfulness and sincerity that Dickens also shares, as I will show. Campbell's words further reveal that, as well as conversionism, Pietism also contains aspects of crucicentrism, which is a less significant aspect of Dickens' thinking.

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<sup>80</sup> John Coffey, "Introduction: Sources and Trajectories of Evangelical Piety", in *Heart Religion: Evangelical Piety in Britain and Ireland, 1690-1850*, edited by John Coffey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.

<sup>81</sup> Ted Campbell, "Close Encounters of the Pietistic Kind: The Moravian-Methodist Connection", *Communio Viatorum* 45 (1) (2003), 70.

“Pietistic movements have appeared throughout Christian history whenever religion seemed to become divorced from experience”.<sup>82</sup> However, the origins of pietism as a movement are especially associated with Philip Jacob Spener in the seventeenth century, and German Lutherans.<sup>83</sup> Neither is Pietism confined to Evangelicals of a particular kind, but “Covers the spectrum from conservative, orthodox, liturgical members of state-church traditions to separatist groups... to radical prophetic groups...”.<sup>84</sup> What pietists have always shared with Evangelicals, however, is described by Emma Mason as “an intensely personalised faith derived from a direct and emotional relationship with Christ enabled by repeated study of the Gospels and a focus on the Cross”.<sup>85</sup> This draws in biblicism as well, and this focus, among others, is seen in Spener’s writings.

Spener prioritises Scripture, arguing that, “Thought should be given to a *more extensive use of the Word of God among us*... [because] If there is to be any good in us, it must be brought about by God”.<sup>86</sup> Further, practising virtue is more important “than mere intellectual assent to prescribed dogmas”,<sup>87</sup> since, “... *it is by no means enough to have knowledge of the Christian faith, for Christianity consists rather of practice*”<sup>88</sup> (conversionism and activism). It is already apparent that Dickens was influenced by this Pietistic tradition, since he too prioritised faith in action (cf. the Letter of James and see Section 1.1). Additionally, both he and Spener disliked too much theological argument, with Spener saying, “not all disputation

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<sup>82</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, “Pietism”; <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pietism>.

<sup>83</sup> Randall Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 454.

<sup>84</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia*, 454.

<sup>85</sup> Emma Mason, “Religion”, in *Charles Dickens in Context*, edited by Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 321.

<sup>86</sup> Philip Spener, *Pia Desideria*. Translated, edited, and with an introduction by Theodore G. Tappert. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1964), 87; italics in original.

<sup>87</sup> Balmer, *Encyclopedia*, 454.

<sup>88</sup> Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 95; italics in original.

is useful and good”,<sup>89</sup> and “proper disputation is not the only means of maintaining the truth but requires other means alongside it”.<sup>90</sup>

Pietism can also be seen in many well-known eighteenth-century English figures, including John Wesley. The story of his Evangelical conversion is well-known, and Pietistic spirituality is a significant element. As J. Steven O’Malley explains, Pietism and Methodism were both looking for “a fresh encounter with the living God at a time when that voice had been neglected, as well as a recovery of God’s saving mission for a lost humanity”,<sup>91</sup> and Wesley’s Pietism can be seen in many of his sermons. For example, he says that faith in Christ “is not barely a speculative, rational thing” but “also a full reliance on the blood of Christ, a trust in the merits of his life, death, and resurrection; a recumbency upon him as our atonement and our life...”,<sup>92</sup> in an example of crucicentrism. He also focuses on the suffering of Christ, saying, for example, “But his obedience implied more than all this. It implied not only doing, but suffering...”.<sup>93</sup> Further, John and Charles Wesley were both “committed... to leaving organized ‘societies’ of new Christians behind them...”<sup>94</sup> Dickens, meanwhile, did not talk about concepts such as atonement but did share Wesley’s stress on trust in Jesus, and on a faith that was living and active and came from the heart, and not just a matter of intellectual agreement.

More could be said about Pietism and its different expressions but for this research it is primarily important to note that it was an influential part of much Evangelical thinking in

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<sup>89</sup> Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 100.

<sup>90</sup> Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 101.

<sup>91</sup> J. Steven O’Malley, “Pietism and Wesleyanism: Setting the Stage for a Theological Discussion”, *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 51 (1) (Spring 2018), 57.

<sup>92</sup> John Wesley, *The Complete Sermons* (n.p.: Hargreaves Publishing, 2013), 1.

<sup>93</sup> Wesley, *Sermons*, 101.

<sup>94</sup> Jonathan Dean (ed.), *A Heart Strangely Warmed: John and Charles Wesley and Their Writings*. Canterbury Studies in Spiritual Theology. (Norwich, Canterbury Press, 2014), 6.

Dickens' lifetime.<sup>95</sup> I have already shown evidence of pietistic influence on Dickens, in contrast to the popular blanket assumption that Dickens was totally opposed to all things Evangelical, and it is necessary to keep this in mind when trying to understand him in relation to the Evangelical world.

Another important influence on nineteenth-century Evangelicalism was the eighteenth-century revival, which I will now discuss.

### 2.2.3 Revivalism

The eighteenth-century revival led to increased Evangelical reach across nineteenth-century society, both inside and outside the bounds of Evangelicals themselves, by affecting society's moral values and actions. Bebbington notes that revivals have always been a common feature of church history, brought about by "a sense that not everything was well, perhaps that existing methods were proving ineffectual or that the Church had lost its first love".<sup>96</sup>

Revivals are also not necessarily confined to Protestant or Evangelical faith.<sup>97</sup> However, they are primarily associated with Evangelicals, and "The decade beginning in 1734 witnessed in the English-speaking world a more important development than any other, before or after, in the history of Protestant Christianity: the emergence of the movement that became Evangelicalism".<sup>98</sup> This statement by Bebbington makes clear its importance. He also explains that the revival turned around the difficult position of the Dissenting churches in Britain, increasing their numbers at a rate faster than the population growth rate. He notes, by

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<sup>95</sup> Emma Mason, "Religion", 321.

<sup>96</sup> David Bebbington, "Introduction", *Studies in Church History* 44 (2008), xv.

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, Peter B. Nockles, "The Oxford Movement as Religious Revival and Resurgence", *Studies in Church History* 44 (2008), 214-244.

<sup>98</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 20.

way of example, that numbers of Independent and Baptist church members rose by 20,000 and 14,000, respectively, between 1750 and 1800. These figures do not include those who came to meetings but did not join the churches – something which pushes the numbers influenced by revival even higher.<sup>99</sup> In 1851 a religious census was added to the national census, aiming to discover how far spiritual provision and religious instruction were keeping up with the needs of the growing population. While not entirely reliable for various reasons, the census recorded 4,536,264 worship attenders at the main Dissenting churches on the 30 March 1851 in England and Wales. This compares to 5,292,551 Anglicans, and 383,630 Roman Catholics. The total population of England and Wales was around 17.9 million.<sup>100</sup> Thus, Dissenters were an important, influential, and growing section of society, which helps to explain Dickens' interest in them and why they are a significant group for understanding both Victorian society and Dickens himself. It is harder to know what proportion of the Church of England was Evangelical, though, as surveys do not provide this kind of detail. Numbers of Evangelical clergymen are thus often used to give an idea. Elisabeth Jay states that Gladstone estimated an increase in Evangelical clergy "from one in twenty to one in eight between 1820 and 1830", while the Calvinist James Grant estimated one in five clergymen to be Evangelical in 1839.<sup>101</sup> Thus, Anglican Evangelicals were also increasingly significant in Dickens' lifetime.

This growth in Evangelical numbers was associated with the movement's successful emphasis on the need for each individual to respond to the Gospel (conversionism). The revivalist message is exemplified by Henry Venn in *The Complete Duty of Man*. Venn places

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<sup>99</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 21.

<sup>100</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church: Part I 1829-1859* (London: SCM Press, 1971), 365.

<sup>101</sup> Elisabeth Jay, *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth Century Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 32.

the saving death of Christ at the centre of faith, in line with crucicentrism,<sup>102</sup> describes the universal sinfulness of humanity and its sorry state before God,<sup>103</sup> and positions the Bible as the best way to draw near to God, combining biblicism and a focus on the importance of personal faith that aligns with Pietist impulses.<sup>104</sup> The need to be convinced of sin as the pathway to faith is also affirmed, in an example of conversionism.<sup>105</sup> Faith itself he describes as “the reliance of the soul on Jesus Christ for help and deliverance”<sup>106</sup> and as consisting in depending on “the teaching of Christ, through his word and Spirit, for the knowledge of all things needful to salvation”.<sup>107</sup> Faith is also “the root of all the fruits of righteousness”,<sup>108</sup> in a classic Evangelical emphasis on faith over works that he develops by rejecting good works as a way to salvation.<sup>109</sup> He further describes “true religion” as having “the honor [*sic*] and glory of God for its object”. Finally, such religion leads to holiness of living, a major concern of Pietist thinking.<sup>110</sup> This is an expression of conversionism which Dickens shares, given his stress on living in a truly Christian manner, even if his view of what that constitutes differs from many Evangelicals.

Venn’s work thus displays many characteristics of both Evangelicalism and Pietism which can also be traced in nineteenth-century Evangelical thinking and were familiar to Dickens. While Dickens strongly disliked the idea of universal sinfulness, as I will show, and had a greater emphasis on action than Venn, he did share at least some of the pietistic elements of Venn’s thinking.

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<sup>102</sup> Henry Venn, *The Complete Duty of Man; or, a System of Doctrinal and Practical Christianity, Designed for the Use of Families*. New ed. (New York, NY: American Tract Society, n.d.), 14.

<sup>103</sup> Venn, *Complete Duty*, 54.

<sup>104</sup> Venn, *Complete Duty*, 66-67.

<sup>105</sup> Venn, *Complete Duty*, 72-73.

<sup>106</sup> Venn, *Complete Duty*, 110.

<sup>107</sup> Venn, *Complete Duty*, 113.

<sup>108</sup> Venn, *Complete Duty*, 115.

<sup>109</sup> Venn, *Complete Duty*, 130.

<sup>110</sup> Venn, *Complete Duty*, 218.

A further characteristic of the eighteenth-century revival was emotional responses, reflecting a Pietistic element. These were often expressed through tears produced by a conversion experience or listening to preaching designed to appeal to the emotions. However, during the eighteenth century, tears were considered not simply a mark of emotion but also a sign of deep faith and sometimes an indication of real conversion and true belief,<sup>111</sup> showing a stress on conversionism. For example, Thomas Dixon quotes the future Methodist leader Sampson Staniforth, then a recent convert, who wrote about his conversion experience in 1745:

... I kneeled down, and determined not to rise, but to continue crying and wrestling with God, till He had mercy on me... as I looked up to heaven I saw Jesus hanging on the cross. At the same moment these words were applied to my heart, “thy sins are forgiven thee.” My chains fell off; my heart was free. All guilt was gone, and my soul was filled with unutterable peace.<sup>112</sup>

This contrasts with Dickens’ later criticisms of such emotionalism, despite appeals to emotion in his own writing. The difference may lie in emotion in worship potentially being whipped up in a manipulative fashion to achieve a particular end, whereas Dickens favours sincere emotion arising naturally from within, aligning with the pietistic emphasis on sincerity and “the heart”. Neither was Dickens alone in his dislike of emotionalism. Dr John Scott, for example, argued in 1744 that, while “there is an excellent Use even of our sensitive Passions in Religion”, it was best to have a “gentle Temper of Body, whose Passions are soft

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<sup>111</sup> Thomas Dixon, “Enthusiasm Delineated: Weeping as A Religious Activity in Eighteenth-Century Britain”, *Litteraria Pragensia: Studies in Literature and Culture* 22 (43) (1 January 2013).

<sup>112</sup> Thomas Dixon, “History in British Tears: Some Reflections on the Anatomy of Modern Emotions” (lecture, Netherlands Historical Association, Koninklijke Bibliotheek Den Haag, 4 November 2011), 4.

and easy”.<sup>113</sup> “Passions”, he further argues, are just a matter of differences in temperament, and should not be used as a sign of true conversion.<sup>114</sup> Thus, while Dickens did differ from some Evangelicals in his avoidance of religious emotionalism, he was also aligned with others. These included the Clapham Sect, founded in 1780 by, among others, Henry Venn (1796-1873), and comprising middle-class professionals primarily concerned with social justice, thus emphasising activism. This group contrasts with the common nineteenth-century caricatures of Evangelicals that are especially associated with Dickens, and they are closer to him with their stress on active faith. However, Dickens seems not to refer to them, perhaps because of his tendency not to distinguish between types of Evangelicals.

#### **2.2.4 Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism**

Importantly, Jay draws out the importance of understanding the religious world of authors such as Dickens. She begins by stating her belief, which I share, that, “we cannot fully understand the work of the major English nineteenth-century novelists unless we have some knowledge of the world from which they came”.<sup>115</sup> She expands on this by explaining that in the Victorian era, “it was assumed that a man’s religious life was so intimately bound up with his social existence and behaviour that to ignore it was to sacrifice a major insight into the influences forming a man’s character”.<sup>116</sup> The importance of religious life to Victorians and its place in understanding people’s thinking and actions is thus vital to properly

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<sup>113</sup> John Scott, *A Fine Picture of Enthusiasm, Chiefly Drawn by Dr John Scott, Formerly Rector of St Giles’s in the Fields, Wherein the Danger of the Passions Leading in Religion is Strongly Described* (London: J. Noon, 1744), 3.

<sup>114</sup> Scott, *A Fine Picture*, 4.

<sup>115</sup> Jay, *Religion of the Heart*, [1].

<sup>116</sup> Jay, *Religion of the Heart*, 2.

understanding them and, consequentially, Dickens. Therefore, it is important to discuss the nineteenth-century Evangelical world in general before moving on to Dickens in particular.

Evangelicalism's nineteenth-century social and political influence is clear. Boyd Hilton, for example, points to individual influential Evangelicals such as Wilberforce and Thornton affecting politics,<sup>117</sup> showing the ascendancy of Evangelical thinking in higher levels of society. Bebbington also states that "Evangelical attitudes were characteristic of the times as never before or since"<sup>118</sup> and that Victorian values, at least in the mid-Victorian period, resulted from Evangelical faith.<sup>119</sup> This also suggests that many may have accepted Evangelical standards without necessarily fully signing up to Evangelical doctrines, leading to a kind of cultural Evangelicalism.

Among the influences on the development and growth of Pietism and Victorian Evangelicalism, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* is especially important. As C. Stephen Finley shows, "for many of the Victorian faithful... Bunyan played a role in their religious formation and their personal mythologies of quest and development second only to the Bible itself".<sup>120</sup> *The Pilgrim's Progress* was widely distributed in different formats, for both children and adults at all levels of society, with associated maps and games also available.<sup>121</sup> The book's popularity helped to bring Evangelical ideas, including Pietism, to a wider audience. Further, Emma Mason has noted that it was seen "as a redemptive, salvific and consolatory evangelical narrative" that "lent itself to a Victorian obsession with exploring

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<sup>117</sup> Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 7.

<sup>118</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 105.

<sup>119</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 105.

<sup>120</sup> C. Stephen Finley, "Bunyan among the Victorians: Macaulay, Froude, Ruskin", *Journal of Literature & Theology* 3 (1) (March 1989), 77.

<sup>121</sup> George Offor, *The Whole Works of John Bunyan, Accurately Reprinted from the Author's Own Editions: Volume 1* (London: Blackie and Son, 1862), vi.

the personal truths of individual subjectivity”.<sup>122</sup> Many Victorians also related to Christian’s struggles, such as when Christian and Pliable fell into the slough of Despond and “wallowed for a time... and Christian, because of the burden that was on his back, began to sink in the mire...”.<sup>123</sup> Such scenes chimed with the common Victorian concept of the Christian life as one of difficulties and temptations to conquer through both biblical knowledge and self-examination, showing both biblicism and conversionism. As Finley notes, Victorian “piety was markedly like Bunyan’s piety to the extent that what was real, what the Christian really lived... was pilgrimage, and it was to the unfolding pattern in the pilgrimage that he or she looked for assurance”.<sup>124</sup> Further, Bunyan’s story of a lone Christian making his way through life and faith chimed with the characteristic Evangelical stress on an individual’s relationship with God. Thus, his work fit the growing Evangelical influence in Victorian England by reinforcing the idea of a one-to-one relationship with the divine apart from the structures and authority of the wider Church.

Dickens was no exception to the Victorian closeness to *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Indeed, according to Vincent Newey, “Among nineteenth-century authors, Dickens is the one most variously in touch with Bunyan”.<sup>125</sup> Mason notes, for example, that in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) Little Nell and her grandfather’s journey from London to the Midlands can be seen as going from the Slough of Despond to the Celestial City.<sup>126</sup> Indeed, Dickens himself refers to Bunyan’s book in relation to their journey. As Nell and her grandfather look back on

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<sup>122</sup> Emma Mason, “The Victorians and Bunyan’s Legacy”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan* edited by Anne Dunan-Page (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 151.

<sup>123</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress: From This World to That Which is to Come* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 17.

<sup>124</sup> Finley, “Bunyan Among the Victorians”, 77.

<sup>125</sup> Vincent Newey, “Bunyan’s Afterlives: Case Studies”, in *Reception, Appropriation, Recollection: Bunyan’s “Pilgrim’s Progress”* edited by W.R. Owens and Stuart Sim. Religions and Discourse 33. (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2007), 41.

<sup>126</sup> Mason, “Victorians and Bunyan’s Legacy”, 150; Rachel Bennett also makes interesting comments on specific elements of *Old Curiosity Shop* and how they relate to *Pilgrim’s Progress* in “Punch Versus Christian in *The Old Curiosity Shop*”, *The Review of English Studies* 22 (88) (November 1971), 423-434.

London from a distance, Nell recalls a copy left at home and says, ““I feel as if we were both Christian, and laid down on this grass all the cares and troubles we brought with us; never to take them up again””.<sup>127</sup> Here, Dickens uses the imagery of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* to convey how Nell and her grandfather are escaping the difficulties and dangers that lie behind them in London and setting out towards a new and better life. Thus, they find a kind of salvation in their journey which parallels that found by Christian. Unlike Bunyan, though, Dickens also sees this salvation as lying in moving away from the city to a more rural setting. This preference for the rural will come up later when considering Dickens’ attitude towards worship.

The preceding outline has helped to lay the foundations for understanding not only the Evangelical world of nineteenth-century England, but also how and why Dickens reacted to it. Nineteenth-century Evangelicals were affected by the rise of Pietism, the eighteenth-century revival and its focus on emotion, the widespread influence of Evangelical thinking across politics and wider society, and an enthusiasm for Bunyan. These elements helped to form Evangelicals and consequently shaped Dickens’ responses. The pervasiveness of Evangelical influence also helps to show why the movement mattered to Dickens. As something which affected many areas of society and had, as he saw it, negative effects on the poor and vulnerable, he was bound to have strong opinions. However, it was not just social issues that bothered Dickens, and neither was he entirely opposed to all that Evangelicals stood for, as I have already touched on and will explore further.

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<sup>127</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop: A Tale* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 123.

## 2.3 Dickens' concerns

Jay notes the difficulty of pinning down what constitute important Evangelical doctrines, something due to both the focus on individual interpretation rather than an authoritative Church body, and the differences between Arminian and Calvinist Evangelicals. Nonetheless, she lists various doctrines associated with Evangelicals: original sin/total depravity, conversion, justification by faith, and the authority of the Word, eternal punishment, millenarianism, special providence, and assurance.<sup>128</sup> Dickens' writings reflect his reactions to many of these doctrines in different ways and to differing degrees, even though he "showed little interest in the minutiae of sectarian belief".<sup>129</sup> He was instead more concerned with "attacking the evangelical ethos".<sup>130</sup> Therefore, he generally focused on the out-workings of Evangelical faith and influence, reacting primarily to much of what Jay refers to as "practical piety". This fits with his focus on living out faith in action and displaying virtues within a Christian framework rather than stressing correct beliefs. Jay's "practical piety" includes liturgy, domestic life, personal devotional materials (especially death-bed scenes), missionary and charitable work, and relating to "the world"<sup>131</sup> (contemporary culture, often seen negatively as being opposed to God). As this thesis proceeds, I will show how Dickens addressed many of these concerns.

Dickens is often described as having a particular dislike for Evangelicalism in a blanket manner. However, in reality his dislike often related to things which unfairly impacted ordinary people and to those who imposed ideas and expectations, especially when these

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<sup>128</sup> Jay, *Religion of the Heart*, 51-104.

<sup>129</sup> Jay, *Religion of the Heart*, 26.

<sup>130</sup> Jay, *Religion of the Heart*, 26.

<sup>131</sup> Jay, *Religion of the Heart*, 106-205.

seemed to be injurious to the true nature of Christianity as he saw it. He was also strongly opposed to anything which he saw as hypocrisy or judgementalism, seeing them as contrary to the virtues of kindness and charity, central aspects of his real Christianity. Important elements of nineteenth-century Evangelicalism which especially caught Dickens' attention are thus discussed below to gain deeper insight into what Dickens objected to and why, beginning with Sabbatarianism.

### **2.3.1 Sabbatarianism**

#### *Growth, context, and influence*

Sabbatarianism was “the most important influence on the Victorian Sunday”, states John Wigley. He continues that it involved “a perverse reluctance to enjoy oneself on Sundays and a determination to stop other people enjoying themselves too”.<sup>132</sup> Wigley also explains that Sabbatarianism has a long and complex history going back to the Early Church.<sup>133</sup> However, it intensified in the early-nineteenth century<sup>134</sup> thanks to “a small army of ultra-evangelical defenders, whose tactics and dedication won them a degree of social and political influence that far exceeded their numerical strength...”.<sup>135</sup> Why the Sabbath should be important to Evangelicals in particular is not explained by Wigley, or others, but I suggest that it arises from Evangelicalism's strong focus on the Bible as the ultimate source of authority (biblicism), its stress on personal holiness of living (conversionism), and a desire to bring “the world” under divine rule (activism).

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<sup>132</sup> John Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), 2.

<sup>133</sup> Wigley, *Rise and Fall*, 7-11.

<sup>134</sup> Wigley, *Rise and Fall*, 28.

<sup>135</sup> Pope, *Dickens and Charity*, 42.

Thus, for example, the *Society for the Suppression of Vice*, set up in 1802 with royal support, aimed, among other things, to uphold the Sabbath, non-observance of which it listed as a serious vice.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, Sabbath-keeping was a serious matter for some, and its proponents saw it as a moral and legal imperative for all. Indeed, in its first two years the *Society* gained 623 convictions of Sabbath violators.<sup>137</sup> Similar societies appeared in following years, including, for example, the *Lord's Day Observance Society*, founded in 1831 by Joseph and Daniel Wilson. One of its first resolutions stated that,

The welfare of nations is intimately connected with the due sanctification of the Christian Sabbath... the Divine chastisements now abroad in the world place before us, with awful warning, the danger of neglecting any of the appointments of Christianity.<sup>138</sup>

Given the idea that Sabbath-keeping was a serious matter for all to attend to, Dickens could not ignore it, content that it would have no effect on him, as Sabbatarian ideas permeated society.

Paul Schlicke describes Sabbatarianism as “an extreme wing of evangelicalism” concerned with preventing “activities other than church-going on a Sunday”.<sup>139</sup> This suggests it was a fringe concern, but evidence suggests it was actually more mainstream. For example, the bishop of London, Charles Blomfield, stressed Sabbath observance in 1830, describing a lack

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<sup>136</sup> M.J.D. Roberts, “The Society for the Suppression of Vice and its Early Critics, 1802-1812”, *The Historical Journal* 26 (1) (1983), 159.

<sup>137</sup> Pope, *Dickens and Charity*, 43.

<sup>138</sup> Society for Promoting Due Observance of the Lord's Day, *Promoting the Due Observance of the Lord's Day* (n.p.: Ellerton, 1831), 2.

<sup>139</sup> Paul Schlicke, “Popular Culture”, in *Charles Dickens in Context*, edited by Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 93.

of attention to it as “an evil of great and crying magnitude” that “seems to threaten the destruction of all religious habits in the lower classes of society”.<sup>140</sup>

Blomfield also addresses those who possess “worldly advantages” and aid ungodliness because of “their carelessness, their indifference, their evil example”,<sup>141</sup> but his emphasis on the “lower classes” is interesting given that many of Dickens’ objections focused on unfairness towards the poor, as discussed below. The Evangelical bishop J.C. Ryle also argued for Sabbath observance in *Keep it Holy!* (1856). He asserted that, “the observance of a Sabbath Day is *part of the eternal law of God*”.<sup>142</sup> Then he argued for the benevolent purpose of the Sabbath as “God’s merciful appointment *for the common benefit of all mankind*”.<sup>143</sup> Ryle further emphasised that the Sabbath “*must be kept as a day of rest*” and “must be kept holy... It is to be a rest in which, as far as possible, the affairs of the soul may be attended to... and communion with God and Christ kept up.”<sup>144</sup> Finally, he criticised those who desecrated the Sabbath by using it for secular pursuits.<sup>145</sup>

For many, therefore, the Sabbath was vital and non-observance risked divine judgement. Others could be more lenient, though. Wilberforce, for example, generally did not travel or write letters on Sundays, but sometimes relaxed these rules. He mentioned this in 1822, saying, he did “not like to call it the sabbath” as he did “not quite consider it in the light in which it is viewed by many religious men”.<sup>146</sup> However, Evangelicals did agree on some

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<sup>140</sup> C.J. Blomfield, *A Letter on the Present Neglect of The Lord’s Day Addressed to the Inhabitants of London and Westminster*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: B. Fellowes, 1830), 3-4.

<sup>141</sup> Blomfield, *A Letter*, 5.

<sup>142</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Keep it Holy!: A Tract on the Sabbath Day*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Ipswich: William Hunt, 1856), 5; italics in original.

<sup>143</sup> Ryle, *Keep it Holy!*, 12; italics in original.

<sup>144</sup> Ryle, *Keep it Holy!*, 17; italics in original.

<sup>145</sup> Ryle, *Keep it Holy!*, 21-22.

<sup>146</sup> Robert Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce: Volume V* (London: John Murray, 1838), 143.

elements of how Christians should pass their Sundays.<sup>147</sup> There was a widespread consensus that church-going should be followed by “family prayer, Bible reading, and serious conversation on religious topics”.<sup>148</sup>

As a parliamentary reporter from 1832-1836, Dickens was familiar with many of the eight significant Sabbath bills that were introduced in the 1830s.<sup>149</sup> These bills aimed “to suppress such things as Sunday trading, travelling, labour, recreation (including the opening of public houses and tea gardens), nonreligious meetings, and ‘above all, the enormous evil of the Sunday Newspapers’”.<sup>150</sup> Dickens’ interest in Sabbatarianism continued beyond this point, however, as evidenced across his letters, journalism, and non-fiction writing, as well as his novels. His thoughts about it can be divided into different themes that reveal his concerns about and occasionally his partial agreement with Sabbatarianism.

### *Sabbatarianism, social class, and real Christianity*

Dickens is well-known as an observer of social class and social problems, including among those who do not take his religious context into account. However, his social concern is often strongly linked to his religious beliefs. Therefore, we can see his social concerns mixed in with ideas about religious hypocrisy and real Christianity (see Section 1.1 for information on the latter). Colledge argues, as I do, that Dickens’ view of Christianity is founded on the necessity to act in certain ways and show particular virtues<sup>151</sup> (see also, Section 1.1 on Dickens’ alignment with the Letter of James). In this sense, Dickens’ real Christianity

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<sup>147</sup> Pope, *Dickens and Charity*, 43.

<sup>148</sup> Pope, *Dickens and Charity*, 43.

<sup>149</sup> Pope, *Dickens and Charity*, 49.

<sup>150</sup> Pope, *Dickens and Charity*, 49.

<sup>151</sup> Colledge, *God and Charles Dickens*, 108.

emphasises conversionism and activism, despite his frequent aversion to Evangelical practices. In support of Dickens' activism, and its connection to his social concern, Susan Jhirad comments:

For Dickens, political and spiritual issues were always intimately connected; child labor, indifference to starvation and cruelty towards the poor and outcast were not merely unjust, they were "sins." In his understanding of the Bible, our role as human beings is to help others and "love thy neighbor as thyself", a gospel of the needy and against the greedy. Ultimately, it is as impossible to separate Dickens' political concerns from his religious ones as it is to separate Mahatma Gandhi's or Rev. Martin Luther King's social activism from their spiritual beliefs.<sup>152</sup>

Thus, social and religious interests combine to form Dickens' criticism of Sabbatarian attitudes, based on perceived Evangelical distortions of Christian faith and living. Therefore, when examining his social commentary on Sabbath restrictions, it is important to remain alert to overlaps between this and more overtly religious concerns.

Dickens' first public comment on Sabbatarianism focused on its social aspect. In *The Evening Chronicle* (April 1835) he approvingly described London apprentices out enjoying themselves, and stated:

We see no reason why the same gentleman of enlarged and comprehensive views who proposes to Parliament a measure for preserving the amusements of the upper classes

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<sup>152</sup> Susan Jhirad, *Dickens' Inferno: The Moral World of Charles Dickens* ([Charleston, SC]: Leapyear Press, 2013), 1.

of society, abolishing those of the lower, may not with equal wisdom preserve the former more completely, and mark the distinction between the two more effectually, by bringing in a Bill ‘to limit to certain members of the hereditary peerage of this country and their families, the privilege of making fools of themselves as often and as egregiously as to them shall seem meet.’ Precedent is a great thing in these cases, and Heaven knows he will have precedent enough to plead.<sup>153</sup>

In this attack Dickens emphasises class differences, suggesting that Sabbatarian legislation aimed to suppress the poor in the little free time they had, while leaving the wealthy free to enjoy themselves as they wished. Matters of doctrine or faith are not mentioned, initially suggesting Dickens’ interest lay in the social effects of regulating Sunday activities rather than in specifically religious matters. However, as I will show as this thesis proceeds, Dickens focused on faith in action and virtues. Many of these virtues, such as charity/love, and kindness, are included in biblical lists of positive qualities, including the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.22. Additionally, cheerfulness can be seen as springing from both hope and joy, other important Christian virtues. These virtues were important parts of Dickens’ real Christianity, alongside his view that strict Sabbatarianism undermined true Christian faith by ignoring ordinary people’s needs in favour of adherence to rules.

Neither was this the only time Dickens took this approach. His best-known non-fiction attack on Sabbatarianism was his pamphlet, *Sunday Under Three Heads* (1836, under the pseudonym “Timothy Sparks”). The three heads of Sunday referred to in the title were three

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<sup>153</sup> Charles Dickens, “Sketches of London. – No. X: Thoughts About People”, *The Evening Chronicle* (23 April 1835), 3; this sketch later appeared in *Sketches by Boz* as “Thoughts About People”, but without the quoted lines.

sections called as “As It Is”, “As Sabbath Bills Would Make It”, and “As It Might Be Made”.

The pamphlet’s dedication to the bishop of London stressed class differences:

You were among the first... to expatiate on the vicious addiction of the lower classes of society to Sunday excursions... Your elevated station... affords you countless opportunities of increasing the comforts and pleasures of the humbler classes of society... by merely sanctioning with the influence of your example, their harmless pastimes, and innocent recreations. That your Lordship would ever have contemplated Sunday recreations with so much horror, if you had been at all acquainted with the wants and necessities of the people who indulged in them, I cannot imagine possible. That a Prelate of your elevated rank has the faintest conception of the extent of those wants, and the nature of those necessities, I do not believe.<sup>154</sup>

Here again, we see Dickens’ concern for the poor and how he places the Galatians 5.22 virtues of kindness and generosity at the centre of what it means to be Christian, rather than commitment to rules and duties.

The pamphlet further attacks both “The pampered aristocrat, whose life is one continued round of licentious pleasures and sensual gratifications” and “the gloomy enthusiast, who detests the cheerful amusements he can never enjoy”.<sup>155</sup> Thus, as well as repeating his criticism based on social class, Dickens targets misguided religious zeal, in a mixing of social criticism and religious belief. He continues the latter by commenting that if such people experienced real poverty, they would change their minds: “How marvellously would his

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<sup>154</sup> Charles Dickens [Timothy Sparks, pseud.], *Sunday Under Three Heads* (London: J.W. Jarvis & Son, 1884), 3-4.

<sup>155</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 2-3.

ardent zeal for other men's souls, diminish after a short probation, and how enlightened and comprehensive would his views of the real object and meaning of the institution of the Sabbath become!".<sup>156</sup> Thus, Sabbatarian ideas are seen as being imposed by those with no real understanding of the poor but simply a desire to enforce religious conformity with no concern for displaying Christian virtues, including the theological virtue of charity. Dickens often referred to the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity as important to his religious thinking, thus emphasising his Christian understanding of goodness.

Dickens also contradicts the widely held belief that opening public houses on Sundays might be harmful as the lower classes were more inclined towards drunkenness than the wealthy.<sup>157</sup> He argues that drunkenness, disease, and squalor could be alleviated if the working classes were enabled to use their Sunday leisure time well and the God-given purpose of the Sabbath preserved:

But you hold out no inducement, you offer no relief from listlessness, you provide nothing to amuse his mind, you afford him no means of exercising his body... He flies to the gin-shop as his only resource; and when... he lies wallowing in the kennel, your saintly lawgivers lift up their hands to heaven, and exclaim for a law which shall convert the day intended for rest and cheerfulness, into one of universal gloom, bigotry, and persecution.<sup>158</sup>

This passage highlights the hypocrisy and cruelty of attempts to restrict what people can do on Sundays and then criticising them for resorting to their only mean of escape. It also

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<sup>156</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 14.

<sup>157</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 5.

<sup>158</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 18.

appeals to Christian principles of cheerfulness, kindness, and charity to criticise a social evil inflicted on the poor. Thus, Dickens displays both his hatred of hypocrisy and his concern with Christian virtues.

Dickens had a more positive view of the poor than many in his social position, as shown above and in his 1855 *HW* article “The Great Baby”. This was a response to a parliamentary investigation into the 1854 *Sunday Beer Act*, which had restricted Sunday opening hours for pubs and beer-houses. Dickens seems not to have realised that the committee’s aim was to repeal the *Act*, and so his article was based on a misunderstanding.<sup>159</sup> Nonetheless, it shows his feelings about Sunday restrictions. The article compared Sunday legislation to treating the public like a baby in need of guidance and help at every turn, thus not taking ordinary people seriously as able to make decisions and act without prompting. He asks, “Is it because the People is altogether an abstraction to them; a Great Baby... We take the liberty of replying, Yes”.<sup>160</sup>

An 1855 *HW* article by the author and journalist George Sala (a frequent contributor to *HW*) referring to outdoor Sunday music also reinforced this idea of unfair attitudes towards the poor. While not directly by Dickens, it is important because of Dickens’ strong editorial control (discussed in Section 1.3), which did not allow articles that contradicted his own ideas:

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<sup>159</sup> Dickens Journals Online, “The Great Baby”; <https://www.djo.org.uk/indexes/articles/the-great-baby.html>.

<sup>160</sup> Charles Dickens, “The Great Baby”, *Household Words* XII (280) (4 August 1855), 1; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-xii/page-1.html>.

Now, why should secular Sunday music be so dreadfully wicked?— or, again... why can't we be a little consistent in the application of our strictures... I never heard of an association in a country town for putting down regimental waltzes on Sundays...

You object to Sunday strains when the music... affords a rational, cheerful, innocent amusement for the tens of thousands of overworked humanity.<sup>161</sup>

Dickens himself further emphasised the social class theme more generally in *Sunday Under Three Heads* by criticising a Bill first introduced into Parliament by Sir Andrew Agnew in 1836. Dickens summarised it by saying:

The proposed enactments of the bill are briefly these:- All work is prohibited on the Lord's day, under heavy penalties, increasing with every repetition of the offence.<sup>162</sup>

This was the *Sabbath Observance Bill*, which Agnew unsuccessfully introduced three times between 1833 and 1836, proposing a wide range of Sabbath prohibitions.<sup>163</sup> (It was finally dropped when Agnew left Parliament in 1837.) Dickens pointed to the absurdity of legislating for righteousness, stating:

The idea of making a man truly moral through the ministry of constables, and sincerely religious under the influence of penalties, is worthy of the mind which could form such a mass of monstrous absurdity as this bill is composed of.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> George Sala, "Sunday Music", *Household Words* XII (290) (13 October 1855), 261; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-xii/page-261.html>.

<sup>162</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 13-14.

<sup>163</sup> See, Wigley, *Rise and Fall*, 36, for more details.

<sup>164</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 21.

Dickens also claimed that the *Bill* specifically targeted the poor, arguing:

... If the rich composed the whole population of this country, not a single comfort of one single man would be affected by it. It is directed exclusively, and without the exception of a solitary instance, against the amusements and recreations of the poor.<sup>165</sup>

Having described how he believes the Bill targets the poor and exempts the rich from its provisions, Dickens satirically remarks on two “exceptions” to this pattern:

The first exempts menial servants from any rest, and all poor men from any recreation... The second is... shielding the rich man... It declares, ‘that nothing in this act contained, shall extend to works of piety, charity, or necessity.’ What is meant by the word ‘necessity’ in this clause? Simply this—that the rich man shall be at liberty to make use of all the splendid luxuries he has collected around him, on any day in the week, because habit and custom have rendered them ‘necessary’ to his easy existence; but that the poor man who saves his money to provide some little pleasure for himself and family at lengthened intervals, shall not be permitted to enjoy it. It is not ‘necessary’ to him...<sup>166</sup>

Admittedly, Dickens was not always personally consistent, exposing him to the same charges of hypocrisy he often levelled at others. For example, in December 1834 he wrote to his

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<sup>165</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 22.

<sup>166</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 27.

brother-in-law Henry Austin about the latter visiting on a Sunday, with clear exasperation about being inconvenienced by servants having time off for the Sabbath.<sup>167</sup> A somewhat cryptic 1836 letter also appears to refer to irritation at Sunday time off for a servant.<sup>168</sup> However, most of Dickens' letters were consistent with his public Sabbatarian criticisms, so on the whole he was genuine in his critique, even if he did not always live up to his own standards. For example, in 1846 he wrote to Forster expressing dismay following a Sunday walk in Paris:

... the work-a-day dresses and drudgeries, are not comfortable. Open theatres and so forth I am well used to, of course, by this time; but so much toil and sweat on what one would like to see, apart from religious observances, a sensible holiday, is painful.<sup>169</sup>

This letter exemplifies much of Dickens' attitude towards Sunday restrictions. He is comfortable with entertainments, allowing working people to enjoy themselves in their limited time off in a spirit of kindness and generosity (again aligning with Galatians 5.22) and to encourage cheerfulness. However, he is not happy about the more everyday work that he sees going on around him, which does not allow a break from drudgery for the working classes. Presumably, much of this work would have been designed to enable wealthier members of society to pass the day in comfort. Additionally, we can see here that Dickens recognised the importance of Christian observance on Sundays, thus emphasising his Christian sensibilities.

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<sup>167</sup> House and Storey, *Letters: One*, 51.

<sup>168</sup> House and Storey, *Letters: One*, 138.

<sup>169</sup> Kathleen Tillotson, *The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Four: 1844-1846*. Pilgrim edition. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 660.

Despite a few personal inconsistencies, Dickens continually spoke out against Sabbath restrictions that favoured the wealthy over the poor. In June 1855, he wrote to the philanthropist Angela Burdett-Coutts, commenting on recent anti-*Sunday Trading (Metropolis) Bill* demonstrations. Despite Angela Burdett-Coutts being Evangelical, Dickens maintained a friendship and good working relationship with her, showing some nuance in his approach to Evangelicals rather than a simple blanket rejection. Dickens wrote,

I am sorry for what occurred in Hyde Park, but it is an illustration of what I endeavoured to put before you in reference to to-night's Association – I mean the extraordinary ignorance on the part of those who make the laws, of what is behind us, and what is ever ready to break in if it be too long despised.<sup>170</sup>

The *Bill* had been put forward by Lord Robert Grosvenor with the aim of stopping or restricting Sunday trading in London. This would mainly affect working-class people, who were frequently paid late on a Saturday and so needed to be able to access trade on Sundays. Thus, a mainly working-class demonstration in Hyde Park on 24 June was aimed at upper-class carriages entering the park in the afternoon.<sup>171</sup> This chimed with Dickens' feeling that Sabbath restrictions disproportionately affected the working classes.

Further examples of Dickens' social concern about Sabbatarianism can be seen in his novels, including *Pickwick Papers*, at around the same time as *Sunday Under Three Heads*. The novel's town of Muggleton is described as,

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<sup>170</sup> Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Angus Easson, *The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Seven 1853-1855*. Pilgrim edition. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 659.

<sup>171</sup> Storey, Tillotson and Easson, *Letters: Seven*, 659.

... mingling a zealous advocacy of Christian principles with a devoted attachment to commercial rights... the mayor, corporation, and other inhabitants, have presented at divers times, no fewer than one thousand four hundred and twenty petitions, against the continuance of negro slavery abroad, and an equal number against any interference with the factory system at home; sixty-eight for permitting the sale of benefices in the church, and eighty-six for abolishing Sunday trading in the streets.<sup>172</sup>

This passage brings together various issues of social concern that were important to Dickens; that is, working conditions, slavery, and Sabbath restrictions. There is also a clear hypocrisy in insisting on observing the Sabbath while ignoring the welfare of working people.

Sabbatarianism appears again in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839) via an advertisement for a cook that specifies:

Cold dinner in the kitchen on the Sabbath. Mr Gallanbile being devoted to the Observance question. No victuals whatever cooked on the Lord's Day, with the exception of dinner for Mr and Mrs Gallanbile, which, being a work of piety and necessity, is exempted. Mr Gallanbile dines late on the day of rest, in order to prevent the sinfulness of the cook's dressing herself.<sup>173</sup>

This passage sharply delineates Dickens' concerns about the differing effects of Sabbath restrictions on the poor and the wealthy. The wealthy Gallanbiles ensure they are not inconvenienced by Sabbath restrictions without considering their servants' needs. Thus, the

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<sup>172</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 98.

<sup>173</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 187.

Gallanbiles hypocritically assume an air of piety while ignoring the Sabbath's real nature as a day of rest and cheerfulness for all.

This passage also resonates with Sala's 1856 *HW* article, "Little Saint Zita". Zita (died 1278), the patron saint of domestic workers, was an Italian housekeeper. Sala contrasts her employers, who were impressed by her faith, with modern attitudes, saying, "Now, a pious cook is not considered, in these sceptical days, as a very great desideratum. A pious cook not unfrequently refuses to cook a Sunday's dinner...".<sup>174</sup> The article thus highlights the double-standards involved in the wealthy objecting to their cooks having time off while themselves insisting on Sabbath rest. Again, Sabbatarianism is portrayed as being imposed on the poor but only applying to the rich insofar as it does not inconvenience them.

The novelist James Payn's 1858 *HW* article, "A Sabbath Hour", makes a similar point. The titular Sabbath hour is when the post office is open to collect letters on a Sunday, information about which is imparted reluctantly and disapprovingly by the landlady:

"From ten till eleven, I believe," she said, reservedly, "the General Post Office is open for the delivery of letters upon the Sabbath, to such as desec——"

"Thank you", said I, interrupting her...<sup>175</sup>

The post office at this time is a chaos of noise, smells, struggle, and even violence that is clearly unfitting for a Sabbath day, caused by the limited opening time. Also, Miss Macstarchskin's hypocrisy and unwillingness to be personally inconvenienced by Sabbath

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<sup>174</sup> George Sala, "Little Saint Zita", *Household Words* XIII (307) (9 February 1856), 93; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-xiii/page-93.html>.

<sup>175</sup> James Payn, "A Sabbath Hour", *Household Words* XVIII (449) (30 October 1858), 471; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-xviii/page-471.html>.

restrictions is exposed when her maid is seen collecting her employer's letters. Neither is she alone in this, since "... although the righteous do not come themselves for their letters, and plentifully anathematise those who are bold enough to do so, they send their servants upon that errand in considerable numbers".<sup>176</sup> Such hypocrisy is strongly condemned in the article, which begins by calling London "the City of Whited Sepulchres", referring to Matthew 23.27: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth".<sup>177</sup> Thus, this is an example of both social and religious criticism.

Another example of Dickens' social concern springing from his faith comes in *A Christmas Carol* during a conversation between the Spirit of Christmas Present and Scrooge:

"Spirit... I wonder you, of all beings... should desire to cramp these people's opportunities of innocent enjoyment".

"I!" cried the Spirit.

"You would deprive them of their means of dining every seventh day, often the only day on which they can be said to dine at all", said Scrooge. "Wouldn't you?"

"I!" cried the Spirit.

"You seek to close these places on the Seventh Day?" said Scrooge. "And it comes to the same thing".

"I seek!" exclaimed the Spirit.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Payn, "A Sabbath Hour", 471.

<sup>177</sup> All Bible references in this thesis are from the NRSV.

<sup>178</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 77.

This scene refers to a common difficulty for ordinary people regarding Sunday meals. Many, as Pope points out, “had to rely extensively on Sunday bakers for the preparation of the one hot dinner of the week...”.<sup>179</sup> Thus, ending Sunday trading would deprive the poor of a meal that the rich could have daily, and showed a lack of kindness and understanding towards the poor. Similar concern is also seen in both *Sunday Under Three Heads* and “A Week with Woddertspoon” in *ATYR* (1859).<sup>180</sup> In the former, for example, Dickens refers to:

...the reeking dish, in which a diminutive joint of mutton simmers above a vast heap of half-browned potatoes... dinner is borne into the house amidst a shouting of small voices, and jumping of fat legs, which would fill Sir Andrew Agnew with astonishment... seeing that Baronets, generally speaking, eat pretty comfortable dinners all the week through, and cannot be expected to understand what people feel, who only have a meat dinner on one day out of every seven.<sup>181</sup>

Scrooge’s confusion in *A Christmas Carol* comes from this Spirit appearing kind, jolly, and open-hearted, and yet apparently wanting to deprive the poor. This passage thus again reflects Dickens’ conviction that the aim of Sabbatarian restrictions is to crush happiness for the working classes while the rich remain free and simultaneously assume a false air of piety. The Spirit’s positive characteristics also align with the kinds of virtues that Dickens considers central to Christianity, and Scrooge’s confusion suggests that Dickens is criticising Sabbatarians for giving a wrongful picture of Christianity. This is reinforced by the Spirit’s claim that,

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<sup>179</sup> Pope, *Dickens and Charity*, 55.

<sup>180</sup> “A Week with Woddertspoon”, *All the Year Round* I (23) (1 October 1859), 536; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-i/page-536.html>.

<sup>181</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 9-10.

“There are some... who lay claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us and all our kith and kin, as if they had never lived. Remember that, and charge their doings on themselves, not us”.<sup>182</sup>

This is a clear attack on those who Dickens sees as acting contrary to his idea of the true spirit of Christianity by acting in harmful ways and forgetting about expressing Christian virtues. It also brings to mind the words of Matthew 7.21:

Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord”, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?” Then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers”.

Both the Spirit’s words and this Bible verse convey that claiming knowledge of and intimacy with goodness and faith are not sufficient if words and actions do not match (also relating to the Letter of James), an idea that can often be seen in Dickens’ condemnations of hypocrisy and stress on expressing faith through actions.

The primary anti-Sabbatarian commentary in Dickens’ novels, though, appears in *Little Dorrit* (1857). Here, Arthur Clennam enters London on a Sunday evening. He finds the city locked down, with no prospect of enjoyment for the working classes, since, “Everything was

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<sup>182</sup> Dickens, *Christmas Carol*, 78.

bolted and barred that could by possibility furnish relief to an overworked people ...”.<sup>183</sup> We can compare this with satirical remarks Dickens made later in an 1868 letter, in which he again takes aim at the boredom of a strictly regulated Sunday:

You know the aspect of this City on a Sunday, and how gay and bright it is... The usual preparations are making for the Band in the open air... and the usual pretty children... are at this moment hanging garlands round the Scott monument, preparatory to the innocent Sunday dance round that edifice... It is pleasant to think that these customs were the customs of the early Christians – those early birds who *didn't* catch the worm – and nothing else – and choke their young with it.<sup>184</sup>

Arthur Clennam is also prompted to remember his childhood Sundays by hearing church bells, and it is clear that such Sundays do nothing for true faith:

There was the dreary Sunday of his childhood... There was the sleepy Sunday of his boyhood... There was the interminable Sunday of his nonage... There was the resentful Sunday of a little later, when he sat glowering and glooming through the tardy length of the day, with... no more real knowledge of the beneficent history of the New Testament, than if he had been bred among idolaters.<sup>185</sup>

Sala gives a similar account of tedious Sundays in his 1854 *HW* article “Sunday Out”. Sala outlines his idea of a good Sunday, including river trips and days out, contrasting these with:

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<sup>183</sup> Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 43.

<sup>184</sup> Graham Storey, Margaret Brown and Kathleen Tillotson, *The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Twelve 1868-1870*. Pilgrim edition. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 233.

<sup>185</sup> Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 44-45.

Those long, droning, half-inaudible Sunday sermons; those long Sunday afternoons at home, when Scripture genealogies were to be read aloud, and all save good books (which to be good seemed imperatively required to be dreary, verbose, and unilluminated by a ray of kindly interest) were prohibited; those Sunday evenings when smiles were looked upon as sinful, and people couldn't sit comfortably or talk comfortably because it was Sunday...<sup>186</sup>

All of the above confirm Dickens' criticism of Sabbath restrictions as turning a day for rest and enjoyment into one of boredom and oppression. In Arthur's mother, in particular, he paints a picture of a woman who fundamentally misunderstands what faith should be like, making it a harsh, oppressive affair instead of something promoting gentleness and goodness. Dickens also makes it clear in *Little Dorrit* that he sees Arthur's mother as falling into this because in her biblicism she focuses on Old Testament stories of judgement and punishment, rather than looking to the New Testament and the example of Jesus.<sup>187</sup> This was a common criticism made by Dickens about Evangelicals, and also reveals that Dickens held to an unfair caricature of the Old Testament as being entirely about judgement and wrath (see Section 4 for more on both Mrs Clennam and Dickens' view of the Old Testament). Additionally, none of the restrictions have their intended effect of encouraging faith. Instead, they turn people away from it, breeding negative feelings towards religion and ignorance of real Christianity and its positive characteristics.

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<sup>186</sup> George Sala, "Sunday Out", *Household Words* X (233) (9 September 1854), 73; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-x/page-73.html>.

<sup>187</sup> See, for example, Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 51.

*Little Dorrit* was written during much debate over the “Sunday question” and reflects contemporary concerns. For example, in March 1855 Sir Joshua Walmsley had unsuccessfully attempted to introduce the following resolution to Parliament:

That, in the opinion of this House, it would promote the moral and intellectual improvement of the Working Classes of this Metropolis if the collections of Natural History and of Art, in the British Museum and the National Gallery, were open to the public inspection after Morning Service on Sundays...<sup>188</sup>

He continued by stating that he had no desire to interfere with religious observance but that opening these institutions would benefit many working people in the city, who,

...looked upon those collections as public property, and thought they ought to be thrown open to the great bulk of the community on those days upon which alone they had leisure to examine them.<sup>189</sup>

*Little Dorrit* refers to people being unable to access the wonders of the British Museum or of pictures and being condemned to nothing but monotony in a clear attack on opposers of the resolution.<sup>190</sup> They were cutting off the poor from something the rich had both time and leisure to enjoy at other times of the week, displaying their lack of kindness and understanding about life for the poor. Dickens also attacks Lord Grosvenor, “my lord, their county member”,<sup>191</sup> and author of the previously mentioned *Sunday Trading (Metropolis) Bill*, for not understanding the needs of the poor. Dickens sarcastically asks,

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<sup>188</sup> HC Deb 20 March 1855, vol 137, col. 915.

<sup>189</sup> HC Deb 20 March 1855, vol 137, col. 915.

<sup>190</sup> Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 43.

<sup>191</sup> Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 44.

What secular want could the million or so of human beings whose daily labour, six days in the week, lay among these Arcadian objects, from the sweet sameness of which they had no escape between the cradle and the grave – what secular want could they possibly have upon their seventh day?<sup>192</sup>

The above examples reveal Dickens' strong social concern about how Sabbatarian restrictions affected the working classes. He clearly felt that attempts to impose restrictions unfairly aimed to prevent enjoyment for people who already had limited options to enjoy themselves and struggled with hard work and difficult living conditions. Meanwhile, the rich and powerful were interpreting Sabbath rules to suit themselves. However, while this was undoubtedly a question of social unfairness for Dickens, we cannot separate this from his religious convictions, as the rich were, in his mind, displaying a hypocrisy that was contrary to the spirit of Christianity, and not expressing the faith properly with a spirit of kindness and charity. I have already shown this to some extent but will expand on it now.

### *Faith and worship*

*Sunday Under Three Heads* addresses specifically religious concerns from its first section ("As It Is"), describing the current situation and why Dickens does not believe Sunday business negatively impacts Christian worship:

... a few shops are open at an early hour of the morning... The coffee-shops too ...

All these places, however, are quickly closed; and by the time the church bells begin

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<sup>192</sup> Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 44.

to ring, all appearance of traffic has ceased. And then, what are the signs of immorality that meet the eye? Churches are well filled, and Dissenters' chapels are crowded to suffocation. There is no preaching to empty benches, while the drunken and dissolute populace run riot in the streets.<sup>193</sup>

Dickens both notes the need for places to be open on Sunday mornings so that people can buy necessities or have breakfast, and satirically points out that this does not have to interfere with worship or signal moral and social breakdown. Thus, while social and religious concerns are intertwined in his thinking, the religious aspect is significant and focuses on promoting the good of others in an expression of Christian charity.

Sala's October 1852 *HW* article, "Sunday Morning", was similar. The article aligns with Dickens' dislike of imposing misery and restrictions on people in the name of Sabbath observance and shares his criticism of hypocrisy and pretence. Sala argued:

I cannot see perdition in a Sabbath-sewed-on shirt-button; the bottomless pit in a Sunday-baked pie; Tophet<sup>194</sup> in the boiler of a Sunday steam-boat... I cannot... see any reason why, because it is Sunday, a man should half throttle himself with a white neckcloth [*sic*]; turn his eyes all ways save the natural one; and put on a look of excruciating wretchedness and anguish when he is naturally inclined to be cheerful.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 5-6.

<sup>194</sup> Tophet is mentioned in the Bible as a place where child sacrifices were carried out by burning (2 Kings 23.10) and is also used to mean Hell.

<sup>195</sup> George Sala, "Sunday Morning", *Household Words VI* (133) (9 October 1852), 81; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-vi/page-81.html>.

This also recurs in two 1856 *HW* articles by the goldsmith and writer William Duthie comparing English Sundays with less-restricted European ones. In “Some German Sundays” Duthie mainly approved of the more relaxed approach in Germany, although not of holding lotteries on Sundays, and saw no negative effect on Christian observance.<sup>196</sup> “More Sundays Abroad” was similar, this time covering Germany and France, with the comment that, “The remembrances I have of Paris Sundays decidedly possess a character of rest and recreation... a flood of happy, tranquil Sundays”.<sup>197</sup> These articles persuasively argue that Sunday enjoyment and leisure are not incompatible with Christian devotion. Rather, they can complement each other – at least up to a point. Further, allowing enjoyment and happiness on the Sabbath encourages cheerfulness, something which Dickens sees important to the Christian life, as well as displaying the virtues of kindness and charity towards the poor, something which is more important to him than imposing theological conformity or doctrinal correctness.

Dickens’ intertwining of social and religious concerns continues when describing a church attended by wealthy congregants, who are criticised for using their social status to avoid the demands of true faith and worship:

... the service commences at a late hour, for the accommodation of such members of the congregation... as may happen to have lingered at the Opera far into the morning of the Sabbath... Observe the graceful emphasis with which he offers up the prayers for the King, the Royal Family, and all the Nobility; and the nonchalance with which he hurries over the more uncomfortable portions of the service... murmurs, in a voice

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<sup>196</sup> William Duthie, “Some German Sundays”, *Household Words* XIII (317) (19 April 1856), 320-325; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-xiii/page-320.html>.

<sup>197</sup> William Duthie, “More Sundays Abroad”, *Household Words* XIII (320) (10 May 1856), 404; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-xiii/page-404.html>.

kept down by rich feeding, most comfortable doctrines for exactly twelve minutes, and then arrives at the anxiously expected “Now to God”, which is the signal for the dismissal of the congregation... those who have been asleep wake up, and those who have kept awake, smile and seem greatly relieved... off rattle the carriages: the inmates discoursing on the dresses of the congregation, and congratulating themselves on having set so excellent an example to the community in general, and Sunday-pleasurers in particular.<sup>198</sup>

As well as the rich having more latitude in terms of Sabbath observance, being able to go to operas that extend into Sunday, worship is treated by the attendees as a sign of moral and religious superiority over those who go out and enjoy themselves on a Sunday morning. However, they are not truly worshipping but merely giving an outward, hypocritical show that lacks true faith and sincerity, with the latter being an important aspect of faith to the author, and indeed to Evangelicals, even if Dickens rarely gives them credit for this. Dickens also undermines Sabbatarian arguments by showing that there is no necessary correlation between church attendance and true devotion, as well as reinforcing the social injustice of Sabbath restrictions. Dissenters come under fire also since Dickens then attacks a preacher in “a less orthodox place of religious worship”, described as a “strong-hold of intolerant zeal and ignorant enthusiasm”,<sup>199</sup> who “denounces sabbath-breakers with the direst vengeance of offended Heaven... and blasphemously calls upon The Deity to visit with eternal torments, those who turn aside from the word, as interpreted and preached by—himself”.<sup>200</sup> Thus, neither the wealthy who care only for appearances nor the lower-class Dissenter full of fire, brimstone, and intolerance are displaying true faith and worship. This shows that Dickens’

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<sup>198</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 6-8.

<sup>199</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 8.

<sup>200</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 8.

criticism of Sabbatarianism is not solely about social class, but also includes a vision of what Christian life and worship should be that transcends social concerns.

Dickens' Christian vision is expanded on in the final section of his pamphlet. He describes an idyllic country Sunday scene during a trip away, in which,

Groups of people—the whole population of the little hamlet apparently—were hastening in the same direction [towards church]. Cheerful and good-humoured congratulations were heard on all sides, as neighbours overtook each other, and walked on in company.<sup>201</sup>

Dickens here shares in an idealised view of rural life, away from the noise and factories of the Industrial Revolution, that was found among many Victorians. However, he also emphasises his vision of a kindly, cheerful Christianity that will attract people to church, as opposed to severity and hypocrisy, which will do the opposite.

Inside the church,

The impressive service of the Church of England was spoken—not merely read—by a grey-headed minister, and the responses delivered by his auditors, with an air of sincere devotion as far removed from affectation or display, as from coldness or indifference.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 25.

<sup>202</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 26-27.

Thus, this church contrasts with the London ones described earlier in its sincerity and genuine, simple devotion, revealing the importance of sincerity in Dickens' approach to faith, as well as showing Dickens' appreciation of Church of England worship. A similar idealised view of rural churches appears in *Oliver Twist* (1838), where, "The poor people... knelt so reverently in prayer, that it seemed a pleasure... their assembling there together; and... the singing... was real, and sounded more musical... than any he had ever heard in church before".<sup>203</sup>

The rural clergyman in *Sunday Under Three Heads*, who has close relationships with his parishioners, then encounters a post-church game of cricket. Dickens is afraid that the clergyman will reprove the players but is surprised to find him "surveying the whole scene with evident satisfaction!".<sup>204</sup> This is then held up as an example to follow in order to bring people into church and to a true version of Christianity:

It is such scenes as this, I would see near London, on a Sunday evening. It is such men as this, who would do more in one year to make people properly religious, cheerful, and contented, than all the legislation of a century could ever accomplish.<sup>205</sup>

Dickens thus believes that strictness harms religion, and that a more humane approach would draw people to true faith and worship, rather than trying to impose it from above with restrictions. This of course also tells us that Christian faith was important to him, since he wished people to be drawn to it, contradicting suggestions that his faith was confused, not Christian, or insignificant.

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<sup>203</sup> Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist, or, The Parish Boy's Progress* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 263.

<sup>204</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 28.

<sup>205</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 28.

Dickens' final words in *Sunday Under Three Heads* appeal to Scripture, and sum up his approach to Sundays: “‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man to serve the Sabbath’” (Mark 2.27). By concluding his pamphlet like this, Dickens reveals that his objections to Sabbatarianism are grounded in his vision of Christianity. Therefore, he reminds his readers that Sunday is a day given by God to be freely enjoyed, not made gloomy by harsh legislation. This is reinforced by Dickens' earlier comment in the pamphlet that:

Sunday comes, and brings with it a day of general gloom and austerity. The man who has been toiling hard all the week, has been looking towards the Sabbath, not as to a day of rest from labour, and healthy recreation, but as one of grievous tyranny and grinding oppression. The day which his Maker intended as a blessing, man has converted into a curse.<sup>206</sup>

He also claims this has turned people away from faith, contradicting the idea that enforcing Sunday restrictions will encourage religious feeling:

People have grown sullen and obstinate, and are becoming disgusted with the faith which condemns them to such a day as this, once in every seven. And as you cannot make people religious by Act of Parliament, or force them to church by constables, they display their feeling by staying away.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 20.

<sup>207</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 20.

Thus, again, although social concerns are important, the effect that such an approach to Sundays has on people's experience of Christianity is at least equally important.

*HW's*' "The Sunday Screw" article (1850), by Dickens himself, continues the theme of Sabbath restrictions harming Christianity. It followed Lord Ashley, an Anglican Evangelical, presenting a petition to Parliament calling for an end to Sunday post. Dickens describes this petition as, "the beginning of a Sabbatarian Crusade, outrageous to the spirit of Christianity, irreconcilable [*sic*] with the health, the rational enjoyments, and the true religious feeling, of the community...".<sup>208</sup> Dickens has a two-fold religious argument. Firstly, this "Sabbatarian Crusade" opposes real Christianity because it imposes restrictions instead of promoting freedom. Secondly, it risks turning people away from faith with an approach contrary to the freedom, kindness, and cheerfulness that he sees as being among Christianity's most important characteristics. Dickens also refers to the idea of the Sabbath being made for man in the article, as he did at the end of *Sunday Under Three Heads*, as the guiding principle for the day. Thus, this article shows an ongoing dislike for Sabbatarian principles that is based on Scripture (revealing biblicism), the wellbeing of ordinary people (an expression of charity), and what he sees as Sabbatarianism's negative effect on faith by enforcing a conformity that takes no account of the true nature of either Christian faith or the Sabbath.

The article seems to have caused debate as a later "Chips" article refers to receiving many letters on the subject, mainly from postal workers complaining about extra Saturday work caused by postal services being unavailable on Sundays. The article claims that the measure has therefore been counter-productive, since, "Vexation has... taken the place of that religious, calm, and beneficent state of mind in which the Sabbath ought to be passed".<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Charles Dickens, "The Sunday Screw", *Household Words* I (13) (22 June 1850), 289; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-i/page-289.html>.

<sup>209</sup> H.W. Wills "Chips: Sabbath Pariahs", *Household Words* I (16) (13 July 1850), 379; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-i/page-379.html>.

Thus, far from relieving workers of a burden the measure is portrayed as adding to it, and undermining the true purpose and nature of the Sabbath, returning to Dickens' interweaving of social and religious concerns.

Additionally, *Sunday Under Three Heads* blames a widespread negative view of Sundays and worship on two particular religious groups. First are those with,

an envious, heartless, ill-conditioned dislike to seeing those whom fortune has placed below him, cheerful and happy—an intolerant confidence in his own high worthiness before God, and a lofty impression of the demerits of others—pride, selfish pride, as inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity itself, as opposed to the example of its Founder upon earth.<sup>210</sup>

These people, announces Dickens, are acting contrary to the example of Jesus, an important aspect of his real Christianity (see Section 4.4), by failing to display humility, kindness, and a cheerful sense of charity towards others.

The second group comprises,

the stern and gloomy enthusiasts, who would make earth a hell, and religion a torment... delude themselves into the impious belief, that in denouncing the lightness of heart of which they cannot partake, and the rational pleasures from which they never derived enjoyment, they are more than remedying the sins of their old career,

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<sup>210</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 33-34.

and—like the founders of monasteries and builders of churches, in ruder days—  
establishing a good set claim upon their Maker.<sup>211</sup>

Dickens thus claims that those who promote Sabbath restrictions are trying to make up for their past misdeeds and gain credit with God, in a similar way to medieval abuses. This parallels Dickens' view of Roman Catholicism, with Evangelical enthusiasts repeating what he sees as the former's mistakes. Interestingly, just as in his earlier years of writing Dickens saw Roman Catholicism as a relic of the past, for example in *Pickwick Papers*<sup>212</sup> (see Section 3), here Evangelical enthusiasm is also treated like an unfortunate throwback to a more ignorant time.

#### *Working with Sabbatarians?*

The above discussion has portrayed Dickens as almost entirely negative towards Sabbatarianism. This may raise the question of whether Dickens ever took a more positive approach. In answer, we can turn to an invitation Dickens received in 1844 to become a vice-president of the Metropolitan Drapers' Association. The association had strong Sabbatarian support and links and included many Evangelicals on its committee. Dickens, perhaps unexpectedly, accepted.<sup>213</sup> Thus, he did not allow the Sabbatarian elements of this organisation to stop him working with them. On the other hand, though, his involvement did dwindle over time, and his original interest came from his support for mechanics' institutes and the association's main goals regarding working hours.<sup>214</sup> This suggests that, while

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<sup>211</sup> Dickens, *Sunday*, 34.

<sup>212</sup> Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, 29.

<sup>213</sup> Tillotson, *Letters: Four*, 88.

<sup>214</sup> Pope, *Dickens and Charity*, 61-62.

Dickens was initially prepared to overlook the Sabbatarian and Evangelical aspects of the association, his willingness did not last very long, reinforcing that while he was not always consistent, overall he was opposed to what Sabbatarians stood for.

The preceding discussion has shown Sabbatarianism's wide-ranging effects across society and in politics. It was also significant to Dickens for both social and religious reasons, as revealed by looking closely at letters and magazine articles alongside some of his fiction. His view that Sabbatarian legislation disproportionately affected the poor and made their lives harder fed into his wider interest in helping the poor and vulnerable, and his criticisms of actions or inaction that made things worse instead of better. Both his interest and his criticism sprang from his view of what Christian life should be like: one of joy and freedom, emphasising charity, kindness, and cheerfulness, rather than restrictions and misery imposed in the name of theology and doctrine. His Sabbath criticisms had an important religious basis, therefore, in that he saw Sabbatarians as undermining true Christianity by making it into something hard, strict, and unfeeling, in direct opposition to his own view of faith. Thus, Dickens' objection to Sabbatarianism was multifaceted and reveals much about both his social thinking and his religious worldview.

Temperance, similarly, as a combined outworking of conversionism and activism in its insistence on both personal and social change, was another focus of Dickens' critique.

### 2.3.2 Temperance

Classically, temperance (or self-control) is one of the four cardinal virtues,<sup>215</sup> as well as self-control being included among the fruit of the Spirit. In nineteenth-century Europe and America, however, the term “temperance” became linked especially to alcohol use.<sup>216</sup> There have, of course, been teetotal groups throughout Christian history, and individual teetotalers can be found across Christian traditions. As Henry Yeomans notes, though, alcohol has also had an important place in British society for many centuries, such that the 1267 *Assize of Bread and Ale* considered beer a necessity of life. Beer’s popularity continued through later centuries with only occasional worries about excessive drinking leading to acts such as the 1606 *Act to Repress the Odious and Loathsome Sin of Drunkenness*.<sup>217</sup> Early nineteenth-century temperance movements, though, focused on promoting moderate drinking, before total abstinence societies arose in the 1830s, in an example of activism being used to try to reform society. Dickens particularly objected to this second phase of temperance, while being more positive about moderation, as I will expand on below. To begin with, though, considering how temperance developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries will help clarify what Dickens was reacting to and why it mattered to him.

#### *Growth, context, and influence*

During the eighteenth century, acceptance of beer continued, but gin raised fears. As Paul Jennings notes, “gin has been viewed overall more negatively than positively, from its arrival

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<sup>215</sup> The others are prudence, justice, and fortitude.

<sup>216</sup> Christopher Cook, *Alcohol, Addiction and Christian Ethics*. New Studies in Christian Ethics 27. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 77.

<sup>217</sup> Henry Yeomans, *Alcohol and Moral Regulation: Public Attitudes, Spirited Measures and Victorian Hangovers* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2014), 6-7.

in England... down to the present day”.<sup>218</sup> Relatively new to Britain, having arrived after the Glorious Revolution (1688-89), gin was the first widely consumed spirit and, in the “gin craze” during the first half of the century, consumption rose rapidly, especially in London. A strong, cheap drink favoured by the poor, it led to increased public drunkenness. The resulting “gin panics” led to four parliamentary Acts between 1729 and 1751 to control gin drinking.<sup>219</sup> Alcohol itself was not seen as a problem at this time, but rather the negative effects on public disorder caused by excessive working-class drinking.

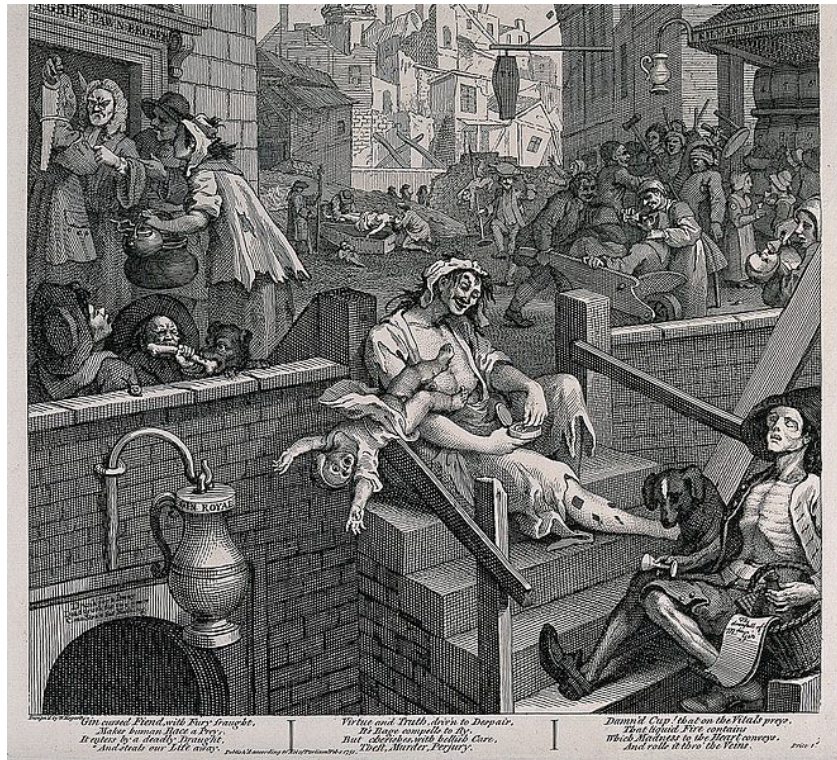
The eighteenth-century’s contrasting attitudes to gin and beer are most famously exemplified in William Hogarth’s 1751 *Gin Lane* and *Beer Street* prints. *Gin Lane* shows the effects of gin-drinking on the poor including, “a drunken mother dropping her baby to take a pinch of snuff, the burial of a naked woman, mass brawling, and a man and dog fighting over a bone”:<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Paul Jennings, *Gin and the English: An Illustrated History* (Swindon: Liverpool University Press on behalf of Historic England, 2024), 1-2.

<sup>219</sup> Yeomans, *Alcohol and Moral Regulation*, 37.

<sup>220</sup> Royal Academy of Arts, “Gin Lane”; <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/work-of-art/gin-lane-1>.



*Figure 1*

*Gin Lane by William Hogarth (print)*

1751

Verses below the picture speak about gin preying on people and taking life, encouraging theft, murder, and perjury, and driving people to madness.

In contrast, *Beer Street* shows “the health and productivity benefits of drinking beer”.<sup>221</sup> The engraving shows happy people working productively and cheerfully, with only the pawnbroker struggling, and the verses below claim that beer cheers, upholds labour and art, and encourages liberty and love:

<sup>221</sup> Royal Academy of Arts, “Beer Street”; <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/work-of-art/beer-street-1>.



*Figure 2*

*Beer Street by William Hogarth (print)*

1751

Early in the nineteenth century, however, drunkenness began to be considered a disease. For example, the physician Thomas Trotter stated, “I consider drunkenness, strictly speaking, to be a disease...”.<sup>222</sup> While this attitude changed later in the century, it created the idea of alcohol being a negative and harmful substance in itself and helped to shape later temperance campaigns. There was also significant impact from American temperance campaigners visiting Britain. Under their influence, campaigns against drinking spirits began in 1829 in Ireland and Scotland. The first English temperance society began in 1830 in Bradford under

<sup>222</sup> Thomas Trotter, *An Essay, Medical, Philosophical, and Chemical on Drunkenness and Its Effects on the Human Body*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810), 18.

Henry Forbes.<sup>223</sup> The number of societies then grew rapidly, reaching an estimated 127 in the same year, comprising 23,000 members, primarily in northern manufacturing areas.<sup>224</sup> These societies were largely linked to Evangelicals, like their American counterparts (although not entirely, as the work of Fr Matthew and others in Ireland reveals). Not all Evangelicals were involved in temperance, however, as seen in the Buxton and Guinness brewing families.<sup>225</sup> The societies were also predominantly non-conformist in origin and leadership, while the Church of England Temperance Society was not founded until 1862 and had Anglo-Catholic roots. In earlier years, the Church of England had little official interest in the temperance movement. Some clergy supported moderating alcohol intake, but once temperance began moving towards total abstinence many saw it as fanaticism, especially given demands to end the use of fermented wine at Communion.<sup>226</sup>

Other issues also contributed to the rise of temperance. These included unsafe and insufficient water supplies in large cities, unsafe milk, and a lack of other cheap and easily obtainable soft drinks. Additionally, alcoholic drinks were widely thought to increase physical stamina and health, adding to their popularity.<sup>227</sup> Alcohol's use to relieve psychological and emotional difficulties is also well-known. More positively, alcohol additionally has a long history in festivities and celebrations, especially in more agricultural areas.<sup>228</sup> Combined, these factors made alcohol consumption widespread and normal.

However, as the rise of temperance societies shows, not everyone saw this as positive. The

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<sup>223</sup> Cook, *Alcohol*, 81.

<sup>224</sup> Annemarie MacAllister, "Temperance Periodicals", in *The Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers* edited by Andrew King, Alexis Easley, and John Morton (London: Routledge, 2016), 342.

<sup>225</sup> John Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney. A History of Evangelicalism*. (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 172.

<sup>226</sup> Lilian Shiman, "The Church of England Temperance Society in the Nineteenth Century", *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 41 (2) (June 1972), 179-195.

<sup>227</sup> Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Keele: Keele University Press, 1994), 38-40.

<sup>228</sup> Harrison, *Drink*, 44.

1830 *Beer Act* was also significant. While some loosening of licensing requirements on beer-sellers happened with the 1828 *Estcourt Act*, the *Beer Act* greatly increased this liberalisation by allowing beer, ale, and cider to be sold without permission from a local magistrate, instead requiring sellers to pay for an excise licence. *The Times* printed extracts from the Bill, clarifying that it did not apply to spirits and revealing that while beer was still considered positive or neutral, other alcoholic drinks were not.<sup>229</sup> Support for the Bill was also expressed in a letter to *The Times* revealing an attitude towards beer like that of earlier centuries:

Can any good reason be assigned why the sale of beer should not be as free as the sale of bread and cheese, or bacon? Both are equally necessary for the proper subsistence of a poor man's family...<sup>230</sup>

The *Beer Act* was widely popular<sup>231</sup> but not universally so. Discontent arose from it unsurprisingly leading to beer becoming more widely available at a lower price and not significantly reducing spirit-drinking. Thus, arrests for drunkenness increased, causing social concern. This in turn added impetus to already hardening attitudes towards alcohol and undermined the idea that beer was harmless.<sup>232</sup>

Following the *Beer Act* and the ensuing problems, from 1832 temperance began to move away from promoting moderate alcohol use towards pushing for complete abstinence. Temperance efforts then began focusing on trying to prevent young people taking up drinking at all, rather than just reforming current drinkers, and the first national young people's movement, the Band of Hope, was founded in 1847. Then, in 1853, the United Kingdom

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<sup>229</sup> Letter to the editor, *The Times*, 31 May 1830, 6; italics in original.

<sup>230</sup> Letter to the editor, *The Times*, 21 June 1830, 3.

<sup>231</sup> Harrison, *Drink*, 74.

<sup>232</sup> Yeomans, *Alcohol and Moral Regulation*, 57-58.

Alliance was formed, influenced by American prohibitionists<sup>233</sup> in another example of American influence. The Alliance's aim was, "to procure the Total and Immediate Legislative Suppression of the Traffic in all Intoxicating Liquors as Beverages".<sup>234</sup> The Alliance also outlined its religious basis, stating: "The Alliance... shall, at all times, recognise its ultimate dependance [*sic*] for success on the blessing of Almighty God".<sup>235</sup>

Temperance lecturer Clara Lucas Balfour, a Baptist convert who had taken the pledge and wrote a book for children, exemplifies the abstinence message. She clarifies what was at stake for abstinence groups and why drinking mattered. Balfour stated that England was well-known globally for "one most debasing vice. That vice is INTEMPERANCE!",<sup>236</sup> framing drinking not just a personal weakness but a national and international shame. She also addressed the existence of both positive and negative biblical references to wine by claiming that: "... when wine is praised it means the harmless juice of the grape; when wine is condemned... it is the strong drink – the dangerous wine that leads to intemperance and ruin".<sup>237</sup> Balfour also gives examples of great civilisations brought to ruin by intemperance, claiming that Britain is more intemperate still but has so far been spared by divine mercy, although drinking by Harold II's soldiers is blamed for William the Conqueror's victory in 1066.<sup>238</sup> Balfour also argues that alcohol leads to, "the ruin, misery, and death of countless numbers of human beings, in all ages of our world's history... is surely wasteful and thoughtless extravagance... causes a great deal of sickness, wickedness, and poverty".<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Cook, *Alcohol*, 81-83.

<sup>234</sup> United Kingdom Alliance, *Minutes of First Meeting of Members of General Council of the United Kingdom Alliance, held in Manchester, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1853, Nathaniel Card, Esq., in the chair* (Manchester: Smith, Barnes, and Blackley, 1853), 2.

<sup>235</sup> United Kingdom Alliance, *Minutes*, 2.

<sup>236</sup> Clara Balfour, *Morning Dew-Drops; or, The Juvenile Abstinence*. Revised and illustrated ed. (London: S.W. Partridge and Co., 1876), 2.

<sup>237</sup> Balfour, *Morning Dew-Drops*, 26; this follows the same kind of reasoning used in the contemporary *The Temperance Bible-Commentary* by Lees and Burns.

<sup>238</sup> Balfour, *Morning Dew-Drops*, 53.

<sup>239</sup> Balfour, *Morning Dew-Drops*, 68-70.

Balfour further comments on how growing crops for making beer wastes land and time that could be used for producing food, as well as necessitating breaking the Sabbath to tend to the crops. This creates a link to Sabbatarianism, and these two concerns did often overlap, such as in debates over Sunday opening for public houses. Balfour's references to drinking leading to ruin also pick up on the unbreakable and inevitable link made by abstinence advocates between drinking and "the inexorable path of alcohol addiction, and the destitution, delirium, and death into which victims of the bottle descend".<sup>240</sup> Even moderate drinking was thought to be connected to crimes including murder and robbery, while abstinence was linked to hard work and respectability.<sup>241</sup> Balfour further describes temperance as being among a person's "principal personal duties"<sup>242</sup> in a discussion of self-denial, the latter of which she sees as "the groundwork of every moral virtue, and also of every religious excellence".<sup>243</sup> Temperance, in the sense of abstinence, is thus promoted as positive because it is "founded on *self-denial*"<sup>244</sup> and, it is "self-denial of the best and purest kind – self-denial for the good of others",<sup>245</sup> because it involves giving up alcohol in order to lead by example. Thus, Balfour argues that temperance is a moral imperative that must be practised for the good of both self and others.

While Balfour also discusses other elements of the abstinence message, the above extracts sufficiently reveal the general tenor of temperance concerns at this time. They reveal a care for Britain's national image, success, and well-being, and for people's moral, religious,

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<sup>240</sup> Katherine Newey, "Victorian Theatre: Research Problems and Progress", in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture* edited by Juliet John (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 672.

<sup>241</sup> Yeomans, *Alcohol and Moral Regulation*, 50-52.

<sup>242</sup> Balfour, *Morning Dew-Drops*, 82.

<sup>243</sup> Balfour, *Morning Dew-Drops*, 83.

<sup>244</sup> Balfour, *Morning Dew-Drops*, 84; italics in original.

<sup>245</sup> Balfour, *Morning Dew-Drops*, 84.

physical, and economic health (based on conversionism and activism), combined with a particular reading of the Bible that was used to provide a Christian basis for the idea that alcohol was inevitably a negative and corrupting force (based on biblicism). Temperance certainly had an effect as by the end of the nineteenth century probably around ten per cent of adults were teetotal.<sup>246</sup> For Dickens, though, growing teetotalism was far from positive, even though his relationship with temperance was more nuanced than with Sabbatarianism, as I will now discuss.

### *Dickens' relationship with the temperance movement*

While Dickens condemned drunkenness, he favoured moderate drinking. Therefore, as the temperance movement began to emphasise abstinence, Dickens moved further away from their position. However, even while not supporting total abstinence, Dickens' stress on the importance of moderation reveals that self-control was an important virtue to him. For example, he wrote in 1847 about the good that temperance advocates were doing and stressed moderation but rejected the idea that alcohol should not be used at all:

But I do not... go along with those excellent persons in confounding the use of anything with its abuse... I know nothing whatever allowed for us for use and capable of abuse... that might not be denied to moderate people, and made a sinful enjoyment, on the same terms.<sup>247</sup>

This letter also includes scriptural references to the Wedding at Cana (John 2.1-12) and the Last Supper to back up Dickens' position, revealing that Dickens' concerns had religious

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<sup>246</sup> Annemarie McAllister, "Temperance Periodicals", 344.

<sup>247</sup> Storey and Fielding, *Letters: Five*, 45-46.

foundations: “At any rate there will be the record of a certain Marriage Feast in Galilee, and of a certain supper where a cup was filled with Wine and not with water...”<sup>248</sup> Further, Dickens reveals that he is guided in his religious opinions by what he considers conducive to good and cheerful living, in line with the virtues he considers central to Christianity. Rather than engaging abstinence proponents in theological or doctrinal debate, he is content to rest his argument on the positive benefits he sees in moderate drinking, in terms of people’s character and goodwill towards others, which in his mind reflect real Christianity. Dickens also shows that he objects to forcing all to refrain from alcohol because of problems caused by a few. This is a recurring theme that links with his dislike of authoritarianism and Sabbatarianism. To give one example here, Dickens’ 1851 *HW* article “Whole Hogs” satirised this aspect of temperance:

It has been discovered that mankind at large can only be regenerated by a Tee-total Society, or by a Peace Society, or by always dining on Vegetables. It is to be particularly remarked that either of these certain means of regeneration is utterly defeated, if so much as a hair's-breadth of the tip of either ear of that particular Pig be left out of the bargain. Qualify your water with a tea-spoonful of wine or brandy— we beg pardon— alcohol— and there is no virtue in Temperance... You must take the Whole Hog, Sir, and every bristle on him, or you and the rest of mankind will never be regenerated.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Storey and Fielding, *Letters: Five*, 46; Dickens does not address temperance claims about positive wine references in the Bible applying to non-alcoholic drinks (see Balfour discussion).

<sup>249</sup> Charles Dickens, “Whole Hogs”, *Household Words* III (74) (23 August 1851), 505; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-iii/page-505.html>.

Similar comments can be seen in magazine articles throughout Dickens' life, including in 1854,<sup>250</sup> 1857,<sup>251</sup> and 1869,<sup>252</sup> showing that he consistently asserted that temperance beliefs should not be forced on others. The 1857 article especially, "Stores for the First of April", also refers to the wrongness of denying people gifts from God. Thus, even though Dickens may not always explicitly refer to religious beliefs when talking about temperance in his letters and articles, there is an element of religious thinking in his critique that underpins his focus on care for others as a Christian virtue.

However, as previously mentioned, Dickens did agree with temperance advocates about drunkenness, despite disagreeing with their diagnosis of the cause and solution to the problem, especially as it related to the poor.

### *Drunkenness and social class*

Dickens' negativity about drunkenness can be seen in various places, not least in his letters. For example, in 1847 he wrote, "From all modes of existence that are precarious, miserable, degrading, and suggestive of reproach... drunkenness, to a greater or less extent, is well nigh inseparable".<sup>253</sup> This was reinforced in 1857, in a letter to a prominent temperance activist, stating: "you cannot detest drunkenness more than I do or hold in greater horror the evils that follow in its train...".<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Sala, "Sunday Out".

<sup>251</sup> Charles Dickens, "Stores for the First of April", *Household Words* XV (363) (7 March 1857), 220-221; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-xv/page-220.html>.

<sup>252</sup> Charles Dickens, "New Uncommercial Samples. A Plea for Total Abstinence", *All the Year Round*, n.s., II (27) (5 June 1869); <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-ii-new-series/page-13.html>.

<sup>253</sup> Storey and Fielding, *Letters: Five*, 6-7.

<sup>254</sup> Storey and Tillotson, *Letters: Eight*, 498.

As Ewa Kujawska-Lis explains, though, Dickens divides drunkenness into two kinds: one caused by poverty and misery, and made worse by attitudes towards the poor, and one which is (in his view) deliberately chosen.<sup>255</sup> His approach to each varied and so I will consider them separately.

Regarding drunkenness caused by poverty and misery, Dickens' 1835 *Evening Chronicle* article "Gin Shops" was aligned with the worries about gin-drinking that had begun in the eighteenth century. Thus, he condemns excessive gin-drinking and describes gin-shop customers as poor, wretched, and sometimes violent. However, he blames poverty and difficult living conditions for gin-drinking, rather than taking the temperance line that drinking causes these problems: "Gin-drinking is a great vice in England, but poverty is a greater; and until you can cure it... gin-shops will increase in number and splendour".<sup>256</sup> Additionally, Dickens complains that temperance societies offer no practical help, preferring moralising to Christian charity:

If Temperance Societies could suggest an antidote against hunger or distress, or establish dispensaries for the gratuitous distribution of bottles of Lethe<sup>257</sup> water, gin-palaces would be numbered among the things that were. Until then, we almost despair of their decrease.<sup>258</sup>

That Dickens saw excessive drinking as a symptom of a deeper problem is also revealed in an 1842 letter:

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<sup>255</sup> Ewa Kujawska-Lis, "'The Drunkard's Death': 19<sup>th</sup>- Century Polish Translations", *Dickens Quarterly* 37 (4) (December 2020), 349-371.

<sup>256</sup> Charles Dickens, "Sketches of London. – No. II: Gin Shops", *The Evening Chronicle* (7 February 1835), 3; later published in *Sketches by Boz*.

<sup>257</sup> In Greek mythology, Lethe was one of the rivers of the underworld and took away memories.

<sup>258</sup> Dickens, "Gin Shops", 3.

The position that Drunkenness is the cause of all other passions, is one of the most monstrous in the world. You will almost invariably find that some other passion has been the cause of Drunkenness; and that that vice is the coping on the top of most of the Devil's Edifices – not the foundation stone...<sup>259</sup>

Dickens' social concern relating to alcohol additionally appears in a July 1848 review in *The Examiner* of George Cruikshank's *The Drunkard's Children*, a sequel to his previous set of etchings, *The Bottle* (1847). Both sets of pictures were designed to display "the inexorable path of alcohol addiction, and the destitution, delirium, and death into which victims of the bottle descend".<sup>260</sup> At the beginning of *The Bottle* all is well but, by the end, the wife has been killed by her now-insane husband, one child is dead, and the other two are abandoned to the streets. In *The Drunkard's Children*, meanwhile, the neglected surviving children wander the streets and are led inexorably to the gin shop, portrayed as the source of all crime. The children fall into crime, the boy is arrested and transported, and brother and sister are parted for ever. The boy dies, and the girl takes her own life in despair.

Dickens did not agree that drink inevitably led to disaster. Instead, he accused Cruikshank of only showing one side of the problem and not recognising the underlying issues:

When Mr Cruikshank shows us... that side of the medal on which the people in their crimes and faults are stamped, he is bound to help us to a glance at that other side on which the government that forms the people... is no less plainly impressed.

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<sup>259</sup> House, Storey and Tillotson, *Letters: Three*, 403-404.

<sup>260</sup> Newey, "Victorian Theatre", 672.

Drunkenness... is the effect of many causes. Foul smells, disgusting habitations, bad workshops and workshop customs, want of light, air, and water, the absence of all easy means of decency and health, are commonest...<sup>261</sup>

As in “Gin Shops”, Dickens is eager to move away from blaming drinking for the problems of the poor, asserting that poverty is to blame for drinking. Cruikshank has, like other temperance advocates, got things the wrong way round and is choosing moral judgement over kindness, charity, and understanding. In the same vein, Dickens also refers to Hogarth, and claims that the latter better understands the real problem in *Gin Lane* because he depicts the poverty and squalor in which the residents are living: “... it forces on the attention of the spectator a most neglected, wretched neighbourhood... an unwholesome, indecent, abject condition of life...”.<sup>262</sup> Dickens further criticises the Church based on the church building depicted by Hogarth in *Gin Lane*, in a way that reflects his idea that real Christianity is expressed in helping others, rather than having the right doctrines. While Dickens accepts that more recently the Church has done more to help the poor, he still insists that the message holds true: “The church... coldly surveys these things... and is passive... We take all this to have a meaning, and to the best of our knowledge it has not grown obsolete...”.<sup>263</sup>

In another example, the 1849 *Examiner* article “Demoralisation and Total Abstinence” also asserts that drunkenness can be a symptom of social problems:

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<sup>261</sup> Charles Dickens, “The Drunkard’s Children. A Sequel to The Bottle. In Eight Plates”, *The Examiner* (8 July 1848), 436.

<sup>262</sup> Dickens, “The Drunkard’s Children”, 436.

<sup>263</sup> Dickens, “The Drunkard’s Children”, 436.

We hold that it is quite as often the consequence as the cause of the condition in which the poor and wretched are found; and that it prevails in the low depths of society... because those depths have been too long unfathomed and unsunned...<sup>264</sup>

As well as asserting that poverty could cause drunkenness, though, Dickens also believed that efforts to regulate drinking were primarily aimed at suppressing the poor, with no concern for what was behind excessive drinking, in a clear parallel with Sabbatarianism. An example of this appears in “The Great Baby”, in which a police magistrate comments that the poor should not be allowed to drink on Sundays (adding to the link with Sabbatarianism) because they are more likely to become drunk and cause public disturbances, claiming: “A large majority of the... charges are... against persons of the lowest class, of having been found drunk and incapable of taking care of themselves”.<sup>265</sup> This article thus emphasises the class element of attempts to curb drunkenness by highlighting that such efforts are aimed at the working classes.

The relationship between Dickens’ social and religious concerns is also shown in the same article by “Mr Monomaniacal Patriarch”, “the Reverend Single Swallow”, and “the Reverend Temple Pharisee”. The first of these is metaphorically ushered in by the ghost of John Bunyan. Although Dickens, as already seen, was often positive about Bunyan, here Dickens links him to Mr Patriarch. The latter claims to be the only person who really understands drunkenness. He therefore believes he knows better than ordinary people themselves what they want and need. Consequently, he treats them as incapable of making their own decisions, something to which Dickens objects:

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<sup>264</sup> Charles Dickens, “Demoralisation and Total Abstinence”, *The Examiner* (27 October 1849), 673.

<sup>265</sup> Dickens, “The Great Baby”, 2.

Yes; I am the only man to be heard on the subject; I am the only man who knows anything about it... nobody would raise up the sunken wretches, but I. Nobody understands how to do it, but I.—Do you think the People ever really want any beer or liquor to drink? Certainly not. I know all about it, and I know they don't.<sup>266</sup>

Dickens concludes by saying that "...the Great Baby is growing up, and had best be measured accordingly",<sup>267</sup> clearly rejecting those wishing to impose their will on others based on a higher social position and a supposed moral superiority not borne out by their actions.

Secondly, there is a conversation with "the Reverend Single Swallow", a name referring to the claim that even a small amount of alcohol would inevitably lead to ruin. Swallow argues that alcohol is the only significant root of crime:

Have you reason, Mr. Swallow, to believe that excessive indulgence in "lush" [getting drunk] has been the cause of these men's crimes? O yes indeed. O yes! — Do you trace their offences to nothing else? They have always told me, that they themselves traced them to nothing else worth mentioning.

He is followed by "the Reverend Temple Pharisee", a name that conjures up images of hypocrisy and self-righteousness based on New Testament portrayals of pharisees. He complains, among other things, about people drinking in a place called The Glimpse of Green on a Sunday evening. He is asked,

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<sup>266</sup> Dickens, "The Great Baby", 3.

<sup>267</sup> Dickens, "The Great Baby", 4.

Do the mass of the inhabitants of your district work hard all the week? I believe they do.—Early and late? My curate reports so. —Are their houses close and crowded? I believe they are. —Abolishing The Glimpse of Green, where would you recommend them to go on a Sunday? I should say to church.— Where after church? Really, that is their affair; not mine.<sup>268</sup>

This highlights a lack of understanding or care for the living conditions of others, contrary to Dickens' ideas about what real Christianity should look like. Pharisee lacks first-hand knowledge of the people in his charge and shows no interest in their lives and needs outside of church services. Thus, he is not displaying the charity which is a central part of real Christianity but is only concerned with imposing restrictions and religious conformity in the name of morality.

Dickens' dislike of simply telling the poor what to do also comes out strongly in the 1863 *AYTR* article "Temperate Temperance". The article's authorship is debated, but it seems likely that it was by Dickens himself.<sup>269</sup> The article asserts that imposing rules on what working-class people should and should not have or do is patronising to them, and frames this as a matter of social control:

WE want to know... why the English workman is to be patronised? Why are his dwelling-place, his house- keeping arrangements, the organisation of his cellar, and

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<sup>268</sup> Dickens, "The Great Baby", 3.

<sup>269</sup> John Drew and Hugh Craig, "Did Dickens Write 'Temperate Temperance'? An Attempt to Identify Authorship of an Anonymous Article in 'All the Year Round'", *Victorian Periodicals Review* 44 (3) (Fall 2011), 267-290.

his larder — nay, the occupation of his leisure hours even — why are all these things regarded as the business of everybody except himself?<sup>270</sup>

Dickens acknowledges the need to help the poor, something which is important to him as an expression of the theological virtue of charity, but feels that,

... you must help them judiciously. You must look at things with their eyes... The weak point in almost every attempt which has been made to deal with the lower classes is invariably the same — too much is expected of them. You ask them to do, simply the most difficult thing in the world — you ask them to change their habits. Your standard is too high.<sup>271</sup>

While this in itself also seems patronising, Dickens' reason for saying it relates to the “terrible” situation in which the poor find themselves, which leaves them “deprived of energy” and makes change hard.<sup>272</sup> Temperance advocates, he implies, do not appreciate this. Going on to talk approvingly about eating places for the poor, he cautions against patronising or making assumptions:

The poor man who attends one of these eating-houses... is not to be patronised, or ordered about, or read to, or made speeches at... the working man is neither a felon, nor necessarily a drunkard, nor a very little child.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Charles Dickens, “Temperate Temperance”, *All the Year Round* IX (208) (18 April 1863), 188; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-ix/page-188.html>.

<sup>271</sup> Dickens, “Temperate Temperance”, 188.

<sup>272</sup> Dickens, “Temperate Temperance”, 188.

<sup>273</sup> Dickens, “Temperate Temperance”, 188.

Turning now to those who “choose” to drink excessively, a real-life example of Dickens’ attitude appears in a May 1864 letter about an *ATYR* employee, where Dickens strongly condemns two women left to care for him during a serious illness. These women had apparently got “blind drunk together on Gin” and “omitted everything they had undertaken to do”.<sup>274</sup> Dickens clearly believes that these women were responsible for deciding to drink and subsequently neglecting their duties. While we might now wonder if they were suffering from an alcohol addiction or extreme stress, Dickens obviously does not have our modern understanding of addiction or psychology. However, he did have medical interests that related to his understanding of drinking, as is revealed most clearly in the final *Sketches by Boz* story, “The Drunkard’s Death” (1839).

Sabine Schülting argues that *Sketches by Boz* is,

an indirect comment on the effects of the Poor Law reform in the 1830s, leading from the nostalgic reminiscence of parish support to a ruthless diagnosis of the effects of the new laws: the conceptualization of the poor population as “bare life”.<sup>275</sup>

Dickens himself does not indicate why he wrote “The Drunkard’s Death”, apart from wanting to “finish the Volume with *eclat* [*sic*]”.<sup>276</sup> However, following Schülting, it can be seen at least partly as a commentary on the effects of political and social changes on the poor, as well as on the psychology of drunkards, thus straddling Kujawska-Lis’ two categories of drunkenness. Regarding the idea that some choose drunkenness, though, Dickens claims in

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<sup>274</sup> Graham Storey, Margaret Brown and Kathleen Tillotson, *The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume Ten 1862-1864*. Pilgrim Edition. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 392.

<sup>275</sup> Sabine Schülting, *Dirt in Victorian Literature and Culture: Writing Materiality* (London: Routledge, 2016), 86.

<sup>276</sup> House and Storey, *Letters: One*, 208.

the story that these, “have wilfully, and with open eyes, plunged into the gulf from which the man who once enters it never rises more...”.<sup>277</sup> Therefore, the drunkard is not entirely blameless, even though the story also shows that some of his problems arise from poverty. Blaming the drunkard seems to chime well with the abstainers’ argument that alcohol is in itself sinful, and leads inevitably to hopeless ruin, making this the closest we have seen Dickens get to their position so far. “The Drunkard’s Death” suggests that things go downhill once the drunkard allows excessive drinking to take over. Various disasters overtake the previously happy and well-respected man and his family, all blamed on his drinking, until he finally becomes insane and drowns himself.

In its entirely negative portrayal of drinking this story brings to mind the cautionary tales about drinking produced by total abstinence supporters. However, the cautionary aspect in this tale relates to those who “refuse” to control their drinking, and thus lack self-control, not to all drinkers. As he wrote to Compton: “If I were a Drunkard, I would take the pledge. If I had a drunkard in my family or service I would urge him by all means to do the like”.<sup>278</sup> However, some choosing to not control their drinking did not justify demonising alcohol and all who drank it.

“The Drunkard’s Death” also reveals the influence of the Scottish surgeon, Robert Macnish. Macnish claimed, in words reminiscent of “The Drunkard’s Death”, that “Some are drunkards by choice, and others by necessity”, explaining that the first group were people of “coarse unintellectual minds, and of low animal propensities”, while the second group were those who turned to drink to escape their problems instead of “bearing up manfully”.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Charles Dickens, “The Drunkard’s Death” in *Sketches by Boz* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 555.

<sup>278</sup> Tillotson, *Letters: Four*, 31.

<sup>279</sup> Robert Macnish, *The Anatomy of Drunkenness: With a Sketch of the Author’s Life* (Glasgow: W.R. M’Phun, 1850), 29-30.

Thus, the problem was not alcohol but people lacking the capacity to cope with it or their problems. Macnish further claimed that drunkenness was “a state of partial insanity”<sup>280</sup> and that it could, among other things, lead to drunkards thinking they saw “individuals who are, in reality, absent or even dead”.<sup>281</sup> This was reflected in “The Drunkard’s Death”, when,

the forms of his elder children seemed to rise from the grave, and stand about him... His senses were leaving him... He was going mad... He retreated a few paces, took a short run, desperate leap, and plunged into the river.<sup>282</sup>

It seems clear that Dickens believed in a link between excessive drinking and insanity and felt there was a moral deficit in choosing to drink too much rather than being forced into it by poverty. Thus, this kind of drunkenness is condemned as failing to live out a proper Christian life, in which moderation and self-control were important (see below on “Moderation and companionship”).

The link between alcohol and disease is further emphasised in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), in which Jenny Wren’s alcoholic father is a physical and psychological wreck due to his drinking, and a link is made between this and Jenny’s physical disability and harsh character. This last especially emphasises that this kind of drinking is condemned by Dickens for harming others, contrary to the Christian imperative to care for one’s neighbour. *Hard Times* (1854) provides a similar negative portrayal with Mrs Blackpool, “A disabled, drunken creature... so foul to look at, in her tatters, stains, and splashes, but so much fouler than that in her moral infamy, that it was a shameful thing even to see her”.<sup>283</sup> She has fallen to these

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<sup>280</sup> Macnish, *Anatomy of Drunkenness*, 38, 43.

<sup>281</sup> Macnish, *Anatomy of Drunkenness*, 43.

<sup>282</sup> Dickens, “The Drunkard’s Death”, 563-565.

<sup>283</sup> Charles Dickens, *Hard Times: For These Times* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 70.

depths due to her drinking, which has physically and morally damaged her. Thus, we see the same theme of disability as in *Our Mutual Friend*, and the same link between drunkenness and moral failure. Finally, in terms of psychology and alcohol, Dickens gives us Mr Wickfield in *David Copperfield* (1850). Wickfield's drinking is portrayed as arising from grief for his deceased wife and is encouraged by Uriah Heep. While Wickfield's drinking is less destructive than my other examples, it traps Wickfield in his grief, makes him vulnerable to Uriah's manipulation, and hinders David and Agnes' happiness. However, this time there is hope as Wickfield changes things for the better by ceasing to drink. Thus, it is not always the case in Dickens' mind that drunkards are beyond hope, as further revealed when he wrote in a letter that, "As to there being no hope of drunkards, we mustn't start from that point... total abstinence societies have set this question at rest, and have demonstrated the possibility".<sup>284</sup>

Indeed, the theological virtue of hope was important to Dickens, and this is reflected elsewhere. Sydney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities*, for example, also reveals hope for drunkards. Carton is introduced as rude, scruffy, and a heavy drinker, contrasting with the physically similar Charles Darnay in both temperament and how successfully they have used their lives. There is no in-depth explanation of Carton's drinking, but he claims to Darnay that he drinks because, "I am a disappointed drudge, sir. I care for no man on earth, and no man cares for me".<sup>285</sup> This brings up the idea (discussed further below) of solitary drinking being negative, while drinking in company reflects goodwill, cheerfulness, and companionship, all of which Dickens sees as important characteristics of Christian living. However, there is redemption for Carton as he ultimately sacrifices himself for both Darnay

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<sup>284</sup> Storey and Fielding, *Letters: Five*, 7.

<sup>285</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 89.

and his wife, Lucie. Carton's redemption is seen in his move from being a solitary man living without love to a man willing to give up his own life to save others (cf. John 15.13). Here, again, Dickens emphasises Christian virtues by praising self-sacrificing love over doctrinal, theological, or moral correctness, as well as showing that there is always hope.

Despite his views on drunkenness, though, Dickens is well-known for his portrayals of eating and drinking in cheerful company, and this represents his strongest difference from temperance activists, as I now discuss.

### *Moderation and companionship*

Dickens' positivity about social and moderate drinking appears in an 1842 letter, where he claims: "A great many good qualities and a great many genial feelings are brought out in good men by a cheerful glass".<sup>286</sup> He also alluded to his own cellar in letters<sup>287</sup> and wrote about his own drinking habits, and concerns about enforcing abstinence.<sup>288</sup> Additionally, he wrote to the secretary of the National Temperance Society, Theodore Compton, in 1844, promoting moderation: "I do not see the wisdom or the justice of depriving sober men of that which moderately used, is undoubtedly a cheerful, social, harmless, pleasant thing – often tending to kindness of feeling and openness of heart".<sup>289</sup>

Dickens' most famous positive portrayal of drinking, though, appears in *A Christmas Carol*, in which Ebenezer Scrooge is transformed in a redemptive manner from a solitary, hard, and

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<sup>286</sup> House, Storey and Tillotson, *Letters: Three*, 318; italics in original.

<sup>287</sup> See, for example, Storey, Brown and Tillotson, *Letters: Nine*, 239.

<sup>288</sup> See, for example, House, Storey and Tillotson, *Letters: Three*, 403-404.

<sup>289</sup> Tillotson, *Letters: Four*, 30-31.

miserable man to one of goodwill, cheer, sociability, and kindness. The positivity of communal celebrations including alcohol appears several times in a way that links them to faith. For example, the Ghost of Christmas Present takes Scrooge to see Bob Cratchit's family, who, although poor, are celebrating together with food and drink in an atmosphere of happiness and love. In this context, the atmosphere of conviviality is given a religious tinge, since it appears as part of Scrooge's redemption and is a portrayal of what things should be like in Dickens' vision of life transformed, similarly to biblical depictions of feasting in the kingdom of God.

Interestingly, in contrast to the negative attitudes towards gin that I discussed earlier, Bob is portrayed as making a drink with gin to aid in the celebration and happy atmosphere: "Bob... compounded some hot mixture in a jug with gin and lemons, and stirred it round and round and put it on the hob to simmer..."<sup>290</sup> Thus, gin is not demonised here, and neither is its use by the poor. Gin is helpful in moderation and when used with self-control, and when not being turned to through desperation. Indeed, Dickens even wrote in a November 1855 letter that, "I am impatient to know how the Gin Punch succeeded... It is the most wonderful beverage in the world, and I think ought to be laid on at high pressure by the Board of Health".<sup>291</sup> Finally, after Scrooge's conversion into a man of generosity and kindness, and thus a man exemplifying real Christianity, we also see him promise to share "a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop [a type of mulled wine]"<sup>292</sup> with Bob, as a sign of new-found openness to life and goodness. Thus, Dickens refutes the idea that alcohol automatically leads to misery and ruin. Instead, used with moderation and self-control it can be a joyful, life-

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<sup>290</sup> Dickens, *Christmas Carol*, 80.

<sup>291</sup> Storey, Tillotson and Easson, *Letters: Seven*, 741.

<sup>292</sup> Dickens, *Christmas Carol*, 116.

giving thing that helps to build bonds, lighten hearts, and contribute to well-being, and in this way, it can fit into a Christian life.

The goodness of moderate as opposed to excessive drinking is also highlighted twice in *Pickwick Papers*. Firstly, the novel introduces us to the Methodist minister Mr Stiggins via Sam Weller's stepmother. She has become involved with his church, which preaches temperance. Stiggins himself, first seen by Sam sitting in the latter's father's bar, is,

... a prim-faced, red-nosed man... A pair of old, worn, beaver gloves, a broad-brimmed hat, and a faded green umbrella... being disposed in a very tidy and careful manner, seemed to imply that the red-nosed man... had no intention of going away in a hurry.<sup>293</sup>

Thus, Dickens depicts a moralising Dissenter while hinting that all is not as it should be with the reference to him being "red-nosed", a sign of a drinker, and Stiggins' apparent determination to stay in the bar as long as possible. Stiggins' liking for alcohol and desire to drink heavily is also shown by the fact that,

Beside him, stood a glass of reeking hot pine-apple rum and water... and every time the red-nosed man stopped to bring the round of bread to his eye... he imbibed a drop or two of the hot pine-apple rum and water...<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, 353.

<sup>294</sup> Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, 354.

Also, as Mrs Weller explains, ““Night after night does this excellent man... come and sit here, for hours together...””.<sup>295</sup> When Stiggins does eventually leave, he has “several most indubitable symptoms of having quite as much pine-apple rum and water about him, as he could comfortably accommodate...””.<sup>296</sup> After Stiggins has continued in this way for some time Sam Weller’s father exposes his hypocrisy by making him drunk just before a temperance meeting.

Stiggins exemplifies Dickens’ dislike of hypocrisy and the idea of imposing total abstinence, especially when combined with Evangelical moralising about the dangers of alcohol without concern for the wellbeing of others or any understanding of why people might be driven to drink excessively. Stiggins takes advantage of his relationship with Mrs Weller and her easy access to alcohol to indulge himself at her and her husband’s expense, while displaying judgementalism towards others, including those who drink. Thus, abstinence is here a self-serving desire to stop others from indulging in what Stiggins enjoys without limits. However, nowhere does Dickens condemn the drinking of alcohol in itself, and Sam’s father, the inn-keeper, is a positive character in this tale, again reinforcing Dickens’ approval of moderate and companionable drinking.

The second *Pickwick Papers* tale, “The Story of the Goblins Who Stole a Sexton”, revolves around Gabriel Grub, an, “ill-conditioned, cross-gained, surly fellow – a morose and lonely man, who consorted with nobody but himself, and an old wicker bottle....””.<sup>297</sup> One Christmas Eve, drinking while digging a grave, Grub has visions of goblins who show him various scenes of life, in a way reminiscent of the ghosts in *A Christmas Carol*, leading to Grub

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<sup>295</sup> Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, 355.

<sup>296</sup> Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, 359.

<sup>297</sup> Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, 381.

repenting of his behaviour. Ashamed, Grub immediately leaves the village and his bottle. Ten years later, Grub reappears, a changed man, and the story ends with the moral that, "...if a man turns sulky and drinks by himself at Christmas time, he may make up his mind to be not a bit the better for it, let the spirits be ever so good...".<sup>298</sup> Grub's mistake is to shut himself off from others and drink alone. It is this mistaken approach to drinking and his lack of sociability that causes his problems, as he shuts himself off from goodness and companionship, not alcohol itself.

However, companionship alone does not always remove the dangers of alcohol in Dickens' writings. "Making a Night of It" was published 1835 in *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*. In this story two friends go out on the town, and drink heavily. They are ejected from a theatre for disruptive behaviour, continue to drink, "and the rest of the entertainment was a confused mixture of heads and heels, black eyes and blue uniforms, mud and gaslights, thick doors, and stone paving".<sup>299</sup> In the morning they wake up in a police cell, and are charged with multiple assaults, theft, and other crimes and misdemeanours. Finally, they are fined and never go out drinking in this way again. While this is a light-hearted story, it does reveal Dickens' awareness of the problems and dangers of drunkenness, as ordinarily respectable men are led astray by excessive drinking. However, the story also suggests that moderate drinking is positive, since the evening begins with, "... a nice, snug, comfortable dinner... supported... by a pot of the real draught stout...".<sup>300</sup> It is only afterwards, when the friends begin drinking whiskey immoderately, and lose control of themselves, that the problems start. Thus, while food and drink taken in moderation can help with celebration and

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<sup>298</sup> Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, 390.

<sup>299</sup> Charles Dickens, "Making a Night of It" in *Sketches by Boz*, 313.

<sup>300</sup> Dickens, "Making a Night of It", 310.

a sense of companionship, it is still possible to go too far by drinking to the point where it begins to cause harm instead of promoting good cheer.

*Our Mutual Friend* also provides a positive view of moderate drinking, contrasting with Jenny Wren's father. Miss Potterson, owner of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters tavern, firmly controls her customers. She has a reputation for strictness and firmly asserts her authority, saying: "I am the law here, my man... and I'll soon convince you of that, if you doubt it at all".<sup>301</sup> Thus, Miss Potterson keeps her tavern as a place of "orderly community and relative health",<sup>302</sup> showing us alcohol consumption kept safely under control, without outlawing it completely.

Dickens' positive attitude towards moderate drinking also appears in his non-fiction writing. For example, the previously-mentioned "Demoralisation and Total Abstinence" article asserted that,

It is a characteristic of the age that it comprehends a large class of minds apparently unable to distinguish between use and abuse... because drunkenness is, for the most part, inseparably associated with crime and misery, a leap is made at the conclusion that there must be no drinking. Because Bill Brute, the robber in Newgate, and Mr Brallaghan of Killaloo, resident down the next court, make wild beasts of themselves under the influence of strong liquor, therefore Jones, the decent and industrious mechanic... is not to have his pint of beer and his glass of gin and water – a proposition which... is simply ridiculous.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 68-69.

<sup>302</sup> Darin Graber, "Regulating Alcohol and Structuring Life in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*", *Dickens Studies Annual* 49 (1) (2018), 108.

<sup>303</sup> Dickens, "Demoralisation and Total Abstinence", 673.

Thus, Dickens believes that it is unreasonable to enforce total abstinence on all when the problem is confined to a small group of people. This is an example of Dickens' dislike of having rules and limits imposed on the enjoyment of others, which he considers as going against the freedom and joy that should be found in Christian life. He goes even further in the previously-discussed "The Great Baby", effectively upending Balfour's patriotism message by appealing to the national character as a reason not to impose abstinence on all:

That a whole people,—a domestic, reasonable, considerate people, whose good nature and good sense are the admiration of intelligent foreigners... should be judged by, and made to answer and suffer for, the most degraded and most miserable among them, is a principle so shocking in its injustice, and so lunatic in its absurdity, that to entertain it for a moment is to exhibit profound ignorance of the English mind and character.<sup>304</sup>

Dickens also explicitly compared abstinence proponents to Sabbatarians in "Demoralisation and Total Abstinence", calling both groups "misbegotten children of Cant" who are prone to "sweeping assertion"<sup>305</sup> with no basis in fact, thus linking his criticisms of Sabbatarians and temperance advocates under the banner of hypocrisy, since they are both concerned with promoting their ideas but not with expressing faith in action by helping others. This link is further seen in "The Great Baby", which criticises both Sabbatarians (Section 2.3.1) and temperance, with Dickens saying about the latter:

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<sup>304</sup> Dickens, "The Great Baby", 3-4.

<sup>305</sup> Dickens, "Demoralisation and Total Abstinence", 673.

Adamantine-hearted Baby, dissolve into scalding tears at the sight of the next witness, hanging his head and beating his breast. He was one of the greatest drunkards in the world, he tells you. When he was drunk, he was a very demon... He never takes any strong drink now, and is as an angel of light. And because this man never could use without abuse... therefore, O Big-headed Baby, you perceive that he must become as a standard for you; and for his backslidings you shall be put in the corner evermore.<sup>306</sup>

Overall, Dickens was more consistent about temperance than Sabbatarianism. He favoured moderation and opposed abstinence, considering the issue not to be alcohol itself, but its misuse. However, he did share the temperance dislike of drunkenness, and on this subject often sounded very similar to abstainers. Dickens' approach to drunkenness is nuanced, though, as he understood that some were driven to drink due to social factors, and he did not advocate blaming such people. Rather, he criticised those who showed no care for the difficulties of the poor and were concerned only with appearances of morality instead of actually actively living out faith. He did, though, condemn drunkenness for causing harm to others, something which ran against the Christian duty of caring for neighbours. Additionally, those who he saw as choosing to drink despite the consequences, and therefore as lacking in self-control, were subject to strong criticism. Dickens' criticisms of temperance were often very similar to those aimed at Sabbatarians, in that he disliked people imposing rules out of a sense of moral superiority and identified an element of hypocrisy in their unwillingness to offer help instead of condemnation. These things ran counter to his real Christianity, which stressed instead cheerfulness, goodwill, kindness, tolerance, freedom, and charity, all of which he saw as being unharmed, or even potentially enhanced, by moderate and responsible drinking.

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<sup>306</sup> Dickens, "The Great Baby", 3.

Another great interest of Dickens', and an area in which he conflicted with Evangelicals, was the theatre, which Evangelicals focused on due to concerns about personal piety (conversionism) and because they saw it as encouraging social ills (activism).

### 2.3.3 Theatre

#### *Evangelicals and leisure*

The preceding discussion has covered Sunday leisure time and social drinking, both elements of recreation. Leisure was a key area of discussion in the nineteenth century, Paul Schlicke explains, not least because of industrialisation and urbanisation. Long hours in factories squeezed out recreation, while the loss of older community relationships in small settlements increased social-class differences and added to middle-class disdain for working-class amusements. Additionally, ideas about the sanctity of work meant recreation was increasingly frowned-upon, and "Religion and recreation, so closely integrated throughout history, diverged sharply... competing for separate allegiance".<sup>307</sup>

Therefore, many aspects of recreation attracted Evangelical scrutiny. As Doreen Rosman notes, little personal Evangelical writing from then reveals an interest in leisure activities, with the main concern being the personal private or public life of that person. This, she continues, may indicate that recreation was of low importance.<sup>308</sup> Dickens, however, promoted innocent enjoyment and recreation, especially for those who were hard-pressed

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<sup>307</sup> Paul Schlicke, *Dickens and Popular Entertainment*. Routledge library ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 44.

<sup>308</sup> Doreen Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 86.

elsewhere, as seen earlier in this thesis. Behind the Evangelical disdain for leisure activities was a belief that “Christ and ‘the world’ were essentially opposed”,<sup>309</sup> and in need of reform and conversion, as reflected in the baptismal promise to “renounce... the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh...”.<sup>310</sup> Not only was the current world a place of danger and exile to be travelled through on the way to their real home, as in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, but earthly happiness was unimportant because Christians should have only one aim: to make themselves ready for Heaven while keeping death and the next life constantly in mind. Thus, nothing that belonged to this world was significant and leisure activities were at best a distraction from the real business of being a Christian.<sup>311</sup>

In an example of Evangelical dislike of “worldly” things, John Ryland reports on his fellow-Baptist minister Andrew Fuller being shown round Oxford and showing little interest in its beauties. Fuller wished to go home and discuss justification, saying: “*That inquiry is far more to me than all these fine buildings*”.<sup>312</sup> According to Rosman, Fuller’s attitude was more common among Dissenters than in the Church of England.<sup>313</sup> However, there were some Anglican examples, as in a letter from Edward Bickersteth, later bishop of Exeter, to one of his daughters:

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<sup>309</sup> Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture*, 40.

<sup>310</sup> Brian Cummings (ed.), “The Book of Common Prayer [1662]”, in *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 411.

<sup>311</sup> Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture*, 40-41.

<sup>312</sup> John Ryland, *The Work of Faith, the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope Illustrated; in the Life and Death of the Reverend Andrew Fuller* (London: Button & Son, 1816), 574-575.

<sup>313</sup> Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture*, 86.

There is a beautiful Cathedral in this city, and a little company that love our Saviour, far more beautiful in papa's eyes than all the beautiful cathedrals and churches in the world, and living stones of a temple far more glorious and lasting.<sup>314</sup>

Rosman further notes that a serious and sober life was considered a sign of proper Christian commitment. This was contrasted with not only levity and frivolity but also vivacity and vitality. In turn, this attitude led to concern about amusement, often seen as involving a decadent ignoring of eternity.<sup>315</sup> Thus, John Pearson argued in his *Life of William Hey* that,

...the manner in which we dispose of our time... can never be a light and unimportant matter...recreations... should be innocent... indulged in with moderation and sobriety, pursued rather because they are useful and necessary, than for the mere purposes of gratification....<sup>316</sup>

Duty was also important in Evangelical thinking (see Section 4.7 for more on this) and often referred to in discourse around recreation and the Christian life. Some argued that leisure activities were unnecessary, while others felt some activities were permissible if they helped Christians live better lives:<sup>317</sup>

... Religion prohibits no amusement or gratification which is really innocent. The question, however, of its innocence, must not be tried by the loose maxims of worldly morality, but by the spirit of the injunctions of the word of God; and by the

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<sup>314</sup> T.R. Birks, *Memoir of The Rev. Edward Bickersteth, Late Rector of Watton, Herts: Vol. II* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1851), 45.

<sup>315</sup> Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture*, 86-87.

<sup>316</sup> John Pearson, *The Life of William Hey* (London: Hurst, Robinson, and Co., 1822), 241-242.

<sup>317</sup> Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture*, 87.

indulgence being conformable or not conformable to the genius of Christianity, and to the tempers and dispositions of mind enjoined on its professors.<sup>318</sup>

However, a number believed there was no innocent recreation as idleness provided an opportunity for sin,<sup>319</sup> especially on Sundays:

Nothing is to be done which is merely for amusement or for gain. To saunter in the public walks... to read the public journal, or other works which are not religious, to read and to write letters... to pay idle visits - to engage in frivolous conversation... must be contrary to the Christian's duty of the Lord's-day.<sup>320</sup>

It was thus a duty to remain busy with works suitable for the Christian life to avoid being caught up in unsuitable worldly activities.

For some Evangelicals, though, plays were acceptable when read at home, especially when they involved significant works such as those of Shakespeare. Reading plays at home eliminated the danger of mixing with unsuitable company in theatres (discussed below) and reduced much of the appealing to passions visible on the stage. It also allowed sober contemplation and instruction in how the play compared with the teachings of their faith,<sup>321</sup> thus fulfilling the Evangelical need for leisure to help with living a good Christian life. Some, including the Clapham Evangelicals, also put on their own plays in the home.<sup>322</sup> Here,

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<sup>318</sup> William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity* (Dublin: B. Dugdale, 1797), 327.

<sup>319</sup> Schlicke, *Popular Entertainment*, 9.

<sup>320</sup> Baptist Noel, *The Sanctification of the Sabbath and the Blessing Attached to It: A Sermon on Gen. II. 3* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1835), 13.

<sup>321</sup> Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture*, 129.

<sup>322</sup> Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture*, 83.

Dickens had something in common with these Evangelicals, given his own interest in putting on performances at home.

It was also commonly felt, however, that there were difficulties in finding innocent pleasures that did not disrupt duty.<sup>323</sup> Thus, in Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* Lucilla expresses concern about enjoying gardening, saying:

Nay, I almost doubt if it is not too pleasant to be quite safe. An enjoyment which assumes a sober shape may deceive us by making us believe we are practicing a duty when we are only gratifying a taste.<sup>324</sup>

However, among all potential leisure activities, “there was no stronger taboo than that on the theatre”.<sup>325</sup> Given this, and Dickens’ personal life-long interest in and involvement with the theatre, I focus on this aspect of recreation. Another reason for this focus is that theatre-going was popular across all levels of society, from the queen to the poorest people who could afford a ticket.<sup>326</sup> Theatre in this era covered a wide range of forms, summed up by Michael Booth as encompassing “farce, pantomime, melodrama and animals on stage... opera, Shakespeare and comedy”.<sup>327</sup> Thus, it touched a vast number of lives. Outside of the main London and provincial theatres there were music halls, penny gaffs, and saloon theatres,<sup>328</sup> widening such entertainment’s reach still further. Additionally, economic difficulties from 1815 to the 1860s led to lower ticket prices and attempts to increase attendance by “gratifying

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<sup>323</sup> Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture*, 87.

<sup>324</sup> Hannah More, *The Works of Hannah More: Vol. VII, Coelebs in Search of a Wife*. New ed. (London: T. Cadell, 1880), 350.

<sup>325</sup> David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody*. A History of Evangelicalism (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 218.

<sup>326</sup> Michael Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 10.

<sup>327</sup> Booth, *Theatre*, 1.

<sup>328</sup> Booth, *Theatre*, 5.

popular taste in melodrama, farce and spectacle entertainment”,<sup>329</sup> again widening theatre’s reach. My discussion will consider all of these forms and locations under the umbrella term “theatre”, but I also recognise that differences existed between them and were often related to social factors. Such widespread acceptance and enjoyment of theatre, going as high as the queen, meant that Evangelicals had an impossible task in trying to curb theatre-going. This may explain why they primarily tried to frame theatre as something a serious Christian should not be involved with, rather than attempting widespread social change, as happened with the Sabbath and alcohol.

In order to gain an understanding of the context of nineteenth-century theatre, though, before discussing reactions from both Dickens and Evangelicals, it is helpful to know a little of its history and Christian reactions, and so I will give a brief outline now.

### *History of theatre*

The early centuries of Christian history saw condemnation and attacks on theatre.<sup>330</sup>

However, by the Middle Ages much theatre arose from drama produced for Church festivals and a desire to teach a largely illiterate population about Christianity and the Bible, with portable theatres that were moved around the country on wagons. Following the Reformation, though, religious plays were suppressed, and instead theatre companies were licensed to perform as long as they had aristocratic support.<sup>331</sup> Thus, we can see theatre as growing out of religious worship, and particularly Roman Catholic worship, with its emphasis on drama,

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<sup>329</sup> Booth, *Theatre*, 7.

<sup>330</sup> See, for more on this, Richard Foulkes, *Church and Stage in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 20-21.

<sup>331</sup> V&A, “The Story of Theatre”; <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/the-story-of-theatre>.

gesture, and ritual fitting well with theatrical conventions. This may, of course, have contributed to Evangelical dislike of the art-form. The closing of theatres in 1642 was a temporary triumph for Puritan dislike of the theatre, but this was reversed under Charles II.<sup>332</sup> By the eighteenth century, theatre was a popular form of entertainment, with theatres being extended and new playhouses being built across the country.<sup>333</sup>

However, this century also saw the 1737 *Licensing Act*. Primarily triggered by *The Golden Rump*, a farce which suggested that the queen gave enemas to the king, the *Act* significantly impacted theatre's growth. Due to concern about political satire undermining the government, the *Act* allowed only the two patent theatres of Drury Lane and Covent Garden to produce plays for financial gain. It also introduced strict censorship and oversight, conducted by the lord chamberlain, assisted by the examiners of plays<sup>334</sup> (hence creating "legitimate theatre"), who would examine each play before performance to ensure its suitability. The *Act* classed actors as vagabonds and stated that anyone found to be putting on a play, or assisting with such, without a licence from the lord chamberlain would be fined.<sup>335</sup>

Ways around the *Act* were found by non-patent (or illegitimate) theatres, though, such as including musical numbers between scenes, leading to melodrama and burlesque growing in popularity because of their short scenes and musical accompaniment. Thus, by the beginning of the nineteenth century the system was buckling under the huge demand for theatrical entertainment. New theatres were springing up in the capital and the lines between legitimate and illegitimate theatre were blurring.<sup>336</sup> These new theatres competed strongly with the

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<sup>332</sup> Foulkes, *Church and Stage*, 21.

<sup>333</sup> V&A, "The Story of Theatre".

<sup>334</sup> V&A, "The Story of Theatre".

<sup>335</sup> The Statutes Project, "1737: 10 George 2 c.28: The Licensing Act"; <https://statutes.org.uk/site/the-statutes/eighteenth-century/1737-10-george-2-c-28-the-licensing-act/>.

<sup>336</sup> V&A, "The Story of Theatre".

patent theatres by putting on a wider range of entertainment, including “musical concerts, ballets, gothic dramas, melodramas and pantomimes”, and the patent theatres were forced to respond by expanding their programmes and providing more spectacle.<sup>337</sup> Consequently, the 1843 *Theatre Regulation Act* reduced the lord chamberlain’s censorship powers to only preventing plays that threatened decorum and public peace within London and royal residences (in both patent and non-patent theatres). It also allowed justices of the peace in other areas to issue licences, although all plays still had to be approved by the lord chamberlain.<sup>338</sup>

### *The problem with plays*

George Burder’s *Lawful Amusements* (1805) sermon is an early example of the nineteenth-century Evangelical taboo against theatre. Apparently primarily springing from conversionism, Burder cautioned against many activities, but especially theatre. This was entirely outlawed because, “... the holy name of God is frequently profaned... and... many filthy songs, indecent figures and wanton gestures are allowed...”.<sup>339</sup> He also argued that plays might have been created with good intentions but by their nature “... they tend to evil almost more than any other species of amusements”.<sup>340</sup> The reasons for this tendency included irreverent references to God, sensual performances and art, and unsavoury characters among audiences: “Is not the Playhouse the very Exchange for Harlots? Is there a loose, debauched, depraved, ungodly man or woman, who, generally speaking, does not

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<sup>337</sup> Patricia Pulham, “The Arts”, in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*, edited by Chris Williams (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 451.

<sup>338</sup> The Statutes Project, “1843: 6 & 7 Victoria c.68: Theatre Regulation Act”; <https://statutes.org.uk/site/the-statutes/nineteenth-century/1843-6-7-victoria-c-68-theatre-regulation-act/>; this Act remained in force until 1968.

<sup>339</sup> George Burder, *Lawful Amusements; A Sermon, Preached at the Thursday-Evening Lecture, Fetter-Lane, January 10, 1805*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Biggs and Co., 1805), 4.

<sup>340</sup> Burder, *Lawful Amusements*, 5.

frequent the Theatre?”.<sup>341</sup> Actors fared no better than audiences, being described as “loose, debauched people”.<sup>342</sup> Further,

The Interludes, the Dances, the Scenery and the Music... are calculated to dissipate the mind, to endear to the heart the vanities of the world, to render the ordinary businesses of life insipid, and the rules of virtue and religion irksome and disgusting.<sup>343</sup>

Burder also argued that Christians should live “a *life of nonconformity to the world*”, and “carnal amusements”, particularly plays, were prime examples of the world; thus, Christians should avoid them.<sup>344</sup> Finally, the Christian life was to be one of “Communion with God” and play-going was incompatible with this.<sup>345</sup>

Similar attitudes persisted during the nineteenth century and permeated much thinking about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in terms of respectability, religion or, often, both. For example, an 1851 letter to the *Christian Observer* argued that:

... if you allow that... there is scarcely a play conducted on the true principles of right and wrong... you will see enough in the representations themselves to make one... stand aloof, and have nothing to do with such things... to sanction the representation of sin, is surely equivalent to mocking at it; to wink at the playing with iniquity, is as

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<sup>341</sup> Burder, *Lawful Amusements*, 6-7.

<sup>342</sup> Burder, *Lawful Amusements*, 7.

<sup>343</sup> Burder, *Lawful Amusements*, 9.

<sup>344</sup> Burder, *Lawful Amusements*, 27; italics in original.

<sup>345</sup> Burder, *Lawful Amusements*, 28.

much as to allow that we account that which cost the Saviour's blood a thing of nought.<sup>346</sup>

It continued about actors themselves:

...what shall we say to the known fact of the theatre being constantly connected with, and greatly supported by, organized profligacy, such as we shudder to think of? No one can deny that the neighbourhood of the theatre abounds with immorality of the grossest kind.<sup>347</sup>

This “immorality” was ascribed to the way in which women were encouraged to speak and act on stage, seen as leading to their “purity of thought and modesty of action” being undermined and causing them to be “plunged into a life of profligacy”.<sup>348</sup> There were also concerns that performing might lead to pride and a vain craving for applause, as well as worries about the dissimulation involved in playing a role. For example, the poet, hymnwriter, and sometimes singer Frances Ridley Havergal was dissuaded from playing Jezebel in Mendelssohn's *Elijah* on the grounds that it was a morally unsafe part for a Christian.<sup>349</sup> Nina Auerbach explains that the Victorians had a “cultural passion to preserve all lives from their inherently deceitful potential” and observes that, “It is scarcely possible to be ourselves without acting ourselves, but to be sincere, we must not act”; thus, the theatre

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<sup>346</sup> A.W. “The Theatre; and Can it Be Improved?”, *Christian Observer* 51 (May 1851), 300.

<sup>347</sup> A.W. “The Theatre”, 300.

<sup>348</sup> A.W. “The Theatre”, 300.

<sup>349</sup> Peter Webster, “Evangelicals, Culture and the Arts” in *The Routledge Research Companion to the History of Evangelicalism*, edited by Andrew Atherstone and David Ceri Jones (London: Routledge, 2019), 236.

came to represent “the dangerous potential of theatricality to invade the authenticity of the best self”.<sup>350</sup>

Also, even where plays showed the consequences of sin, they were frowned upon for introducing that sin to the audience in the first place.<sup>351</sup> Dickens, however, took a different view, insisting in an 1860 “Uncommercial Traveller” article about visiting the Britannia Theatre that he was, “pleased to observe Virtue quite as triumphant as she usually is out of doors... We all agreed... that honesty was the best policy, and we were as hard as iron upon Vice...”.<sup>352</sup>

Much of the association between theatre and vice came from a link made between theatres and prostitution. Tracy Davis explains that historically women have been found playing a dual role of prostitute and actress and, although this was not particularly the case in the nineteenth century, anxiety over the link persisted because,

... Victorians recognized that acting and whoring were the occupations of self-sufficient women who plied their trades in public places, and because Victorians believed that actresses’ male colleagues and patrons inevitably complicated transient lifestyles, economic insecurity, and night hours with sexual activity.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Nina Auerbach, *Private Theatricals: The Lives of the Victorians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 8.

<sup>351</sup> Webster, “Evangelicals, Culture and the Arts”, 236.

<sup>352</sup> Charles Dickens, “The Uncommercial Traveller [iii]”, *All the Year Round* II (44) (25 February 1860), 418; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-ii/page-418.html>.

<sup>353</sup> Tracy Davis, “Actresses and Prostitutes in Victorian London”, *Theatre Research International* 13 (3) (Autumn 1988), 221.

However, Davis' argument does not cover all of the concern about immorality as both male and female actors were considered suspect due to their lifestyles and working conditions, making this a wider anxiety than just one about immoral women. Additionally, Davis states, the link between theatre and prostitution in the nineteenth century was further strengthened by theatres often being situated close to places popular with working prostitutes. These women often entered theatres in pursuit of trade and were often not discouraged as long as they caused no trouble.<sup>354</sup> Thus, there was an additional reason for those who disapproved of the practice to worry about the theatre's potential for moral corruption.

Many Evangelicals were "wary of the contamination of the outside world" and "felt most free to relax and have fun when they were at home",<sup>355</sup> where they could ensure high moral standards and proper Christian teaching. These attitudes towards recreation could be seen as examples of attempts to control behaviour and limit enjoyment, while lacking concern for others' wellbeing and happiness, which are both things that we have seen Dickens objecting to when discussing Sabbatarianism and temperance. Another significant influence on his attitude, though, is his love of theatre.

### *Dickens' love of theatre*

Long before he became a writer, Dickens' first love was theatre. He makes this clear in an 1859 letter stating that he "was an actor and a speaker from a baby", before becoming "a great writer at 8 years old or so".<sup>356</sup> Indeed, he made a failed attempt to audition as an actor in 1832, only to be prevented by illness, after which he never tried again, although he

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<sup>354</sup> Davis, "Actresses and Prostitutes", 225-227.

<sup>355</sup> Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture*, 70.

<sup>356</sup> Storey, Brown and Tillotson, *Letters: Nine*, 119.

remained a passionate theatre-goer all his life.<sup>357</sup> He also frequently acted as a producer and stage manager for plays.<sup>358</sup> Many of Dickens' letters refer to him putting on, scripting, stage-managing, and acting in plays on an amateur basis,<sup>359</sup> or to plays he had seen in theatres.<sup>360</sup> Additionally, Dickens had close friendships with many people involved in the theatrical world, especially Wilkie Collins and William Macready, with whom he corresponded and collaborated on various ventures throughout his life. Dickens also showed a positive interest in theatre in his published writings and public readings of his works. He gave approximately 472 readings in both Great Britain and America between 1853 and 1870, which were widely popular. More than just reading aloud, Dickens planned his readings to move audiences from one mood to another, was careful with the set-up and lighting of each scene and used his voice and physical movements to express both his characters and his public persona as an author.<sup>361</sup>

### *Dickens and theatre's reputation*

Dickens himself does not seem to have written directly about theatre's reputation among Evangelicals, but Sala's 1851 *HW* article, "Getting Up a Pantomime", defended actors:

I do honestly think that the theatrical profession and its professors are somewhat calumniated... if a little more were known of how hard-working, industrious, and

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<sup>357</sup> Herb Moskowitz, "Three Actors: An Examination of Charles Dickens' Love of Theatre"; <https://www.charlesdickenspage.com/dickens-and-the-theatre-moskovitz.html>.

<sup>358</sup> See, Forster, *Life*, 184.

<sup>359</sup> See, for example, House, Storey and Tillotson, *Letters: Three*, 370-371.

<sup>360</sup> See, for example, Storey and Tillotson, *Letters: Eight*, 71.

<sup>361</sup> Susan Ferguson, "Dickens's Public Readings and the Victorian Author", *Studies in English Literature* 41 (4) (Autumn 2001), 731.

persevering theatricals, as a body, generally are... we should look upon the drama with a more favourable eye...<sup>362</sup>

The 1865 *ATYR* article, “At the Opening of the Royal Dramatic College” (a home for retired actors), was again positive about actors.<sup>363</sup> The author then criticised those who promoted negative ideas about theatre and actors, referring directly to Evangelical teaching:

In the sphere... in which I imbibed my early ideas, it was broadly inculcated that the theatre was a very wicked place... When I first went to the theatre, on the sly, I had some compunction about it; but not being able to discern any wickedness in connexion with the performance of a beautiful play, in which virtue was rewarded, and vice punished, I dismissed the feeling... actors are not sinners in a greater degree than other classes of society, while in many amiable respects they can lay claim to a larger number of virtues.<sup>364</sup>

Thus, the article absolves actors from the Evangelical charge that they are particularly sinful, instead using personal experience to argue that they are no worse, and in some respects perhaps better, than any other group of people.

A similar approach to actors’ reputations comes in *Pickwick Papers*. Here, “Dismal Jemmy” tells “The Stroller’s Tale”, describing the stroller as “a low pantomime actor; and, like many people of his class, an habitual drunkard”.<sup>365</sup> Drinking has led to poverty and he has a

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<sup>362</sup> George Sala, “Getting Up a Pantomime”, *Household Words* 4 (91) (20 December 1851), 290; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-iv/page-290.html>.

<sup>363</sup> “At the Opening of the Royal Dramatic College”, *All the Year Round* XIII (322) (24 June 1865), 515; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-xiii/page-515.html>.

<sup>364</sup> “At the Opening of the Royal Dramatic College”, 515-516.

<sup>365</sup> Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, 49.

grotesque appearance. Later, the stroller lies ill and afraid of his wife, who he has treated with cruelty and violence, becoming insane before finally dying. This is obviously relevant to Dickens' treatment of drinking, but I have included it here because it concerns an actor. The fact that the narrator of the tale is described as "dismal" suggests that we are not to take his opinion too seriously, in line with Dickens' general emphasis on cheerfulness and good humour, seen especially in this novel's hero, Mr Pickwick. Therefore, we can discount the characterisation of most actors as drunkards in this story.

A different picture of actors appears in the same novel, however, with Mr Jingle, who frequently encounters the Pickwickians. In the words of Paul Schlicke,

For this strolling player all the world truly is a stage, and he exploits his skills as an actor for any audience sufficiently gullible to be taken in by the roles he plays. From his first entrance Jingle's existence is histrionic posturing...<sup>366</sup>

Jingle is deceptive and impudent, a charlatan and a trickster, although his victims are often no better. He ends up being chased by the Pickwickians, winds up in Fleet Prison alongside Pickwick, and ultimately emigrates to Demerara. The journey is financed by Pickwick, but Jingle's treatment seems harsh compared to that of the lawyers Dodson and Fogg, the two other main deceivers in the novel. Jingle is sent off ill, humble, and repentant, while the other two, "exit basking in complacent unrepentance, cheerfully noting down the particulars of Pickwick's denunciation of them in evidence for future legal chicanery".<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Schlicke, *Popular Entertainment*, 44.

<sup>367</sup> Schlicke, *Popular Entertainment*, 45.

Schlicke argues that “this raises unsettling questions about the morality of acting, by implying that role-playing is not gesture but imposture”,<sup>368</sup> since Jingle is shown to be a very different person under his play-acting, while Dodson and Fogg remain unchanged, and the former is punished much more harshly for his actions than the others. This suggests that Dickens is highlighting the importance of sincerity, something which plays a part in his frequent denunciations of hypocrisy, especially in religious contexts. However, Jingle does become a better person in the Fleet. Thus, his ending is partly positive. The portrayal of Jingle may suggest that Dickens shared some concerns about the morality of the acting profession, or it may just indicate that he recognised that good and bad were to be found everywhere, especially given the presence of equally deceiving lawyers. Additionally, none of Jingle’s tricks and deceptions involve his professional work, and we never see him on stage, reducing the link between his job and his character.

A more extensive treatment of actors comes in *Nicholas Nickleby*, with Mr Crummles and his acting troupe. The novel was dedicated to Macready who, as well as being Dickens’ friend, was considered a more respectable kind of actor,<sup>369</sup> and the dedication indicates Dickens’ feelings about both his friend and the theatre. Nicholas encounters Crummles in an inn near Portsmouth after leaving behind the horrors of Dotheboys Hall<sup>370</sup> and is welcomed into the company. In contrast to Mr Squeers, headmaster of Dotheboys Hall, Crummles is generous and welcoming, offering food, drink, and work. Crummles and his company are, admittedly, parodied by Dickens as they “surf upon the clichés of early nineteenth-century melodrama”<sup>371</sup> and “so enjoy the self-display performing allows them that they continually

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<sup>368</sup> Schlicke, *Popular Entertainment*, 45.

<sup>369</sup> See, for more on this, Foulkes, *Church and Stage*, Chapter 3.

<sup>370</sup> A portrayal of the infamous Yorkshire Schools of the nineteenth century.

<sup>371</sup> Mark Ford, “Introduction”, in Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, xxvi.

behave as if in-character even when off-stage”.<sup>372</sup> An example of this comes when Nicholas leaves the company:

... Nicholas was not a little astonished to find himself suddenly clutched in a close and violent embrace, which nearly took him off his legs; nor was his amazement at all lessened by hearing the voice of Mr Crummles exclaim ‘It is he – my friend, my friend!’ ... ‘Farewell, my noble, my lion-hearted boy!’.<sup>373</sup>

Dickens is here satirising the kind of melodramatic over-acting that was popular at the time, but nonetheless Crummles’ emotion is genuine, and his intentions are sincere. As Schlicke notes, “beneath the posturing they [the actors] are figures of instinctive warmth, generosity and kindness”,<sup>374</sup> in contrast to both Nicholas’ own uncle (a greedy, scheming usurer), and the cruel Squeers of Dotheboys Hall. While not without faults and conflicts, the actors are lively, open, warm, and generous, giving a much more positive view of actors than that put forward by critics of the theatre and the acting profession, as well as displaying many features of real Christianity. Finally, although Nicholas eventually leaves the company behind, and is dismissive about them, this has more to do with his desire for social status and respectability than with any faults in actors or their profession.

In another example, Mr Wopsle, the church clerk in *Great Expectations* (1861), shares the Crummles company’s over-theatrical style, for example saying grace “with theatrical declamation”.<sup>375</sup> This is just one of many times when Wopsle is depicted as having thwarted ambition and theatrical leanings, leading to him abandoning his dream of becoming a

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<sup>372</sup> Ford, “Introduction”, xxv.

<sup>373</sup> Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, 381.

<sup>374</sup> Schlicke, *Popular Entertainment*, 79.

<sup>375</sup> Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (London: Penguin, 2003), 25-26.

clergyman in favour of acting. Dickens seems most concerned with pointing out the absurdity of Wopsle's ambitions, culminating in the latter's attempt to play Hamlet, which elicits "peals of laughter"<sup>376</sup> from the audience. Thus, Wopsle is ridiculous but not particularly immoral or harmful, although neither does he display the Crummles' sense of genuine, good-natured companionship. As Schlicke comments, "the derisory nature of the production which seals his doom indicates Dickens's sense of the general level of far too much of the entertainment available at the time he was writing".<sup>377</sup> Indeed, much of Dickens' criticism is aimed at the quality of entertainment, rather than at presumed immorality, as among Evangelicals. Dickens also displayed a dislike of some styles of acting when he wrote to Forster in 1864 complaining that the melodramatic play *Streets of London* was, "...the most depressing instance, without exception, of an utterly degraded and debased theatrical taste that has ever come under my writhing notice".<sup>378</sup> However, again, the criticism revolves around quality, rather than a moral objection to actors themselves, something that displayed all the characteristics of judgementalism and moral superiority which Dickens criticised for perverting Christianity. Dickens also asserted that not only was it narrow-minded and fanatical to condemn all theatre and all actors, but it was also counter-productive as worse would come to take their place. For example, he wrote to his son, Henry, in 1870, saying:

... narrow minded fanatics who decry the Theatre and defame its artists, are absolutely the advocates of depraved and barbarous amusements. For wherever a good drama and a well regulated theatre decline, some distorted form of theatrical entertainment will infallibly arise in their place.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 254.

<sup>377</sup> Schlicke, *Popular Entertainment*, 139.

<sup>378</sup> Storey, Brown and Tillotson, *Letters: Ten*, 434.

<sup>379</sup> Storey, Brown and Tillotson, *Letters: Twelve*, 502; see also, Charles Dickens, "The Amusements of the People [ii]", *Household Words* I (3) (13 April 1850), 59; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-i/page-59.html>.

Dickens, despite his “house for fallen women” (Urania Cottage),<sup>380</sup> and writing about prostitutes in his novels, seems not to have been especially concerned about prostitution in theatres, based on his lack of commentary on it, although this may simply reflect Victorian delicacy about the subject. He did not entirely ignore the subject, though, and in 1840 referred to it in a review for *The Examiner*. Describing the Drury Lane Theatre, he commented, “The entertainment is a very agreeable one, and the theatre is not a temple of obscenity – which (its old-established character in that respect being remembered) is worthy of remark”.<sup>381</sup> The comment alludes to this theatre’s reputation “as a haunt of prostitutes, who would promenade the grand saloon attached to the boxes...”.<sup>382</sup> Dickens appears unconcerned about this reputation, and indeed to consider it overstated. The issue reappeared in 1850 in the second part of the *HW* article “The Amusements of the People”, focusing on the Britannia Saloon. Dickens refers to “a great many very young girls grown into bold women before they had well ceased to be children” in the audience and describes them as “the worst features of the whole crowd”, and “more prominent there than in any other sort of public assembly that we know of, except at a public execution”.<sup>383</sup> This appears to be referencing prostitutes but Dickens passes over this quickly and does not use it to condemn theatre-going as a whole, in contrast to the Evangelical approach of avoiding all potential contact with the morally dubious.

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<sup>380</sup> Urania Cottage was set up by Dickens and Angela Burdett-Coutts for prostitutes with the aim of rehabilitating and training them for new lives in the colonies.

<sup>381</sup> Charles Dickens, “Theatrical Examiner”, *The Examiner* (1840) (26 July 1840), 468.

<sup>382</sup> Charles Dickens, *Dickens’ Journalism: Volume 2 ‘The Amusements of the People’ and Other Papers: Reports, Essays and Reviews 1834-51*, edited by Michael Slater. Dent Uniform Edition. (London: J. M. Dent, 1997), 41.

<sup>383</sup> Charles Dickens, “The Amusements of the People [ii]”, 57.

An 1852 *HW* article by Edmund Saul Dixon, called “More Work for the Ladies”, does acknowledge the moral concerns raised by prostitutes working in theatres, though. (The “more work” referred to allowing women to take on more jobs traditionally held only by men.) However, Dixon does not use this as a reason to avoid such places altogether or to condemn theatres for moral degeneracy. Instead, he argues for better policing of theatres, as in France:

... none of the sad and shameless creatures... are suffered to annoy the public in such places... England talks loudly of her morality; but England cannot attain to this degree of mere common propriety. Mr. Macready, to his honour, set the example.<sup>384</sup>

Dixon thus aligns with Dickens’ dislike of sweeping moral judgements about whole sections of the population when in his view a Christian people should be more tolerant, kind, and generous in its attitudes. Similarly, in the previously mentioned “Uncommercial Traveller” article, Dickens describes the Britannia Saloon as possessing “a general air of consideration, decorum, and supervision, most commendable”.<sup>385</sup> This he puts down to the management and layout of the theatre, thus again suggesting that any unsavoury aspects of the theatre are simply due to poor management, as well as rejecting judgementalism or ideas of automatic moral superiority. The audience itself, containing many working-class people, is described as including “persons of very decent appearance, who had many children with them” and, while many of the audience were “not at all clean and not at all choice in... lives or conversation”, they were “closely attentive, and kept excellent order”.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Edmund Dixon, “More Work for the Ladies”, *Household Words* VI (130) (18 September 1852), 21; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-vi/page-21.html>; Macready was manager of both the Drury Lane and Covent Garden theatres and ended the practice of allowing prostitutes entrance.

<sup>385</sup> Dickens, “Uncommercial Traveller [iii]”, 417.

<sup>386</sup> Dickens, “Uncommercial Traveller [iii]”, 418.

More directly regarding prostitution, Dickens is well-known for his portrayals of prostitutes in novels, most famously Nancy in *Oliver Twist* and Little Em'ly in *David Copperfield*. Both women are depicted sympathetically but also with awareness of their crime as a serious one. Little Em'ly's disappearance from the book thus mirrors her position as a social outcast,<sup>387</sup> while Nancy meets a grisly end among the criminal underworld in which she lives. Dickens portrayed this same combination of sympathy and censure in his work at Urania Cottage. An untitled pamphlet, which he wrote for distribution to women arrested by the police with the aim of encouraging them to come to the home, told the women that they could find there,

...friends, a quiet home, means of being useful to yourself and others, peace of mind, self-respect... I am going to offer you... the certainty of all these blessings, if you will exert yourself to deserve them... I mean nothing but kindness to you, and I write as if you were my sister.<sup>388</sup>

With Urania Cottage Dickens lived out his faith by helping those who he saw as fallen and in need of rescue in a spirit of Christian charity, rather than simply judging them. However, he still expected them to change their lives, thus showing he had a sense of sin and moral uprightness, in contrast to those researchers who have claimed otherwise (expanded on in Section 4). The mention of kindness in the quotation above also reveals the importance of this quality in Dickens' view of how Christians should act. However, he was also sure that these women could not be restored to society in their own country, and stressed the need for honest

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<sup>387</sup> Jane Rogers, "How Did Dickens Deal with Prostitution in his Novels? Little Em'ly in *David Copperfield*"; <https://victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/rogers/4.html>.

<sup>388</sup> Charles Dickens, "[An Appeal to Fallen Women]", in Storey and Fielding, *Letters: Volume Five*, 698.

repentance, along with a reminder to these women of divine judgement should they fail, and a reference to Christ's saving death:

... after they have repented and learned to do their duty... they will be supplied with every means... to go abroad, where... they may become the faithful wives of honest men, and live and die in peace... But you must solemnly remember that if you enter this Home without such constant resolutions, you will occupy, unworthily and uselessly, the place of some other unhappy girl, now wandering and lost; and that her ruin, no less than your own, will be upon your head, before Almighty God, who knows the secrets of our breasts; and Christ, who died upon the Cross to save us.<sup>389</sup>

Dickens' conviction that the only hope for these women was to start a new life in another country contrasts with the titular Ruth in Elizabeth Gaskell's novel. There, Ruth, a prostitute, is the heroine of the story, and is redeemed through family, motherhood, female solidarity, and ultimately a sacrificial death.<sup>390</sup> This shows that Dickens' harsher approach was not the only possibility for fallen women, and here he seems to be espousing a moralism that is closer to strict Evangelicalism than he might have recognised.

However, great controversy surrounded Mrs Gaskell's novel, including burning copies of the book. Given such reactions to the idea of restoring fallen women to normal family life, Dickens may have felt that leniency would cause problems for him and the home, including its residents, and attempted to avoid this by sending the women abroad. Dickens' approach is also similar to the way he treats Jingle in *Pickwick Papers*, though, who similarly leaves for

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<sup>389</sup> Dickens, "[An Appeal to Fallen Women]", 698.

<sup>390</sup> Rachel Webster, "'I think I must be an improper woman without knowing it': Fallenness and Unitarianism in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*", *Victorian Network* 4 (2) (Winter 2012), 10-28; italics in original.

another country in order to live a new life, as discussed above, as if his crimes are too great for forgiveness at home. This suggests that for Dickens there were crimes and misdemeanours which necessitated leaving everything behind for any chance at restoration, reinforcing the idea that he did take the Christian concepts of sin and judgement seriously, despite his own emphasis on kindness and mercy as vital elements of the faith.

Dickens also wrote in January 1854 regarding a resident of the home who was in danger of ejection for misbehaviour:

How horrible, then, to know... that she can be so extraordinarily wicked as under that roof which alone protects her from the great black world of Crime and Shame... I pity this unfortunate creature... But how can I reconcile it to myself to allow her to occupy... the place which a grateful girl sincerely trying to reform herself... would be glad and happy to fill... However, at this forgiving Christmas time... Let her stay... And let it be distinctly known... that the object of the Home is, to save young women who wish to save themselves.<sup>391</sup>

Thus, there is ambivalence in Dickens' attitude towards these women. There is sympathy and a desire to help, as we would expect from a man concerned with the victims of poverty and distress, which many of these women were, and from someone focused on kindness, charity, understanding, and tolerance. However, he also shares some of his contemporaries' disapproval and censure of these women. This is despite his own not entirely spotless reputation in this area. While there is not much direct evidence for Dickens using prostitutes, he did write the following in an August 1841 letter: "There are conveniences of all kinds at

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<sup>391</sup> Storey, Brown and Tillotson, *Letters: Twelve: Appendix A: Addenda and Corrigenda to Volumes I-XI*, 654.

Margate (do you take me?) and I know where they live”.<sup>392</sup> So, perhaps personal experience also helped to soften Dickens’ stance. Additionally, he appears to have ignored the failed 1844 *Brothel Suppression Bill* introduced by the bishop of Exeter, even though this gave rise to accusations of hypocrisy – one of Dickens’ most-condemned vices – due to brothels existing on property belonging to the dean and chapter of Westminster Abbey.<sup>393</sup> This again may indicate his ambivalence about the existence of prostitutes.

Apart from prostitution, other criticisms of indecency were levelled at the theatre. For example, in 1869, in the light of how popular the cancan dance had become in music halls, and ensuing complaints about decency, the lord chamberlain sent a circular to managers in January 1869 about indecency on the stage. In response, an article in three parts, including six “reports”, was published in *ATYR* in March 1869, written by someone styling himself a “volunteer commissioner” of the lord chamberlain. The author touches on the arguments that followed the lord chamberlain’s remarks, before questioning the idea that morals are worsening in the theatre world, and that this is negatively impacting society. He defends theatre from charges of lowering morality on the grounds that it is merely mirroring society:

The state of the theatre fairly reflects... the state of the society of the day; at any rate, the tone of the stage is in a great degree derived from the tone of the audiences—each reacts upon the other; and, if mischief be done, it is difficult to apportion the blame among the parties concerned.<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Storey, Tillotson and Easson, *Letters: Seven: Addenda to Volumes I-VI*, 831.

<sup>393</sup> Emily Baylor, “Bishops, Brothels and Byron: Hypocrisy and the 1844 Brothel Suppression Bill”, *Studies in Church History* 60 (2024), 408.

<sup>394</sup> “To the Lord Chamberlain. The Reports of a Volunteer Commissioner. Six in Number. Report the First”, *All the Year Round*, n.s., 1 (14) (6 March 1869), 324-325; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-i-new-series/page-324.html>.

Therefore, the article suggests, it is unfair to blame theatre alone for a wider social phenomenon and it rejects judgementalism, in line with Dickens' dislike of the practice.

The second part appeared in the following issue. It recognises that music halls are changing, and not always for the better in terms of quality, but still insists that there is nothing to worry about. It does criticise comic singers but rejects the charge of indecency against them: "He is nearly always vulgar, not unfrequently coarse; but he is never indecent".<sup>395</sup> Thus, again, the charge of worsening morals is rejected in favour of a more balanced approach that eschews judgementalism.

In the final part the author reports on various East End theatres, stating that they are pleasanter, and the audiences and performances more decorous, than he has been told. Thus, he argues that there is nothing inherently immoral in these more working-class places of entertainment:

The audience were very quiet and appreciative, and the pantomime afforded extreme delight... Your Commissioner is unable to report that he has any fault to find with the costumes of any of the dramatic company. Neither was there anything in the proceedings of the clowns calling for extraordinary remark.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> "To the Lord Chamberlain. The Reports of a Volunteer Commissioner. Six in Number. Report the Third". *All the Year Round*, n.s., 1 (15) (13 March 1869), 350.

<sup>396</sup> "To the Lord Chamberlain. The Reports of a Volunteer Commissioner. Six in Number. Report the Fifth", *All the Year Round*, n.s., 1 (16) (20 March 1869), 373-374; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-i-new-series/page-373.html>.

The author does caution against burlesque, but only because it is uninteresting, “almost always slangy and occasionally disagreeable”, and not on the grounds of indecency.<sup>397</sup> Finally, in a way that points to hypocrisy on the part of complainers, he further remarks that, “... leg pieces are not the invention of the present epoch, and Your Commissioner has faint remembrance of an Opera House near the Haymarket, in which... such things have been seen ere now by some of your Lordship's friends..”.<sup>398</sup> In summary, he states, “Your Commissioner now, recalling his experiences, begs to say that he is unable to report the existence of stage indecency, such as is suggested by your Lordship's circular”.<sup>399</sup> The extensive treatment of this subject reveals how important it was to Dickens. The article argues that while the theatre is not beyond reproach it is not uniquely immoral or outrageous to public decency, thus rejecting judgementalism and the outcry by those who consider themselves more moral than others and refuse to see the good that theatre could bring to people, in terms of both entertainment and education.

### *Improving entertainment*

Most of Dickens’ commentary on theatre in general revolves around its role in entertainment and education. Imagination and fantasy were important to Dickens, and he considered them vital to a full human life.<sup>400</sup> Thus, the first part of “The Amusements of the People” (1850) stated:

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<sup>397</sup> “To the Lord Chamberlain. The Reports of a Volunteer Commissioner. Six in Number. Report the Sixth”, *All the Year Round*, n.s., 1 (16) (20 March 1869), 374; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-i-new-series/page-374.html>.

<sup>398</sup> “To the Lord Chamberlain. Report the Sixth”, 375.

<sup>399</sup> “To the Lord Chamberlain. Report the Sixth”, 375.

<sup>400</sup> See, Charles Dickens, “Frauds on the Fairies”, *Household Words* VIII (184) (1 October 1853), 97-100.

It is probable that nothing will ever root out from among the common people an innate love they have for dramatic entertainment in some form or other. It would be a very doubtful benefit to society, we think, if it could be rooted out... There is a range of imagination in most of us, which no amount of steam-engines will satisfy... The lower we go, the more natural it is that the best-relished provision for this should be found in dramatic entertainments; as at once the most obvious, the least troublesome, and the most real, of all escapes out of the literal world.<sup>401</sup>

Rather than taking the Evangelical line that theatre is entirely unnecessary and negative, Dickens sees it as satisfying an important human need for escape from the real world into fantasy. This is especially important for the working classes, who have little else, and reflects once again how Dickens' social concern intertwines with his Christian desire to do good for others.

The *HW* article "Shakspeare [*sic*] and Newgate" (1851) continued this theme. Credited jointly to Dickens and Richard Horne, it discussed ways of improving the experience and reputation of the theatre. It began by reaffirming Dickens' belief in the importance of entertainment as an escape from harsh living conditions:

There are not many things of which the English as a people stand in greater need than sound rational amusement. As a necessary element in any popular education worthy of the name; as a wholesome incentive to the fancy, depressed by the business of life;

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<sup>401</sup> Charles Dickens, "The Amusements of the People [i]", *Household Words* I (1) (30 March 1850), 13; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-i/page-13.html>.

as a rest and relief from realities that are not and never can be all-sufficient for the mind,—sound rational public amusement is very much indeed to be desired.<sup>402</sup>

This article repudiates the Evangelical insistence that recreation outside of the home is unnecessary by focusing on the good it does for the overworked and poor. It also contradicts the idea that the theatre promotes sin and vice by claiming that “a well-conducted Theatre is a good place in which to learn good things”.<sup>403</sup> The Sadler’s Wells Theatre is then used as an example. The article admits that this theatre had been “a bear-garden, resounding with foul language, oaths, catcalls, shrieks, yells, blasphemy, obscenity... Fights took place anywhere, at any period of the performance”.<sup>404</sup> However, through good management under Samuel Phelps, and putting on high drama, well-performed, the audience, “have desired to show their appreciation of such care, and have studied the plays from the books, and have really come to the Theatre for their intellectual profit”.<sup>405</sup> Consequently, far from theatre being in itself a cause of sin and something to be avoided by good Christians, the blame for theatre’s negative reputation is placed on how theatres are run, the kinds of plays that are performed in them, and on the quality of performances. This directly contradicts the Evangelical position exemplified by Burder which condemns all theatre-going and acting as inevitably promoting sin. It also reveals again Dickens’ dislike of sweeping judgements and all-encompassing moral condemnation without working to discover and resolve the root causes of problems in a spirit of Christian charity and kindness.

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<sup>402</sup> Charles Dickens and Richard H. Horne, “Shakspeare and Newgate”, *Household Words* IV (80) (4 October 1851), 25; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-iv/page-25.html>.

<sup>403</sup> Dickens and Horne, “Shakspeare and Newgate”, 25.

<sup>404</sup> Dickens and Horne, “Shakspeare and Newgate”, 25.

<sup>405</sup> Dickens and Horne, “Shakspeare and Newgate”, 27.

Due to his insistence on the need for theatrical entertainment, Dickens was also critical of the licensing system for theatres, which restricted the entertainment available. Therefore, he argued in the second part of “The Amusements of the People” that ordinary people should be free to enjoy their entertainments rather than taking the Evangelical approach of trying to suppress them:

We will add that we believe these people have a right to be amused. A great deal that we consider to be unreasonable, is written and talked about not licensing these places of entertainment. We have already intimated that we believe a love of dramatic representations to be an inherent principle in human nature. In most conditions of human life of which we have any knowledge, from the Greeks to the Bosjesmen,<sup>406</sup> some form of dramatic representation has always obtained.<sup>407</sup>

In the same article, however, he reveals a wish to see such entertainment used to improve people. He argues:

We had far better apply ourselves to improving the character of their amusement. It would not be exacting much, or exacting anything very difficult, to require that the pieces represented in these Theatres should have, at least, a good, plain, healthy purpose in them.<sup>408</sup>

In this, Dickens is sharing in the Evangelical desire that there should be improving entertainment and leisure time, but without wanting to stop theatre because of its negative

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<sup>406</sup> A word used by Dutch colonialists to refer to indigenous inhabitants of southern Africa.

<sup>407</sup> Dickens, “Amusements of the People [ii]”, 58.

<sup>408</sup> Dickens, “Amusements of the People [ii]”, 59.

elements. Rather, he wishes to improve it in such a way that it will lift people up out of negative behaviours, thus restoring and helping, not condemning and suppressing. Indeed, Dickens wrote approvingly to the poet and dramatist John Westland Marston about his work in this vein, stating:

... you have with great utility and manfully setting yourself against every discouragement inseparable from the present condition of the stage, endeavoured to restore to it an English Drama, sound and pure in tone, and poetical in form and spirit... I conceive this to be a great literary service rendered to the community.<sup>409</sup>

Therefore, Dickens did criticise theatre which he felt was in poor taste and did not provide improving entertainment and education. For example, before Wopsle begins playing Hamlet in *Great Expectations* Dickens satirically points to the absurdity of expecting to learn about other countries from their depictions in English theatre:

On our arrival in Denmark, we found the king and queen of that country elevated in two arm-chairs on a kitchen-table, holding a Court. The whole of Danish nobility were in attendance; consisting of a noble boy in the wash-leather boots of a gigantic ancestor, a venerable Peer with a dirty face who seemed to have risen from the people late in life, and the Danish chivalry with a comb in its hair and a pair of white silk legs, and presenting on the whole a feminine appearance.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> Storey, Brown and Tillotson, *Letters: Ten*, 136; see also, Storey, Brown and Tillotson, *Letters: Twelve*, 469.

<sup>410</sup> Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 253.

The same theme appears in Dickens' 1850 *HW* article "Mr Booley's View of the Last Lord Mayor's Show". Booley makes a ridiculous claim that he has learnt a great deal about the world from visiting Astley's Amphitheatre:

... he had acquired a knowledge of Tartar Tribes, and also of Wild Indians, and Chinese, which had greatly enlightened him as to the habits of those singular races of men... they were always hoarse... they took equestrian exercise in a most irrational manner, riding up staircases and precipices without the least necessity... it was impossible for them to dance... without keeping time with their forefingers... whenever their castles were on fire... numbers of them immediately tumbled down dead, without receiving any wound or blow, while others, previously distinguished in war, fell an easy prey to the comic coward of the opposite faction....<sup>411</sup>

The idea of improvement was additionally seen in the first part of "The Amusements of the People" with a reference to "Polytechnic institutions" which fit people only for work without concern for other aspects of their lives. This implicitly criticises a utilitarian approach that would see people only exposed to "useful" information and education. In Dickens' well-known dislike of utilitarianism, he can be considered close to Evangelical thought. As Jay argues, Evangelicalism offered an alternative to the utilitarian philosophy that dominated this industrialising society since "Utilitarianism thought the interests of the individual and of the community should be identical",<sup>412</sup> while "Evangelicalism's emphasis on a personal relationship with God, its rejection of the corporate authority of the Church, and the premium it placed upon the individual's judgement assured a man of a significance frequently denied

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<sup>411</sup> Charles Dickens, "Mr Booley's View of the Last Lord Mayor's Show", *Household Words* II (36) (30 November 1850), 217; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-ii/page-217.html>.

<sup>412</sup> Jay, *Religion of the Heart*, 7.

him in secular society”.<sup>413</sup> However, Dickens differed from Evangelicals in that, instead of trying to keep people away from the theatre, he argued for entertainment that both improved people’s moral and intellectual lives and recognised the need for qualities such as imagination and sympathy. Thus, he continues in in this article by saying:

Heavily taxed, wholly unassisted by the State, deserted by the gentry, and quite unrecognised as a means of public instruction, the higher English Drama has declined. Those who would live to please Mr. Whelks, must please Mr. Whelks to live... It required no close observation of the attentive faces... to impress a stranger with a sense of its being highly desirable to lose no possible chance of effecting any mental improvement in that great audience.<sup>414</sup>

Dickens’ most extensive treatment of utilitarianism comes in *Hard Times*, where the teacher Mr Gradgrind and the industrialist Mr Bounderby are contrasted with Sissy Juke and the circus troupe. The two men are committed to the utilitarian cause and lack warmth and humanity. For example, Gradgrind refers to Sissy as “Girl number twenty”.<sup>415</sup> Bounderby, meanwhile, neglects his workers, being only concerned with wealth and power, and he meets all requests from them, however reasonable, with accusations that they wish to be “set up in a coach and six, and to be fed on turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon”.<sup>416</sup> Ultimately, the disasters that befall Gradgrind’s eldest children are traced to the former’s rigid insistence on facts only, with no place for emotion, sympathy, or imagination. For example, when Gradgrind expresses shock at his son, Thomas, robbing a bank the latter replies: ““I don’t see

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<sup>413</sup> Jay, *Religion of the Heart*, 7.

<sup>414</sup> Dickens, “Amusements of the People [i]”, 13-14.

<sup>415</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, 10.

<sup>416</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, 72.

why... so many people, out of many, will be dishonest, I have heard you talk... of its being a law. How can I help laws?’’’.<sup>417</sup>

Sissy, however, displays virtues that utilitarians lack. Her story begins in a circus troupe, with the disappearance of her father. Although the reason for his leaving is not given, it is suggested that he is facing ruin and does not wish to bring Sissy down with him. Bounderby immediately assumes that the absent father is a “runaway rogue and a vagabond”,<sup>418</sup> reflecting popular prejudices against performers and the common judgementalism that Dickens rejected as contrary to the spirit of Christianity. The other circus performers care for Sissy and are good people despite their unconventional lifestyle:

They all assumed to be mighty rakish and knowing, they were not very tidy in their private dresses, they were not at all orderly in their domestic arrangements, and the combined literature of the whole company would have produced but a poor letter on any subject. Yet there was a remarkable gentleness and childishness about these people, a special inaptitude for any kind of sharp practice, and an untiring readiness to help and pity one another, deserving, often of as much respect and always of as much generous construction, as the everyday virtues of any class of people in the world.<sup>419</sup>

Thus, the troupe displays many of the virtues central to Dickens’ concept of Christianity. Despite their shortcomings, they are gentle, innocent, kind, and loving, thus displaying many Christian virtues.

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<sup>417</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, 274.

<sup>418</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, 37.

<sup>419</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, 40.

Sissy ends up living with Gradgrind but does not lose her sympathy and kindness. When the marriage of Gradgrind's daughter, Louisa, collapses, having been based on utilitarian principles, not love, Sissy comforts Louisa despite the latter's mistreatment of her. Sissy thus displays Christian charity and forgiveness. Despite her unconventional upbringing and indulgence in fancy, and her upbringing among people considered by many to lack morality, Sissy is kinder, more human, and more virtuous than the more respectable, conventional, and utilitarian figures in the story. Finally, the lispng circus manager, Mr Sleary, helps Gradgrind get Thomas to safety, showing kindness and mercy even though Gradgrind disapproves of him and his entertainments. He also urges Gradgrind to reconsider the importance of entertainment:

People mutht be amuthed. They can't be alwayth a learning, nor yet they can't be alwayth a working, they an't made for it. You *mutht* have uth, Thquire. Do the withe thing and the kind thing too, and make the betht of uth; not the wurtht!<sup>420</sup>

Dickens clearly does not hold with demonising actors and other performers but wishes to assert the goodness and necessity of allowing people entertainment and fancy, pointing to the existence of virtue among people of many kinds.

I have shown in this section that Dickens frequently criticised Evangelical behaviours and practices. However, Evangelicalism was not the only expression of Christianity which drew criticism from Dickens. He also turned his focus on Catholicism, and so the following section considers how Dickens reacted to that expression of faith.

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<sup>420</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times*, 282.

## Section 3: Catholicism

### 3.1 Introduction and research questions

Catholicism greatly engaged Dickens, especially in his magazines and non-fiction books, and particularly as the position of Catholics was beginning to change in England. Dickens' interactions with both Roman Catholics and Catholic elements in the Church of England are less discussed in the literature compared to Evangelicalism, with a few exceptions, including Mark Eslick<sup>421</sup> and William Long.<sup>422</sup> However, Dickens' strong feelings on the denomination tell us much about his own faith. The smaller amount of discussion on Dickens and Catholicism may be a side-effect of the critical focus on novels, as only *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) concentrates on Catholicism, whereas Evangelicals appear in several novels. This means, though, that the anti-Catholicism in *Pictures*, *A Child's History*, and the letters and magazine articles, can be overlooked. This is important because many of the historical restrictions on Roman Catholic lives and worship were being lifted. This led in some quarters to anxiety and even hostility, due to old fears about Catholic influence in Protestant England. Therefore, despite being small in number, Catholicism led to important religious, political, and social debate during Dickens' life, and the author often criticised the faith harshly. However, there is also a dearth of recent studies specifically focusing on British Catholicism,

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<sup>421</sup> See, for example, Mark Eslick, "Charles Dickens: Anti-Catholicism and Catholicism" (PhD thesis, University of York, 2011).

<sup>422</sup> William F. Long, "'Mr Charles Dickens on Catholicism'", *The Dickensian* 115 (509) (Winter 2019), 252-267.

with the exception of Roy Hattersley's helpful 2017 book,<sup>423</sup> and this lack may also play a part in the lesser focus on Dickens' Catholicism.

I showed in Section 2 that Dickens criticised hypocrisy, measures which harmed the poor, and harsh interpretations of faith. These he saw as perverting Christianity by reducing freedom, joy, and generosity, and by placing doctrine and theology above living faith out by displaying Christian virtues. His criticisms of Roman Catholicism are sometimes similar to those of Evangelicalism, but he also focused on authoritarianism in the Catholic hierarchy, aspects of Catholic worship, ritual, art and architecture, and religious violence.

Similarly to the Evangelicalism section, I will consider the following questions in this discussion of Catholicism:

- What were the characteristics of nineteenth-century Catholicism and how did they affect Dickens' view of Catholics?
- Why was Catholicism an important topic to Dickens?
- What elements of Catholicism did Dickens particularly object to, and why?
- What exceptions are there to Dickens' general criticisms of Catholicism?

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<sup>423</sup> Roy Hattersley. *The Catholics: The Church and Its People in Britain and Ireland, from the Reformation to the Present Day* (London: Vintage, 2018); prior to this, the main study found is Edward Norman's *The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

However, first, I will briefly look at legislative, social, religious, historical, and national-identity factors affecting Catholics to reveal the context of nineteenth-century anti-Catholicism. This will help clarify why and how Catholics at this time found themselves in the position that they did, and what their presence raised in the minds of many English Protestants.

### 3.2 English Catholicism and Protestant national identity

The Reformation marked the beginning of England coming to see itself as a nation whose self and liberty was bound up in its Protestantism. However, as Linda Connors and Mary Lu MacDonald state, if one of the elements of English national identity is Protestantism, then “the true Briton must be... zealously Protestant... But how can this definition of national identity be modified to accommodate a Catholic...?”.<sup>424</sup> For centuries, the answer was that Catholics could not be included in a Protestant nation but must be suppressed. This was only strengthened by England seeing itself as historically threatened by neighbouring strong Catholic powers, not least France,<sup>425</sup> combined with longstanding worries that the Protestant monarchy might be forcibly replaced with a Catholic one. Thus, while divisions existed between Protestant groups, these did not approach the depth of the split between Protestant and Catholic,<sup>426</sup> based on both religious and political factors.

We can trace the start of anti-Catholic legislation to the 1534 *Act of Supremacy*, which proclaimed Henry VIII head of the English Church, backed up by the *Treason Act* of the

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<sup>424</sup> Linda Connors and Mary Lu MacDonald, *National Identity in Great Britain and British North America, 1815-1851: The Role of Nineteenth-Century Periodicals* (London: Routledge, 2016), 9.

<sup>425</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), xx.

<sup>426</sup> Colley, *Britons*, xx.

same year, which included a prohibition on denying the monarch any of his titles and on referring to him as a heretic or infidel. The *Act of Supremacy* thus made loyalty to the pope an act of treason, as the papacy claimed both spiritual and political power over its followers. Catholic allegiance to a foreign leader and identification with an international community that commanded its own loyalty made them unique in the country,<sup>427</sup> and objects of suspicion. Therefore, “Catholicism gradually came to be represented as incompatible with Englishness and loyalty to the Crown...”.<sup>428</sup> This suspicion about Catholic loyalties was later reinforced by plots and events ranging from the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 all the way up to the conversion of John Henry Newman and others to Roman Catholicism and the restoration of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in 1850.<sup>429</sup>

An array of anti-Catholic legislation reinforced suppression of Roman Catholicism in England, often spurred on by real or imagined plots against the Protestant establishment or, as in the case of the Catholic Mary I, in reaction to attempted suppression of Protestantism through violence.<sup>430</sup> Sixteenth-century Acts made Elizabeth I governor of the Church of England and barred Catholics from public office (*Act of Supremacy*, 1559), made attendance at Anglican services compulsory and restricted the use of ornaments in worship, effectively banning the Mass (*Act of Uniformity*, 1559), seized Catholic land (*Recusancy Act*, 1587), and restricted Catholics to mostly staying within five miles of their homes (*Act Against Recusants*, 1593). Anti-Catholic fears were also boosted by Pope Pius V’s 1570 papal bull,

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<sup>427</sup> Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914*. Social History in Perspective. (London: Macmillan Education, 1996), 42.

<sup>428</sup> Laurence Lux-Sterritt, “The Scandalous Nun: Anti-Catholic Representations of English Nuns in Exile in the Seventeenth Century”, in *Anti-Catholicism in Britain and Ireland, 1600-2000: Practices, Representations and Ideas*, edited by Claire Gheeraert-Graffeuille and Geraldine Vaughan (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 145-146.

<sup>429</sup> Maria Poggi Johnson, “How Complete an Overthrow: Religious Conversion and National Character in Some Nineteenth Century Novels of Ancient Britain”, *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 85 (3) (September 2016), 289-305.

<sup>430</sup> Hattersley, *Catholics*, 101.

*Regnans in Excelsis*, one year after the unsuccessful Rising of the North, which had attempted to depose Elizabeth I in favour of Mary Queen of Scots. The papal bull “excommunicated Elizabeth and made treason against her the obligation of all good Catholics”.<sup>431</sup> Therefore, while attempting to encourage Catholic revolution in England, Pius V enabled Protestants to “claim, on the authority of the Pope, that every Catholic was a traitor and potential regicide”.<sup>432</sup> Anti-Catholic fears were especially strong regarding Jesuits, and this attitude persisted into the nineteenth century. Thus, the 1585 *Act Against Jesuits and Seminarists* required all priests and Jesuits to leave the country or face charges of high treason, as well as making it illegal to shelter Jesuits or Catholic clergy. Further, non-Jesuits who had attended Jesuit seminaries overseas were required to return to England to swear an oath of obedience or face penalties for high treason

Moving into the seventeenth century, the Main and Bye plots of 1603, although ineffective, were considered proof that Catholics were still actively attempting to dethrone the monarch.<sup>433</sup> Then, following the much more serious Gunpowder Plot, the 1605 *Popish Recusants Act* banned Catholics from certain professions and from being guardians or trustees, as well as permitting searches of their homes for arms. A new oath of allegiance denied the pope’s power to depose monarchs, all were required to take communion in an Anglican church at least once a year, and obeying the pope rather than the king became high treason. The Gunpowder Plot’s long-lasting effect can be seen in the fact that until 1859 the *Book of Common Prayer* contained a “Form of prayer with Thanksgiving to be used yearly upon the Fifth day of *November*. For the happy deliverance of the King, and the Three Estates of the Realm, from the most Traiterous and Bloudy intended Massacre by Gun-powder”.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> Hattersley, *Catholics*, 131.

<sup>432</sup> Hattersley, *Catholics*, 131.

<sup>433</sup> Hattersley, *Catholics*, 175.

<sup>434</sup> Cummings (ed.), “The Book of Common-Prayer [1662]”, in *The Book of Common Prayer*, 652.

Later, the 1698 *Popery Act* strengthened previous anti-Catholic laws due to a fear that Roman Catholic numbers were growing, even though Catholics only made up 1.1% of the population in 1680 and 1.3% in 1720.<sup>435</sup> Nevertheless, the Act further outlawed Catholic education, inheritance, and land acquisition. More positively, though, it alleviated some of the provisions of the *Act Against Jesuits and Seminarists*. Anti-Catholic legislation continued into the early-eighteenth century, following the 1715 Jacobite Rising, with the *Papists Act* of the same year forcing Catholics to register their names and estates. Another *Papists Act* in 1722, passed following the Atterbury Plot, then forced landowners to swear oaths of allegiance, supremacy, and abjuration.

All of the above aimed to reduce the perceived Catholic “threat” by denying liberties to Catholics. However, the 1778 *Catholic Relief Act* began reversing this by allowing Catholics to own land and serve in the army. According to Hattersley, this was primarily due to Britain’s need for more soldiers to fight in the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), since allowing Catholics (particularly from Ireland) to serve in the army would boost numbers.<sup>436</sup> It was not a popular move, leading to the infamous Gordon Riots<sup>437</sup> of 1780, which provide the setting for Dickens’ *Barnaby Rudge* (see Section 3.6). However, it has been argued that the riots were more reflective of social tensions than actual anti-Catholicism, with Horace Walpole remarking in a letter that “negligence was certainly its nurse, and religion only its godmother”.<sup>438</sup> The Gordon Riots also ultimately helped to reduce anti-

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<sup>435</sup> Clive Field, “Counting Religion in England and Wales: The Long Eighteenth Century, c. 1680 – c. 1840”, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 63 (4) (October 2012), 711.

<sup>436</sup> Hattersley, *Catholics*, 281.

<sup>437</sup> These involved massive rioting in London from 2-9 June 1780, under the leadership of the politician Lord George Gordon, also head of the Protestant Association, which was formed in protest at the *Catholic Relief Act*.

<sup>438</sup> Horace Walpole, “Letter 196 To The Rev. Mr. Cole”, in *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford: In Four Volumes. Volume IV. 1770-1797* (Philadelphia, PA: Lea and Blanchard, 1842), 253.

Catholicism, as their violence disturbed more moderate anti-Catholics,<sup>439</sup> as reflected in *Barnaby Rudge*. This dislike of anti-Catholic violence perhaps helped with passing the 1791 *Roman Catholic Relief Act*, which allowed freedom of worship and Roman Catholic schools. It also permitted Catholics to live in London and take up junior public offices, among other things. The loyalty of Catholic soldiers in the American Revolutionary War, combined with a decline in Jacobitism, further softened attitudes towards Catholics in the late-eighteenth century and helped pave the way to reducing penalties on them.<sup>440</sup>

According to Maria Purves, however, the main element in changing English views of Catholics in the 1790s was the French Revolution and Napoleonic era, when, “The persecution of the Catholic clergy in France and the consequent de-Christianization of the nation drove thousands of recusant priests and a few hundred monastics to English shores, where they were charitably received”.<sup>441</sup> Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was also influential since he turned the persecution of French Catholics into a wider conflict between Christianity and the forces of secularism and impiety,<sup>442</sup> and downplayed England’s Protestantism by stressing the idea of an unbroken Christian tradition going back to the Middle Ages.<sup>443</sup> Thus, England experienced a growing sense that supporting those fleeing the French Revolution meant supporting monarchy, tradition, religion, and stability. This was further bolstered by sympathy for French Catholic clergy suffering under the revolutionary government.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> John Wolffe, “Conclusion: Taking the Long View of Anti-Catholicism”, in *Anti-Catholicism in Britain and Ireland, 1600-2000: Practices, Representations and Ideas*, edited by Claire Gheeraert-Graffeuille and Geraldine Vaughan (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 294.

<sup>440</sup> Maria Purves, *The Gothic and Catholicism: Religion, Cultural Exchange and the Popular Novel, 1785-1829* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), 26.

<sup>441</sup> Purves, *Gothic and Catholicism*, 28.

<sup>442</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France: And on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to That Event: In a Letter Intended to Have Been Sent to a Gentleman in Paris*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: J. Dodsley, 1790), 135.

<sup>443</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, 148; similarly to the future Oxford Movement (Section 3.3.2).

<sup>444</sup> Purves, *Gothic and Catholicism*, 30.

As the above brief survey shows, the Roman Catholic Church faced centuries of persecution and suppression in England following the Reformation. By the end of the eighteenth century, things were changing, but the country still retained longstanding memories of plots (both real and imagined), Catholic persecution of Protestants, and political interference in English affairs. These increased the effectiveness of anti-Catholic propaganda and served to maintain a suspicion of Roman Catholics across English society that helped to shape nineteenth-century attitudes and reactions to changes in the position of English Catholics.

### **3.3 English Catholicism in the nineteenth century**

Seeing the lessening of civil and religious disabilities relating to Roman Catholics, which continued into the nineteenth century, may suggest a smooth progression in Catholic freedom and a lessening of Protestant-Catholic conflict. Indeed, the nineteenth century was once described by Kenneth Scott Latourette as a time of “relative calm... between the chief schools of Christianity”.<sup>445</sup> However, as Walter Arnstein has noted, while the often-bloody religious conflicts of earlier centuries had ended,<sup>446</sup> real concerns and reactions were roused by growing Roman Catholic influence and numbers within staunchly Protestant communities. One such influence came from increasing numbers of Irish Catholics arriving in England.

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<sup>445</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity: Vol. 4: The Great Century: AD 1800-AD 1914: Europe and the United States of America* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1941), 123.

<sup>446</sup> Walter L. Arnstein, *Protestant versus Catholic in Mid-Victorian England* (Columbia, SC: University of Missouri Press, 1982), 1.

### 3.3.1 Irish Catholics

Traditionally, as Hugh McLeod notes, most English Catholics belonged to old Catholic gentry families that had held on for centuries, mainly unknown but also including some like the Howards, who produced the dukes of Norfolk. Additionally, McLeod continues, these were being joined by a Catholic middle class in areas of Lancashire and Birmingham by the start of the nineteenth century. However, Irish Catholics began arriving in large numbers during the nineteenth century and came to form the majority of Catholics in England.<sup>447</sup> This changed the character of Catholicism in England, since the arriving Irish were generally poor and settled in urban areas, giving Catholicism new associations with urban poverty and industrialisation. Immigration also increased Catholicism's reach. Catholics were still only 4% of the overall population in 1851 but with much higher concentrations in Liverpool (38%), the Strand area of London (36%), Preston (31%), St George's, Southwark (30%), and Manchester (27%),<sup>448</sup> mainly due to Irish immigrants. Strong Irish immigration was spurred on by over-population and cheap passage to England even before famine hit in the 1840s.<sup>449</sup> The Irish population in England grew from around 40,000 in 1780 to around 580,000 in 1831, with most immigrants being young, unskilled, and illiterate. This increased longstanding prejudices against the Irish, due to their effect on the labour market, especially in the north of England and in Scotland, where most immigration was concentrated.<sup>450</sup> However, contradictorily, the Irish were also often portrayed as being unwilling to work,<sup>451</sup> as well as being accused of degrading English civilisation.<sup>452</sup> Anti-Irish prejudice also often revolved around long-held ideas of them being "uncivilised, ignorant, filthy, immoral, violent, drunken

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<sup>447</sup> McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 38.

<sup>448</sup> McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 37-38.

<sup>449</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 100.

<sup>450</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 335-336.

<sup>451</sup> "London, Tuesday, September 22, 1846", *The Times* (22 September 1846), 4.

<sup>452</sup> Poor Inquiry (Ireland), *Appendix G: Report on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain* (London: W. Clowes and Sons, 1835), iv.

and priest-ridden”.<sup>453</sup> Tensions were further increased because, for many Irish immigrants, “Catholicism was an essential part of their national identity and wherever the Irish settled the Catholic parish became a focal point of their community life. When they settled in large numbers, Protestantism tended to become equally self-conscious and aggressive”.<sup>454</sup> The clash between these Protestant and Catholic national identities increased English anti-Catholicism, as people saw the arriving Irish as threatening their faith, and revived fears about Catholic takeovers. Further, as Bebbington notes,

Apart from traditional disdain for the Irish, anti-Catholicism was fostered by fears of their revolutionary tendencies and a stereotype of poverty and laziness, barbarism and ignorance... When these attitudes were mingled with inherited anxieties and mixed with Evangelical fervour, the result was a heady and distasteful brew.<sup>455</sup>

Irish immigration grew even faster during the 1845-51 potato famine, reaching 602,000 in England and Wales by 1861, or 3 per cent of the population, and 204,000 in Scotland (7 per cent).<sup>456</sup> While still a very small part of the population overall, despite concentrations in particular areas, the arrival of these immigrants continued to stoke fears and prejudice among many.

Even apparently positive depictions of the Irish could be harmful. For example,

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<sup>453</sup> Amy Lloyd, “Emigration, Immigration and Migration in Nineteenth-Century Britain”. British Library Newspapers; <https://www.gale.com/intl/essays/amy-j-lloyd-emigration-immigration-migration-nineteenth-century-britain>.

<sup>454</sup> McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 37.

<sup>455</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 100-101.

<sup>456</sup> Lloyd, *Emigration*.

... it was broadly argued that the Celt was poetic, light-hearted and imaginative, highly emotional, playful, passionate, and sentimental. But these were characteristics the Victorians also associated with children. Thus the Irish were "immature" and in need of guidance by others, more highly developed than themselves.<sup>457</sup>

Such attitudes conveyed a concept of English superiority that could easily develop into contempt of the Irish and their beliefs.

Dickens talks surprisingly little about the Irish, given their high population in London and frequent poverty, and when he does mention them, he is noticeably unsympathetic. For example, in an 1869 letter he claimed that the Irish were unreasonable.<sup>458</sup> Dickens also often uses the same stereotypes described above, placing him within mainstream English opinion, despite having Irish friends including Percy Fitzgerald and Daniel Maclise. This stereotyping is especially obvious in *Sketches by Boz*. For example, in "Seven Dials", set in this slum area of London, he describes an Irish family in which "the Irishman comes home drunk every other night, and attacks every body [*sic*]".<sup>459</sup> Similar anti-Irish sentiments are found in "Gin-shops", "A Visit to Newgate", and in "The Boarding-house" within the same book. The few Irish characters in the novels are also treated as stereotypes or simple figures without any distinguishing features, not as individuals; for example, Harold Skimpole's Irish servant in *Bleak House* has no name or clear personality traits. Even when objections to national stereotypes are raised, as in the Irish writer Mary Anne Hoare's 1850 *HW* article, "An Irish Peculiarity", the Irish are not entirely championed. Hoare divides the Irish into two kinds and claims that the common stereotypes do apply to "the lower orders", who have a "mingled

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<sup>457</sup> Anthony Wohl, "Racism and Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England"; <https://victorianweb.org/history/race/Racism.html>.

<sup>458</sup> Storey, *Letters: Twelve*, 430.

<sup>459</sup> Charles Dickens, "Seven Dials", in *Sketches by Boz*, 95.

love of fun and fighting...”.<sup>460</sup> As well as Dickens’ general uses of stereotyping there are also a few specific references to Catholicism’s presumed effects on the Irish, in both magazines and his non-fiction books, and these will be covered below.

Irish immigrants were not the only factor in English anti-Catholic concerns, however.

Catholic emancipation in 1829 also played a part.

### 3.3.2 Catholic emancipation

The 1829 *Catholic Emancipation Act* enabled Catholics to vote, take seats in Parliament (lay Catholics only), and hold most public offices. However, it simultaneously forbade male religious orders, and Jesuits especially. Many have connected this to the 1800 *Act of Union with Ireland*, and the need to accommodate new Irish Catholic subjects.<sup>461</sup> The 1829 Act was significant to Catholics, with Cardinal Wiseman stating that it was “to us what the egress from the catacombs was to the early Christians”.<sup>462</sup> However, while this was a moment of (some) freedom for Catholics, Edward Norman notes that it took on a different complexion for many others in the country. He underlines that “Parliament was the governing body of the State Church of England; corporations and civil institutions were the guarantors of national Protestantism”.<sup>463</sup> Thus, allowing Catholics into Parliament would give them a say in Church of England affairs. This, as Norman points out, “seemed... both illogical and dangerous”, especially when combined with long-held suspicions about Catholics being seen as being

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<sup>460</sup> Mary Anne Hoare, “An Irish Peculiarity”, *Household Words* I (25) (14 September 1850), 595; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-i/page-595.html>.

<sup>461</sup> For more on this see, for example, Chadwick, *Victorian Church*; Arnstein, *Protestant versus Catholic*; Colley, *Britons*.

<sup>462</sup> Nicholas Wiseman, *The Religious and Social Position of Catholics in England: An Address Delivered to the Catholic Congress of Malines, August 21, 1863* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1864), 9.

<sup>463</sup> Norman, *English Catholic Church*, 30.

bound to loyalty to a foreign power – the pope in Rome.<sup>464</sup> Michael Wheeler further notes that, to some, “the Protestant constitution itself... seemed to be in danger”, since emancipation allowed Parliament to be “penetrated by a foreign power”.<sup>465</sup> Indeed, when the Houses of Parliament were destroyed by fire in 1834, this was seen by some as divine judgement on the measure.<sup>466</sup>

The Act did not lead to public reactions on anything like the scale of the Gordon Riots. However, there were some extreme reactions, including from the charismatic Presbyterian minister Edward Irving (1792-1834). His apocalyptic *The Signs of the Times* (1829)<sup>467</sup> drew heavily on both Daniel 7, and the judgements of God in the Book of Revelation. In Daniel 7, the prophet sees a vision of four beasts, representing four great empires that were to arise in the world. The last of these is specially terrifying, destructive, and arrogant, and also has horns on its head, three of which are pushed out by another horn. In Irving’s text, this last beast is identified as Rome, with the horn that pushes out three others being the papacy.<sup>468</sup> Irving states that Britain has been free from the beast’s dominion since the Reformation, and a testimony against Roman Catholic evil, but is now falling into the pope’s power and therefore bringing down the judgement of God.<sup>469</sup> In a postscript, Irving asserts that if Catholic emancipation passes through Parliament all hope is gone for the British church and nation, for “this measure, [is] the most God-forgetting, the most God-displeasing, which a nation was ever guilty of”.<sup>470</sup> Irving was a controversial figure who was ultimately deposed

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<sup>464</sup> Norman, *English Catholic Church*, 30-31.

<sup>465</sup> Wheeler, *Enemies*, 139.

<sup>466</sup> Patrick Whitworth, *And Did Those Feet: The Story and Character of the English Church AD 200-2020* (Durham: Sacristy Press, 2021), 439.

<sup>467</sup> Edward Irving, *The Signs of the Times* (London: Andrew Panton, 1829).

<sup>468</sup> Edward Irving, *Signs*, 11.

<sup>469</sup> Irving, *Signs*, 32.

<sup>470</sup> Irving, *Signs*, 38-39.

from the ministry,<sup>471</sup> but his reaction shows that, for some Protestants at least, the idea of greater Roman Catholic freedom and influence was horrifying and struck at fundamental elements of their faith. Further, even more ordinary Protestants also expressed concern, as Gladstone noted,<sup>472</sup> revealing a wider anxiety about Catholic influence.

Given the above, it might be wondered how emancipation passed through Parliament at all. However, some more moderate Protestants supported Catholic rights, and pressure was exerted by figures such as the Irish nationalist Daniel O’Connell. This was reflected, for example, in *The Times*, which described how it had “long enforced the necessity of emancipation upon general grounds of wisdom and of justice...”.<sup>473</sup> Chadwick also points out that, “A small majority in the House of Commons had steadily supported the Catholic claims over twenty years, despite the dominance of a Tory government committed to the union of church and state”.<sup>474</sup> He further notes that even those who were anti-Catholic were not necessarily as extreme as the example I have given. More moderate figures included Thomas Arnold (1795-1842), who argued for granting Roman Catholic claims on the basis of natural justice,<sup>475</sup> although he also felt this would help to improve Irish Catholicism by making it more Protestant.<sup>476</sup>

Overall, despite acceptance of Catholic claims among some, reactions to Catholic emancipation were mainly negative among English Protestants. Responses ranged from strong denunciation to anxiety, and while there was no return to the violence of the Gordon

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<sup>471</sup> George P. Landow, “Edward Irving and the Catholic Apostolic Church”; <https://victorianweb.org/religion/apocalypse/irvingite.html>.

<sup>472</sup> John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone. In Three Volumes – Volume I (1809-1859)* (London: Macmillan, 1903), 57.

<sup>473</sup> “London, Monday, February 9, 1829”, *The Times* (9 February 1829), 4.

<sup>474</sup> Chadwick, *Victorian Church: I*, 9.

<sup>475</sup> Chadwick, *Victorian Church: I*, 9-10.

<sup>476</sup> Thomas Arnold, *The Christian Duty of Granting the Claims of Roman Catholics with a Postscript in Answer to the Letters of The Rev G. S. Faber, Printed in the St James’s Chronicle* (Oxford: W. Baxter, 1829), 3.

Riots, anti-Catholicism rose. The heightened levels of concern around Catholic influence continued over the coming years, and it seems highly likely that they helped to form Dickens' own later views. However, the growth in anti-Catholicism was also spurred on by the rise of the Oxford Movement, as discussed next.

### **3.3.3 The Oxford Movement, conversion, and ritualism**

The Oxford Movement began in 1833 and aimed to assert the ongoing Catholic nature of the Church of England. This was not its only aim, of course, since it primarily wished to oppose “secularism and liberalism” while prioritising “moral seriousness, traditional dogma, and authentic faith”.<sup>477</sup> Therefore, it was initially an attempt to defend the Church of England from liberalism and perceived attacks. Two significant factors in its development were first, the admission of nonconformists to Parliament in 1828, and second, the suppression of ten Irish bishoprics by Parliament under the 1833 *Church Temporalities Act*.<sup>478</sup> These seemed to threaten the special status and authority of the Church of England, now that Parliament was both no longer entirely Anglican and was interfering in church affairs. This threat had only been made worse by the 1829 emancipation of Catholics, which further diluted Anglicanism's position. As the Oxford Movement has been covered extensively in the literature, its characteristics and history need not be discussed here in great detail, but I will focus on it in relation to Catholicism and the criticisms the former faced in this context

The Oxford Movement was not the first to emphasise the Church of England's Catholic heritage, (see Section 3.2 on Burke), but it wished to reinforce the idea, as well as

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<sup>477</sup> Michael Turner, *The Church of England and Victorian Oxford: The History of the Oxford Churchmen's Union, 1860-1890* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2023), 25.

<sup>478</sup> As part of reorganising the Church of Ireland.

highlighting perceived dangers to church integrity.<sup>479</sup> Accordingly, in “Tract 23”, Arthur Philip Perceval discussed the importance of holding firmly to true faith and protecting the Church of England from “the unceasing endeavours which are being made... to overthrow our Church...”.<sup>480</sup> On the Church of England’s Catholic nature, Newman appealed to apostolic authority and unity in “Tract 71”:

... “*How* is it that the particular Christian body to which I belong *happens* to be the right one?... the truth is surely no where [*sic*] to be found pure, unadulterate [*sic*] and entire... Now the primitive church answered this question, by appealing to the simple fact that all the Apostolic Churches all over the world did agree together...”<sup>481</sup>

This kind of appeal was typical of the Oxford Movement,<sup>482</sup> which was attempting to “recall men to ancient truths that had for too long been overlooked or had ceased, in an age of indifference, to stir the pulses of faith”.<sup>483</sup> In the same tract, Newman also addressed his opponents’ questions about why Oxford Movement followers did not simply become Roman Catholic. Firstly, he appealed to 1 Corinthians 7.20’s words, “let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called”. He argued that this meant remaining Anglican unless persuaded otherwise.<sup>484</sup> Secondly, he appealed to Scriptural injunctions against disorder and

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<sup>479</sup> Raymond Chapman, *Firmly I Believe: An Oxford Movement Reader*. Canterbury Studies in Spiritual Theology. (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2006), 15.

<sup>480</sup> Arthur Perceval, “Tract 23: The Faith and Obedience of Churchmen the Strength of the Church”, in *Tracts for the Times: Vol. I for 1833-4*, by Members of the University of Oxford (London: J.G. & F. Rivington, 1834), 2.

<sup>481</sup> John Henry Newman, “Tract 71: On the Controversy with the Romanists, No.1”, in *Tracts for the Times: Vol. III for 1835-6*, by Members of the University of Oxford (London: J.G. & F. Rivington, 1836), 27-28; italics in original.

<sup>482</sup> C. Brad Fought, *The Oxford Movement: A Thematic History of the Tractarians and Their Times* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 36.

<sup>483</sup> Bernard Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age: A Survey from Coleridge to Gore*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 1995), 66.

<sup>484</sup> Newman, “Tract 71”, 3.

division.<sup>485</sup> Thirdly, he made a more emotional appeal to “a debt of gratitude to that particular branch of the Church Catholic through which God made us Christians”, which would “bind us to the English Church, by cords of love...”.<sup>486</sup>

Despite critics’ claims that the Oxford Movement wanted to return to Roman Catholicism, in the early years many members held the popular opinion that Roman Catholicism was “irrevocably error-filled”.<sup>487</sup> However, rather than using popular anti-Catholic stereotypes, the Oxford Movement saw the Church of England as “a doctrinally sound expression of the church catholic” that had “made a judgment against Rome”.<sup>488</sup> None of this, though, prevented their critics from asserting that they represented a dangerous opportunity for Catholicism to reassert itself within Protestant England. This was only made worse by the eventual conversion of Newman to the Roman Catholic Church in 1845, along with other high-profile conversions. While the numbers converting were not large, they were significant in the public eye and served to heighten Protestant fears. Indeed, their importance was such that several newspapers published lists of converts, including *The Times* in October 1845.<sup>489</sup> With Newman’s conversion, “Tractarianism had lost its principal proponent to Rome; in consequence, the legitimacy of the whole movement had become doubtful”.<sup>490</sup> This led to attacks such as that made by George Faber, in his *Letters on Tractarian Secession to Popery*. Faber claimed, among other things, that Newman had been a “concealed Papist” since the beginning of the “Tractarian conspiracy”<sup>491</sup> and compared the Oxford Movement to secret

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<sup>485</sup> Newman, “Tract 71”, 3.

<sup>486</sup> Newman, “Tract 71”, 3-4.

<sup>487</sup> Faught, *Oxford Movement*, 38.

<sup>488</sup> Faught, *Oxford Movement*, 38.

<sup>489</sup> “Secessions from the Anglican Church”, *The Times* (15 October 1845), 6.

<sup>490</sup> Geertjan Zuidwegt, “Newman’s Disputed Honesty”, *Louvain Studies* 34 (2009-2010), 365.

<sup>491</sup> George Faber, *Letters on Tractarian Secession to Popery: With Remarks on Mr. Newman’s Principle of Development, Dr. Moehler’s Symbolism, and the Adduced Evidence in Favour of the Romish Practice of Mariolatry* (London: W.H. Dalton, 1846), x.

Jesuit agents.<sup>492</sup> Similar criticisms were made of other Oxford movement leaders, such as, for example, that they were working with the pope to convert England.<sup>493</sup> On the Roman Catholic side, though, while Charles Dougherty and Homer Welsh discuss evidence of some Vatican interest in the Oxford Movement's potential for restoring English Catholicism,<sup>494</sup> there is no evidence of a concerted effort to leverage it in this way, contrary to Protestant fears.

However, criticism of the Oxford Movement based on fear of Catholicism continued, coming from people such as Edward Ellerton, in his *The Evils and Dangers of Tractarianism*. Ellerton began by refuting claims to Roman Catholic supremacy and arguing that it should be considered subservient to the Jerusalem church.<sup>495</sup> Ellerton further criticised the Catholic Church for being tyrannical, keeping people in ignorance, and introducing non-biblical doctrines,<sup>496</sup> criticisms that appear in Dickens' work as well. Ellerton described the Reformation as saving people from the Catholic Church's abuses, similarly to Dickens, and especially praised the Church of England's Thirty-Nine Articles for helping to reveal true shepherds of the Church.<sup>497</sup> Ellerton was also horrified at Oxford Movement attempts to reconcile Church of England teaching with Catholic faith,<sup>498</sup> which he considered an act of betrayal.<sup>499</sup> He believed that Church of England clergy must oppose Roman Catholic doctrine and that people should avoid extending friendship towards the Catholic Church because,

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<sup>492</sup> Faber, *Letters*, 74.

<sup>493</sup> Michael Wheeler, *The Old Enemies: Catholic and Protestant in Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 15.

<sup>494</sup> Charles Dougherty and Homer Welsh, "Wiseman on the Oxford Movement: An Early Report to the Vatican", *Victorian Studies* 2 (2) (December 1958).

<sup>495</sup> Edward Ellerton, *The Evils and Dangers of Tractarianism: A Lecture* (Oxford: J. Vincent, 1845), 4.

<sup>496</sup> Ellerton, *Evils and Dangers*, 8-9.

<sup>497</sup> Ellerton, *Evils and Dangers*, 9-10.

<sup>498</sup> Ellerton, *Evils and Dangers*, 10.

<sup>499</sup> Ellerton, *Evils and Dangers*, 11.

What attached and educated member of our Communion could ever endure to see the Church of England, the glory of the Reformation, lashed to the wheels of the chariot of Infallibility, and dragged through all the sloughs and superstitions of the Church of Rome?<sup>500</sup>

Ellerton continued in a similar vein but the above suffices to show the strength of feeling against the Oxford Movement among some. It was seen as betraying the Church of England, Protestantism, and the Reformation. Given the country's sense of itself as a Protestant nation standing firm against the evils of Catholicism, this was a double betrayal of both church and people.

The Oxford Movement was not just about theological arguments, though, but had practical effects on the worship and practice of the Church of England as well, with many of these leading to further concerns and criticisms. Thus, explains Turner,

...its influence became clear liturgically, in daily services and in the creation of a eucharistic bond at the heart of parish life, in confession, in schooling, and in the design and restoration of church buildings and in the manner of their furnishing and decoration. There was wider cultural influence too, affecting not only architecture but also music, hymns, poetry, and fiction.<sup>501</sup>

The increased use of ritual and decoration, the reintroduction of Catholic practices such as confession, and the reestablishment of religious orders all alarmed many Protestants, who

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<sup>500</sup> Ellerton, *Evils and Dangers*, 13.

<sup>501</sup> Turner, *Church of England*, 25.

saw them as encouraging superstition and idolatry, as did Dickens, as well as undermining the hard-won victories of the Reformation. As Turner points out, though, not all such developments were entirely the work of the Oxford Movement, as legal changes, the position of nonconformists and the relative strengths of different parties within the Church of England were also involved. Additionally, some scholars see the developments in ritual of the 1840s onwards as separate from the intellectual Oxford Movement of the 1830s. However, those involved in ritualism at the time believed that what they were doing was a natural development from that Movement.<sup>502</sup> Given this, I include developments in ritual and ceremonial in my discussion of reactions to it.

In discussing ritualism, I am using the definition provided by Nigel Yates; that is:

...those ceremonial developments in the Church of England that were considered at the time to be making its services approximate more closely to the services of the Roman Catholic Church, with the implication that those Anglicans who supported such moves had also adopted Roman Catholic theological beliefs which were inconsistent with the doctrines of the Church of England.<sup>503</sup>

The growth of ritualism had several factors according to Nigel Scotland. First was the sense of continuation with the Early Church, something also emphasised by the Oxford Movement. Second was a missionary desire to reach out to the poor and appeal to them through mystery, colour, and ritual. Third was the influence of Romanticism. The Cambridge Camden Society, discussed below, also played a part, as did middle and upper-class fashions for elaborate

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<sup>502</sup> Turner, *Church of England*, 25-26.

<sup>503</sup> Nigel Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain, 1830-1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 2.

furnishings and bright colours in the home. The re-establishment of religious orders was another factor, as it was often within these that a desire for more Catholic practices began to emerge. Finally, the “Ornaments Rubric” of the *Book of Common Prayer* encouraged the use of surplices and changes in the celebration of communion.<sup>504</sup> We might also add the influence of medievalism, which “appealed to a desire for simplicity, self-reliance, and closeness to nature”, with the Middle Ages being “seen as a time of almost childlike innocence, fresher and purer than the jaded nineteenth century”.<sup>505</sup>

Given the prevalence of anti-Catholic feeling such developments were bound to be controversial. For some, though, there was, as Chadwick notes, a desire,

... to reform the worldliness of the Church of England... a more otherworldly reverence ought to inspire the services and fill the churches. Not only the Tractarians wanted the churches to be less like halls of preaching and more like temples where the mystic incense of the heart rises before a throne.<sup>506</sup>

In these words, Chadwick sums up a widespread desire for a deeper, more mystic understanding of worship and spirituality that would draw in more worshippers. This went alongside a real fear that the Church of England was close to disestablishment, pressured as it was by nonconformists, Roman Catholics, and government involvement in church affairs. The Oxford Movement was one response to this, and another came from the University of Cambridge – in the form of the Cambridge Camden Society, founded in 1837. Under the leadership of John Mason Neale and Benjamin Webb, its first interest lay in church

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<sup>504</sup> Nigel Scotland, “Evangelicals, Anglicans and Ritualism in Victorian England” *Churchman* 111 (3) (1997), 252.

<sup>505</sup> Patricia Appelbaum, “St Francis in the Nineteenth Century”, *Church History* 78 (4) (December 2009), 794.

<sup>506</sup> Chadwick, *Victorian Church: I*, 212.

architecture, and especially in the Gothic style, following in the footsteps of Augustus Pugin.<sup>507</sup>

The focus on architecture was driven not just by aesthetic preferences but by a desire for ritual and symbolic significance. Thus, for example, the Round Church in Cambridge, modelled on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, was fitted out with a stone altar and credence table,<sup>508</sup> displeasing the incumbent, who described the altar and table as “abominations of Popery”.<sup>509</sup> This exemplifies the kinds of negative reactions that were growing around the growth of more Catholic, ritualistic, and symbolic expressions of Christian faith. Indeed, for many, the arrival of more Catholic rituals into the Church of England, “offended, in the most deeply painful manner... strongly held prejudices and sensitivities... and was felt to be undermining the character of the Church of England as a church of the Reformation”.<sup>510</sup> An important example of this is the disturbances arising over surplices in 1844 and 1845. An 1844 pastoral letter by Henry Philpotts, then bishop of Exeter, instructed all his clergy to wear a surplice when preaching. However, to ordinary members of the laity the surplice was identified with attacks on the Reformation, and this was intolerable. Widespread protests led to Philpotts backing down, but in January 1845 Mr Courtenay, curate of St Sidwell’s in Exeter, announced that he would keep using the surplice, leading to more serious unrest to the point where he needed police protection, before he too backed down.<sup>511</sup> The strength of popular reaction to Philpott’s attempted changes reveals a growing unhappiness with the growth of Catholic thought in the Church of England.

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<sup>507</sup> Jacqueline Banerjee, “The Cambridge Camden Society and the Ecclesiological Society”; <https://victorianweb.org/religion/eccles.html>.

<sup>508</sup> Jacqueline Banerjee, “The Church of the Holy Sepulchre (The Round Church), Cambridge, Restored by Anthony Salvin”; <https://victorianweb.org/art/architecture/salvin/1.html>.

<sup>509</sup> R.R. Faulkner, “To the Editor of *The Times*”, letter published in *The Times* (7 August 1844), 6.

<sup>510</sup> Yates, *Anglican Ritualism*, 1-2.

<sup>511</sup> Chadwick, *Victorian Church: I*, 219-220.

The changes were not actually entirely innovative, as the first surpliced parish church choir seems to have been in Leeds in 1818, and other ritual changes were often seen in cathedrals and college chapels.<sup>512</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the surplice had been in use in the Church of England since the Reformation, although there were further controversies about this relating to the wording of Prayer Book rubrics. However, for most ordinary Protestant-leaning members of the Church of England in the nineteenth century, ritual and ceremony such as that represented by the surplice was a betrayal of all that the Reformation stood for, and potentially a sign of papal encroachment. The opposition to ritualism in the Church of England also led, among other things, to the foundation of the Church Association in 1865, aiming “to defend the Church of England against ritualistic... teaching”<sup>513</sup> and prevent attempts “to pervert her teaching on essential points of the Christian faith, or assimilate her Services to those of the Church of Rome”.<sup>514</sup>

Dickens himself said little about surplices in his novels, which only contain a few descriptive passages mentioning them.<sup>515</sup> However, magazine articles show Dickens mentioning them in a negative manner, underlining the importance of these articles for better understanding Dickens’ concerns. For example, in October 1850, *HN* claimed that while the country suffered from increasing crime, poverty, and lack of Christian knowledge, religious leaders were failing to help because they were more concerned with, for example, “such questions as whether sermons should be delivered in a surplice...”.<sup>516</sup> Similarly, a Sala article in *HW*

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<sup>512</sup> Yates, *Anglican Ritualism*, 27.

<sup>513</sup> Church Society, “Our History”; <https://www.churchsociety.org/about-us/our-history/>.

<sup>514</sup> Church Society, “Church Association Tracts”; <https://www.churchsociety.org/resource/church-association-tracts/>.

<sup>515</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 44; Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, 468; Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, 871, 872; Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 859; Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, 714.

<sup>516</sup> “The Three Kingdoms”, *Household Words Narrative* (October 1850), 219; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-narrative-of-current-events/year-1850/page-219.html>.

entitled “Bullfrog” criticised “learned and pious men” who “parted from the church that reared...them”<sup>517</sup> in a criticism of the Oxford Movement. Sala continued, “He preached in a surplice, and put the ragged little boys of the village into surplices too, and made them chant drearily...”, making a negative association between the surplice and Catholic worship (see Section 3.5.3). References to other Catholic rituals and decorations in the article further clarify that Sala considers the surplice a dangerously Catholic article.

More even than the arguments over the Oxford Movement, though, the Protestant dislike of “Romanizing” tendencies was made even worse by the storm that erupted over the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in 1850.

### 3.3.4 Restoration of the hierarchy

Victorian anti-Catholic feeling reached its height following Pope Pius IX’s papal bull,<sup>518</sup> *Universalis Ecclesiae*, issued on 29 September 1850. The document emphasised England’s Catholic history and heritage, despite, among other disruptions, “the Anglican schism of the sixteenth age”.<sup>519</sup> Continuing, the pope focused on the continuing care that the Catholic Church exercised for English Catholics in the face of “fierce and cruel storms of persecution” and “the great calamity” that had afflicted the English Church in her separation from Rome.<sup>520</sup> However, the pope continued, in the light of growing numbers of Catholics, and

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<sup>517</sup> George Sala, “Bullfrog”, *Household Words* X (243) (18 November 1854), 334; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-x/page-334.html>.

<sup>518</sup> Arnstein, *Protestant versus Catholic*, 7.

<sup>519</sup> Pius IX, “The Apostolic Letter of Pope Pius IX”, in *The Roman Catholic Question: A Copious Series of Important Documents, of Permanent Historical Interest on the Re-establishment of the Catholic Hierarchy in England, 1850-51*, edited by Anon. (London: James Gilbert, 1851), [1].

<sup>520</sup> Pius IX, “Apostolic Letter”, 2.

... considering also that the impediments which principally stood in the way of the spread of Catholicity were daily being removed, we judged that the time had arrived when the form of ecclesiastical government in England might be brought back to that model on which it exists freely amongst other nations...<sup>521</sup>

Thus, the Roman Catholic hierarchy was to be re-established in England and Wales, with dioceses and bishops covering named geographical areas.<sup>522</sup> This was to replace the previous system of governance of English Catholics through Vicars Apostolic, appointed by Rome and given responsibility for the four areas into which England and Wales were partitioned. Scotland, meanwhile, had a separate district and Ireland still had a hierarchy of its own.<sup>523</sup> Now, for the first time since Mary Tudor in the sixteenth century, England's Roman Catholics were to have a church set-up in line with Catholic countries.<sup>524</sup>

Edward Norman describes this re-establishment from the Roman Catholic perspective as being a matter of administration and better internal governance. This was necessitated by more visible, growing, and urbanised Catholic populations in England, English influence in more Catholic areas of the world through the growth of the latter's empire, and issues regarding communication and mismatched cultural norms and expectations between English Catholics and the Vicars Apostolic in Rome. Finally, Norman agrees with Ullathorne (first bishop of Birmingham in 1850) that the new hierarchy ultimately reduced papal power in England as the pope was no longer the immediate bishop of all English Catholics.<sup>525</sup>

However, this benign and pragmatic view was not shared by many English Victorians. For

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<sup>521</sup> Pius IX, "Apostolic Letter", 2.

<sup>522</sup> Pius IX, "Apostolic Letter", 2.

<sup>523</sup> Norman, *English Catholic Church*, 71.

<sup>524</sup> Anthony Wohl, "The Re-establishment of the Catholic Hierarchy in England, 1850"; [https://victorianweb.org/religion/Hierarchy\\_Reestablished.html](https://victorianweb.org/religion/Hierarchy_Reestablished.html).

<sup>525</sup> Norman, *English Catholic Church*, 69-75.

example, then prime minister Lord John Russell wrote to the bishop of Durham, calling it “aggression... insolent and insidious” and suggesting it was an attempt “to impose a foreign yoke upon our minds and consciences”.<sup>526</sup>

Michael Wheeler asserts that the strong negative Protestant reactions at all levels of English society were partly due to the restoration taking Protestants by surprise. Additionally, it “revived old fears of Papal ambitions”, intensified the anti-Catholicism that had increased since Catholic emancipation, and came on top of “other religious and political crises” and growing levels of crime, making it “the last straw”.<sup>527</sup> The shock was felt across English society, and the strength of feeling among opponents of restoration is perhaps best represented by the anti-Catholic cartoons printed in *Punch*, which consistently portrayed the move as an attempt to take over and destroy England. For example, the illustration below compares the papal move to the Gunpowder Plot:

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<sup>526</sup> Lord John Russell, “Lord John Russell and the Pope”, in *The Roman Catholic Question: A Copious Series of Important Documents, of Permanent Historical Interest on the Re-establishment of the Catholic Hierarchy in England, 1850-51* (London: James Gilbert, 1851), 8.

<sup>527</sup> Wheeler, *Enemies*, 13.



*Figure 3*

*“The Guy Fawkes of 1850” (print)*

*Punch - November 1850*

However, the blame for this event was not placed entirely on Roman Catholicism or papal ambition. Rather, the Oxford Movement was also accused:

Clergymen of our own Church, who have subscribed the Thirty-Nine Articles, and acknowledged in explicit terms the Queen’s supremacy, have been most forward in leading their flocks, “step by step, to the very verge of the precipice”.<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>528</sup> Russell, “Lord John Russell and the Pope”, 8.

This aligns with the already discussed accusations that the Oxford Movement was giving the pope a foothold in England. The restoration of the hierarchy thus only confirmed the fears that this group had raised in the minds of certain Protestants, as reflected in another *Punch* cartoon:



*Figure 4*

*"Puseyism" (print)*

*Punch – 1851*

The term "Puseyism" used here by *Punch* was widely applied to the Oxford Movement by its opponents and especially refers to followers of Edward Bouverie Pusey, a leading figure in the Oxford Movement strongly associated with ritualism.

Such criticism of the Oxford Movement was only worsened by its influence on the revival of religious communities in the Church of England, which encouraged further anti-Catholic feeling based on suspicion of monasterial and convent life.

### **3.3.5 The Jesuits and other religious orders**

Religious communities had been outlawed in England since the sixteenth century. However, the 1791 *Catholic Relief Act* began removing such restrictions and small movements towards restoring monastic foundations started, gaining impetus with the rise of the Oxford Movement. In the process, old Protestant fears were raised, especially around the Jesuit order. Founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola, the Jesuits were heavily involved in attempts “to save ... England... and other countries for the one Catholic Church”.<sup>529</sup> With a mission to defeat Protestantism, and their practice of vowing obedience to the pope rather than the superiors of their order, Jesuits became identified with the Catholic Church in English eyes. They arrived in England in 1580, twenty years after the country had declared itself Protestant, and were quickly suspected of working undercover to subvert the Protestant constitution. Their reputation as spies was cemented by Spain’s attack on England in 1588, supported by the pope, and from then on Jesuits were frequently linked to plots against the country, most notably the Gunpowder Plot.<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> Gerald O’Collins and Mario Farrugia, *Catholicism: The Story of Catholic Christianity*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 38.

<sup>530</sup> Michael Schiefelbein, *The Lure of Babylon: Seven Protestant Novelists and Britain’s Roman Catholic Revival* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 102.

The Jesuits flourished in many ways but their skills in debate, unusual devotional practices, training, and vows, alongside their overt confidence in their own abilities and successes, fears about their powers of control, and the alleged possibility of them acting as a fifth column for foreign powers meant that they attracted hostility from not only Protestants but also sections of the Roman Catholic Church itself.<sup>531</sup> Ultimately, they were suppressed by Pope Clement XIV in 1773, before being restored by Pope Pius VII in 1814. They were therefore a newly revived order in the nineteenth century, creating the conditions for earlier fears about Jesuit interference in the running of England to resurface.

Regarding reactions to Jesuits in the nineteenth century, John Wolffe noted in 2012 that “Nineteenth-century British anti-Jesuitism has yet to receive focused scholarly attention”, even though Jesuits were often referred to in fiction of the time.<sup>532</sup> Many such fictional portrayals were negative. For example, Frances Trollope’s *Father Eustace: A Tale of the Jesuits* sees the General of the Society of Jesus, Scaviatoli, “plotting the seduction of a beautiful young English heiress... by a sensitive, handsome priest in disguise...”, with the aim of converting her and forcing her into imprisonment in a convent, after she has signed over her property to the Jesuits.<sup>533</sup> Thus, the story, “is about the calculation, cunning, and masterful manipulation perfected over the centuries by an organization intent on winning psychological power over others to feed ego and pocketbook”.<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>531</sup> Markus Friedrich, *The Jesuits: A History*, trans. John Noël Dillon (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022), 577-579.

<sup>532</sup> John Wolffe, “The Jesuit as Villain in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction”, *Studies in Church History* (48) (2012), 308-309

<sup>533</sup> Susan Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 81.

<sup>534</sup> Schiefelbein, *Lure*, 103.

The description of Scaviatoli in Trollope's novel used well-known Gothic imagery to describe a secretive Jesuit, attempting to conceal hidden knowledge and power:<sup>535</sup>

His eye had extraordinary power when it was his will to use it; but, for the most part... it was his habit to let his particularly long dark eye-lashes so completely conceal these eyes, that many people having business to transact with him, came and went almost without knowing whether he had any eyes or not.

But when he... darted his... searching glance upon the eyes of the person he was conversing with, it seemed to have the power of penetrating at once to the inmost recesses of his most secret thoughts, rendering every attempt at concealment utterly vain and abortive.<sup>536</sup>

Jesuits are also described as having “more eyes than are fabled in the head of a spider” and as weaving “webs of more delicate and wide-spreading texture, and of threads more nicely vibrative, than all the spiders in the world”.<sup>537</sup> They are also “wise as serpents”<sup>538</sup> and hide all normal human feelings “with a mask of marble”.<sup>539</sup> However, it was not just Jesuits who fell under Protestant condemnation, but the whole concept of celibate monastic life (except for Franciscans, due to their work in the community<sup>540</sup>).

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<sup>535</sup> Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism*, 82.

<sup>536</sup> Frances Trollope, *Father Eustace: A Tale of the Jesuits, Vol. I* (London: Henry Colburn, 1847), 162-163.

<sup>537</sup> Trollope, *Father Eustace*, 71.

<sup>538</sup> Trollope, *Father Eustace*, 246; cf. Matthew 10.16.

<sup>539</sup> Trollope, *Father Eustace*, 160.

<sup>540</sup> See, for example, James Stephen, “St Francis of Assisi”, *Edinburgh Review* 86 (173) (July-October 1847), 1-42.

As Monika Mazurek explains, sexuality within the bounds of marriage was promoted in Protestant culture.,<sup>541</sup> Thus, rejecting sexuality by choosing a celibate life was considered repulsive, and Catholicism was seen as attacking physical love wholesale, states Mazurek. However, she continues,

... it was a widely accepted axiom that the confessionals, monasteries and convents were the places where the most unspeakable acts of debauchery were practised. The Catholic approach to sexuality... scorn[ed] the holy sexuality of marriage while tacitly accepting or even encouraging sinful fornication....<sup>542</sup>

Celibacy was considered unnatural and there was an inability or unwillingness to believe that it could be genuinely sustained. Thus, there must be sexual immorality behind the scenes. This is displayed in Emma Robinson's 1854 book, *Westminster Abbey*, in which Cardinal Wolsey is prepared to allow his son, the reforming priest Raphael Roodspere, to have an illicit relationship with the novitiate-nun Lily-Virgin, but refuses to give them permission to marry.<sup>543</sup> Mazurek states about this, "Thus the Church creates the inverted system of values, in which the illicit and carnal relationships between priests and nuns are overlooked, if not tacitly approved, while the lawful and holy marital love is a sin".<sup>544</sup>

Another concern was the influence of convent schools on non-Catholic pupils, despite Catholic assurances that there would be no attempts at conversion. Such anxieties revolved around not only religious concerns but also fears that nuns might undermine pupils' sense of

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<sup>541</sup> Monika Mazurek, "Perverts to Rome: Protestant Gender Roles and the Abjection of Catholicism", *Victorian Literature and Culture* 44 (2016), 688.

<sup>542</sup> Mazurek, "Perverts to Rome", 688.

<sup>543</sup> Emma Robinson, *Westminster Abbey: Or, the Days of the Reformation: Volume 2* (London: John Mortimer, 1854), 249.

<sup>544</sup> Mazurek, "Perverts to Rome", 690.

patriotism and citizenship,<sup>545</sup> presumably by damaging their sense of being members of a great Protestant nation. These schools were popular due to the high level of education they provided for girls, but “this caused alarm among some fervent Protestants”<sup>546</sup> and led to allegations that the education in these schools was inferior<sup>547</sup> in an attempt to keep Protestant parents away.

Dickens also had a strong dislike of religious orders, apart from the Capuchins, an offshoot of the Franciscans. Although he did not use Jesuit figures, or many Catholic characters at all, in his novels, we can see his dislike in his non-fiction books *Pictures* and *A Child's History*, as well as in magazine articles and letters. These non-fiction books are often overlooked, especially the second, but contain Dickens' most extensive treatments of Catholicism, making them important to this discussion. Given their importance, I will briefly describe them before covering Dickens' individual concerns.

### ***3.4 Pictures from Italy and A Child's History of England***

*Pictures* is Dickens' account of his long visit to Italy from July 1844-June 1845 (with one month-long break). He travelled through various French cities before visiting many parts of Italy, including Genoa, Rome, Naples, and Venice, among others, as well as Switzerland. Jessica Hindes notes that visits to Italy were not unusual, particularly as travel to the Continent opened up in the first half of the nineteenth century following the end of war with France, and travel guides began to appear for the growing numbers of middle-class

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<sup>545</sup> Rene Kollar, “Foreign and Catholic: A Plea to Protestant Parents on the Dangers of Convent Education in Victorian England”, *History of Education* 31 (4) (2002), 335.

<sup>546</sup> Kollar, “Foreign and Catholic”, 337.

<sup>547</sup> See, for example, A.H. Guinness, *Education by Nuns: Its Failures and Injurious Tendencies* (London: Protestant Alliance, 1890).

tourists.<sup>548</sup> Thus, Dickens' guide was also not unusual, and it is unclear how widely read or influential it was. However, it differed from other travel books because of its idiosyncratic and lively nature.<sup>549</sup>

Dickens' trip began only a year after starting to attend a Unitarian chapel, and this may have influenced how he saw Catholicism, alongside his more general Protestant dislike. (See Section 4 for more on Dickens and Unitarianism.) The book contains many negative portrayals of Catholicism, despite Dickens claiming in the preface that he was not attacking Catholicism itself:

I hope I am not likely to be misunderstood by Professors of the Roman Catholic faith... When I mention any exhibition that impressed me as absurd or disagreeable, I do not seek to connect it, or recognise it as necessarily connected with, any essentials of their creed.<sup>550</sup>

Obviously, the book discusses Catholicism outside of England, but it does reveal Dickens' attitude to the faith as a nineteenth-century English Protestant. Also, as Catholicism appeared to gain more of a foothold in England the attitudes shown were applied to contemporary English Catholics and groups such as the Oxford Movement, further increasing the relevance of Dickens' thoughts about Italy.

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<sup>548</sup> Jessica Hinds, "'Rome is Rome, though it's never so Romely': Dickens and the Nineteenth-Century Politics of Leisure", in *Proceedings of the Dickens and Tourism Conference, September 2009* (Nottingham: University of Nottingham Business School, 2009), 81.

<sup>549</sup> Annemarie MacAllister, "'A pair of naked legs and a ragged red scarf': An Overview of Victorian Discourses on Italy", in Alexandro Vescovi, Luisa Villa and Paul Vita (eds), *The Victorians and Italy: Literature, Travel, Politics and Art*. English Library: The Literature Bookshelf, Volume 1. (Monza: Polimetrica, 2009), 19.

<sup>550</sup> Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy* (London: Penguin, 1998), 6.

*A Child's History*, meanwhile, was published in three volumes in the Decembers of 1851 to 1853 (although postdated to the next year). This places the work not long after the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy, although Dickens had mentioned wanting to write such a book as far back as 1843. He originally wanted to produce it to guide his son, Charley (6 years-old in 1843), away from religious ideas that his father disapproved of, saying in a letter that,

I am writing a little history of England for my boy... For I don't know what I should do, if he were to get hold of any conservative or High church notions; and the best way of guarding against any such horrible result is, I take it, to wring the parrots' necks in his very cradle.<sup>551</sup>

The reason for the delayed publication is unclear, but the timing of its eventual appearance fits well with contemporary concerns about Catholicism. Dickens' book mainly covers 50 BC to 1689, divided into chapters covering one or more royal reign, and positions the Glorious Revolution as the triumph of Protestantism over Catholicism and the climax of English history. Later events are covered in a couple of pages. Thus, the book in many ways sees English history as a battle between the backward and oppressive forces of Catholicism and the freedom of Protestantism.

Thomas Keightley's *The History of England* (1839) is considered Dickens' main source for *A Child's History* but Dickens adds his own stresses, such as the plight of ordinary people in wars, and criticisms of monarchs and priests.<sup>552</sup> Keightley's book also has an anti-Catholic tone similar to Dickens, for example referring to Catholicism as "tyranny" and

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<sup>551</sup> House, Storey and Tillotson, *Letters: Three*, 482.

<sup>552</sup> Rosemary Jann, "Fact, Fiction, and Interpretation in 'A Child's History of England'", *Dickens Quarterly* 4 (4) (December 1987), 200-201.

“despotism”.<sup>553</sup> Additionally, Keightley wrote in reaction against the Catholic historian John Lingard’s four-volume *The History of England* (1819-1823), for example accusing Lingard of wrongly suggesting that “the Reformation was in every sense a misfortune to the world” and of being “artful” in passing over “deeds of the clergy as will not bear the light”.<sup>554</sup> Given this background, and the prevailing sentiments of the time, anti-Catholic sentiments are to be expected in *A Child’s History*.

Dickens’ history also reveals a desire to get away from ideas popular among some at the time, and reflected in philosophies such as medievalism and Romanticism, that the past was better than the present. Thus, he wrote in his letter to Jerrold that, “If ever I destroy myself, it will be in the bitterness of hearing those infernal and damnably good old times, extolled”.<sup>555</sup> This was not a short-term dislike, either, as in 1862 an anonymous *ATYR* article called “The Bemoaned Past” criticised nostalgia: “We have gone back in the world... So say the grumblers and the fault-finders, the pessimists and the unbelievers... the doctrine of Progress seems to me a hair's breadth nearer the truth...”.<sup>556</sup>

“The Bemoaned Past” also lists the many ways in which the author considers the world to have progressed, finishing by saying:

The false glitter of romance has gilded many a falsehood in this world; it has created none greater than that which ascribes more virtues to the past than to the present, and

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<sup>553</sup> Thomas Keightley, *The History of England: Vol. I*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Whittaker and Co., 1845), [iii].

<sup>554</sup> Keightley, *History of England: Vol. I*, v.

<sup>555</sup> House, Storey and Tillotson, *Letters Three*, 481.

<sup>556</sup> “The Bemoaned Past”, *All the Year Round* VII (161) (24 May 1862), 257; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-vii/page-257.html>; Dickens famously criticised the Pre-Raphaelites in similar terms in “Old Lamps for New Ones” (*HW*, June 1850), but this is not considered here as it has been extensively discussed elsewhere.

which denies the truth of the glorious doctrine of the infinite and enduring progress of humanity.<sup>557</sup>

Lastly, in February 1866 a letter expressed Dickens' annoyance with the recent revival of the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury.<sup>558</sup> He saw it as a medieval throwback, alongside ritualism, describing an "irritation of mind" about this "dash of the Middle Ages".<sup>559</sup>

However, despite the above, Dickens slips into nostalgia himself when discussing rural worship which, as I show in this thesis, was often idealised, and compared favourably with urban churches. Regardless, though, in *A Child's History* Dickens mostly ignores signs of past social, economic, or intellectual progress in favour of criticising historical figures and praising the resilience of the English in bearing up under their troubles,<sup>560</sup> often brought about by monarchs, Catholics, or some combination of the two.

Dickens says a great deal about Catholicism in the history of England, often reflecting wider Protestant fears about scheming monks and priests undermining the country from within, dictatorial papal power, and ideas about priests fooling and manipulating ordinary people, especially through taking advantage of ignorance and superstition to further their own ambitions. Therefore, regardless of the accuracy or otherwise of Dickens' account of English history, we can gain good insight into his views of Catholicism, what he disagreed with, and what this tells us about his own faith. Obviously, Dickens is referring to the past, but he does not at any time suggest that things might have changed, and Catholicism become more

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<sup>557</sup> "The Bemoaned Past", 261.

<sup>558</sup> The convocations of Canterbury and York are synodical assemblies of bishops and clergy representing the two provinces of the Church of England, now mostly replaced by the General Synod. The revival Dickens criticises came about as a result of concerns that Parliament was no longer fully able to represent the Church of England's interests following the admission of non-Anglicans; see, for example, Jason Loch, "Parliament and the Church of England"; <https://venerablepuzzle.wordpress.com/2014/07/11/parliament-and-the-church-of-england/>.

<sup>559</sup> Storey, *Letters: Eleven*, 157.

<sup>560</sup> Jann, "Fact, Fiction, and Interpretation", 199-200.

benign. Rather, his aim was to warn against contemporary Catholicism by chronicling its past abuses.

The approach in *A Child's History* contrasts with earlier depictions of Catholicism in his works, though, suggesting that his attitudes hardened over time. For example, in 1837, while editor of *Bentley's Miscellany*, Dickens included William Hamilton Maxwell's story, "The Devil and Johnny Dixon". This depicted Catholics as laughable figures confined to the past and therefore nothing to worry about. The story concerns a confrontation between the Devil and a Catholic priest, in which the priest is criticised for lacking faithfulness.<sup>561</sup> Later, references are made to being freed from papal control and to the Devil attacking the pope.<sup>562</sup> Maxwell's story clearly criticises unfaithful priests and papal tyranny but also casts Roman Catholicism in a comic light and as part of an unenlightened past. This is shown by the use of archaic spelling in a pamphlet that appears in the story, which leads to laughter. Finally, the story-telling happens in a tavern, implying that it is not to be taken too seriously, but is just for entertainment. Dickens takes a similar approach in his own fiction as well. During a visit to Rochester Castle in *Pickwick Papers*, Roman Catholics are relegated to the past of a ruined castle and old cathedral, dismissed as "queer customers" and the stuff of legends.<sup>563</sup> Both this and Maxwell's story downgrade Catholics to the past and old stories, and do not take them seriously. Given these examples, it seems that in the 1830s, at least, Dickens did not consider Catholicism a present-day threat, despite Catholic emancipation, but by the time he visited Italy in the 1840s he had become more concerned.

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<sup>561</sup> William Maxwell, "The Devil and Johnny Dixon", *Bentley's Miscellany* I (1837), 253.

<sup>562</sup> Maxwell, "The Devil and Johnny Dixon", 258.

<sup>563</sup> Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, 28-29.

Dickens' concerns covered a number of areas, including religious orders and priests, papacy and authority, worship, ritual and architecture, and religious violence, and I will cover each of these in turn.

### **3.5 Dickens' concerns**

#### **3.5.1 Religious orders and priests**

Both *Pictures* and *A Child's History* reveal Dickens to be strongly opposed to the Jesuit order, seeing them as lacking the sincerity and openness which he held to be important Christian values, instead being sly, secretive, and even bad omens. Thus, Jesuits in Genoa are depicted as "slinking noiselessly about, in pairs, like black cats".<sup>564</sup> Dickens also reflects traditional English Protestant unease about Jesuits trying to undermine governments and gain power through underhanded means. For example, he refers to Genoese theatre performances mostly being French, saying, "Anything like nationality is dangerous to despotic governments, and Jesuit-beleaguered kings".<sup>565</sup> Dickens uses this imagery again in a November 1846 letter, saying of the Swiss that they are "a good wholesome people to live near Jesuit-ridden kings on the brighter side of the mountains".<sup>566</sup>

Dickens further wrote to Forster in December 1844 on the perceived dangers of Jesuits attempting to convert by force, saying,

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<sup>564</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 44.

<sup>565</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 51.

<sup>566</sup> Tillotson: *Letters: Four*, 661.

... their devilry is such that I am assured by our consul that if... we were to let our children go out with servants on whom we could not implicitly rely, these holy men would trot even their small feet into churches with a view to their ultimate conversion!<sup>567</sup>

Thus, again, Jesuits are not trustworthy but underhanded and sneaky, denying people the freedom to choose for themselves, rather than displaying the positive characteristics of real Christianity.

Another negative Jesuit portrayal which repeats many tropes about the order comes in the March 1855 issue of *HW*. “A Ghost Story”, by Dianah Mulock, begins with Isbel thinking she sees the ghost of her old guardian, Anastasius, a Jesuit. Mulock comments that the order is entirely “unlike Him from whom they assume their name”.<sup>568</sup> Thus, Jesuits are not truly displaying faith because they are not properly imitating Jesus – something which was important to Dickens (see Section 4). Anastasius gradually brings Isbel completely under his control. She eventually develops doubts about him but argues to herself that Jesuits are known to play with the truth: “... he follows the law of his order, which allows temporising, and diplomatising, for noble ends”.<sup>569</sup> This again reveals how Jesuits are seen as differing from Dickens’ view of Christianity, since they are insincere and manipulative. Her doubts about Anastasius grow, however, and she eventually discovers his secret agenda to use his nephew, Alexis, to further his ambitions for complete power over both the Jesuits and Catholicism itself.<sup>570</sup> Thus, instead of practising humility and freedom, Anastasius only

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<sup>567</sup> Tillotson, *Letters: Four*, 242-243.

<sup>568</sup> Dinah Mulock, “A Ghost Story”, *Household Words* XI (261) (24 March 1855), 173; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-xi/page-173.html>.

<sup>569</sup> Mulock, “A Ghost Story”, 174.

<sup>570</sup> Mulock, “A Ghost Story”, 174.

wishes to control and dominate. Isabel and Alexis, a Protestant despite Anastasius' attempts to convert him, fall in love and try to leave, but Anastasius insists on accompanying them. Isabel is convinced that they will both be forced into religious orders, saying, "He will haunt me until my death".<sup>571</sup> While on a ship going to their destination, Anastasius begins a relentless campaign to make Alexis become a priest, despite his Protestantism. The two lovers live in fear of Anastasius until the ship sinks in a storm and Anastasius is drowned. This story brings together many negative ideas about Jesuits. In contrast to the honesty, freedom, humility, and sincerity of Dickens' Christianity, Anastasius twists the truth and is dishonest to achieve his ends. He is overly ambitious, controlling, and manipulative, wants to get hold of others' money, and is ruthless about converting people to Catholicism, instead of displaying gentleness and kindness. *A Child's History*, meanwhile, similarly depicts Jesuits as manipulative and overly ambitious. For example, Jesuits are described as plotting "the destruction of Queen Elizabeth... the placing of Mary on the throne, and... the revival of the old religion".<sup>572</sup>

As already seen, Dickens picks up on the idea that Jesuits twist truth and morality to suit their own ends, a common anti-Catholic motif and contrary to Dickens' own focus on sincerity in faith. The idea of using deception and trickery for personal benefit is also extended to other Catholics, though, including Cardinal Wolsey, who is described as being both insincere and overly ambitious, using deception and cunning to get his own way:

He knew a good deal of the Church learning of that time; much of which consisted in finding artful excuses and pretences for almost any wrong thing, and in arguing that

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<sup>571</sup> Mulock, "A Ghost Story", 175.

<sup>572</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Child's History of England* (n.p.: Sheba Blake, 2020), 313.

black was white, or any other colour... the Cardinal was high in estimation with the King; and, being a man of far greater ability, knew as well how to manage him, as a clever keeper may know how to manage a wolf, or a tiger...<sup>573</sup>

Similarly, Dickens accuses Dunstan, Benedictine abbot of Glastonbury in the tenth century, of being dishonest to gain power, saying, “he used to tell the most extraordinary lies about demons and spirits, who, he said, came there to persecute him... it made him very powerful. Which was exactly what he always wanted”.<sup>574</sup> Similar accusations and criticisms are levelled at monks in Ely under William I.<sup>575</sup> Thus, monks are portrayed as departing from true faith because they put personal ambition and power over truth, humility, and sincerity.

Priests do not escape such criticism, either, being also described as power-hungry, overly ambitious, and arrogant. Odo of Bayeux, bishop under William II, is described as not only taking credit for William the Conqueror’s victory in the Battle of Hastings, but also as beginning “in concert with some powerful Norman nobles, to trouble the Red King”<sup>576</sup> in order to get a more compliant king on the throne. Similarly, William de Longchamp, bishop of Ely under Richard I, is described as “making, in his pride and ambition, as great a show as if he were King himself”.<sup>577</sup> Then, during the reign of Henry III, the bishop of Winchester is accused of stirring up rebellion among the nobles.<sup>578</sup> Later, under Henry V, priests are described as trying to maintain their position with the king by spreading false reports about the proto-Protestant Lollards in an attempt to suppress them: “The Lollards were represented by the priests – probably falsely for the most part – to entertain treasonable designs against

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<sup>573</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 258.

<sup>574</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 25.

<sup>575</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 53.

<sup>576</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 58.

<sup>577</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 106-107.

<sup>578</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 127.

the new King...”.<sup>579</sup> Dickens continues this way with other priests under Henry VII, Henry VIII, Mary Tudor, and James I, but the above examples suffice to show that Dickens saw priests as being concerned with power, politics, and scheming to secure their own interests and ambitions and, by extension, the interests of the Catholic Church. This angered him because it displayed a lack of concern with the Christian virtues of sincerity and humility.

However, power over others was not confined to politics and thrones in Dickens’ view. Rather, he portrayed priests as wanting power over ordinary people, also. For example, in *Pictures* Dickens suggests that priests and monks deliberately mislead people with false miracles in order to keep control, saying about Naples that,

The cathedral... contains the famous sacred blood of San Gennaro... which... miraculously liquifies three times a-year... At the same moment, the stone... where the Saint suffered martyrdom, becomes faintly red. It is said that the officiating priests turn faintly red also, sometimes, when these miracles occur.<sup>580</sup>

Dickens shows that the priests do not believe such miracles but deliberately mislead others by claiming they look embarrassed when the supposed miracle occurs. Thus, they are dishonest and hypocritical by promoting something they know to be untrue, not just sincerely mistaken. This theme of priests deliberately fooling people for their own ends, and tricking people into seeing miracles and wonders where there are none, appears in *A Child’s History* as well. For example, when talking about England under Athelstan, in the tenth century, he says:

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<sup>579</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 193.

<sup>580</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 168.

The priests of those days were, generally, the only scholars... And when they wanted the aid of any little piece of machinery... to impose a trick upon the poor peasants, they knew very well how to make it; and DID make it many a time and often, I have no doubt.<sup>581</sup>

Dunstan is also singled out when Dickens accuses him of using ventriloquism to convince people that a crucifix was speaking against priests being allowed to marry: "... a voice seemed to come out of a crucifix in the room, and warn the meeting to be of his opinion. This was some juggling of Dunstan's, and was probably his own voice disguised".<sup>582</sup>

Later, at another meeting on the same topic, Dickens accuses Dunstan of using sabotage to get his own way, even when this costs lives:

... he rose and said, "To Christ himself, as judge, do I commit this cause!"

Immediately on these words being spoken, the floor where the opposite party sat gave way, and some were killed and many wounded. You may be pretty sure that it had been weakened under Dunstan's direction, and that it fell at Dunstan's signal.<sup>583</sup>

In fact, it is generally agreed that Dunstan's part of the floor did also give way, and he saved himself by holding on to a beam.<sup>584</sup> Even Keightley, Dickens' main source, acknowledges this as a possibility, albeit reluctantly and sceptically in a footnote.<sup>585</sup> The fact that Dickens removes the possibility that it was not a deliberate act on Dunstan's part reinforces his own

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<sup>581</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 24.

<sup>582</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 29.

<sup>583</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 29.

<sup>584</sup> Jen Cadwallader, "The Material and the Spiritual in Dickens' 'A Child's History of England'", *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 46 (1) (Spring 2019), 69.

<sup>585</sup> Keightley, *History of England*, 37.

emphasis on Catholic trickery and shows that he is prepared to go beyond his already anti-Catholic source to promote his agenda.

Trickery also appears when Dickens describes lotteries in Naples in *Pictures* and criticises priests' part in the practice. First, he refers to them dishonestly encouraging participation by falsely claiming to be able to predict the outcomes of draws.<sup>586</sup> Then, he disparagingly compares them to a magician performing a show:

... the officiating priest... says a silent prayer... the box is now carried round the front of the platform, by an attendant, who holds it up and shakes it lustily all the time; seeming to say, like the conjuror, "There is no deception, ladies and gentlemen; keep your eyes upon me, if you please!".<sup>587</sup>

Thus, again, priestly power is used to aid insincerity and deception and to harm the poor, instead of helping them with Christian charity.

Dickens also talks about power being used to impose Catholic faith on people, similarly to how he saw Evangelicals as attempting to impose their views on others. Thus, for example, when talking about Elizabeth I's reign, he describes, as figures of horror, "SEMINARY PRIESTS... [who] came to teach the old religion, and to be the successors of 'Queen Mary's priests'... when they should die out".<sup>588</sup> Additionally, when discussing Charles I's wife, Henrietta Maria of France, Dickens claims that the English were initially well-disposed towards her, until her priests tried to impose Catholicism, saying, "she... brought over a

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<sup>586</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 178.

<sup>587</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 179-180.

<sup>588</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 313; capitals in original.

crowd of unpleasant priests, who made her do some very ridiculous things, and forced themselves upon the public notice in many disagreeable ways”.<sup>589</sup> Dickens further drives home his point about the perceived tyranny of priests and their aim of forcing Catholicism on others when discussing Martin Luther:

There now arose... the great leader of... The Reformation... which set the people free from their slavery to the priests... who knew all about them, for he had been a priest, and even a monk, himself... Luther, finding one day to his great surprise, that there really was a book called the New Testament which the priests did not allow to be read, and which contained truths that they suppressed, began to be very vigorous against the whole body...<sup>590</sup>

Here, Dickens is asserting that truth is suppressed by Catholicism so that it can keep people under its control and prevent them learning the truth about Christianity. Thus, Catholicism is portrayed as authoritarian and dishonest, contrary to the virtues of real Christianity, which include freedom, sincerity, and honesty. Dickens also confronted priestly control in his own life while in Genoa when his cook announced that she was to marry and remain in Italy. Dickens describes this in a letter as “a very hazardous venture; as the priests will certainly damage the man, if they can, for marrying a Protestant woman”.<sup>591</sup>

As well as drawing on history, Dickens also uses physiognomy, which associated physical characteristics with personal traits, to criticise the characters of both priests and monks. For example, regarding Genoa, Dickens says: “If Nature’s handwriting be at all legible, greater

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<sup>589</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 341.

<sup>590</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 260-261; Dickens makes similar comments about Miles Coverdale on p.272.

<sup>591</sup> Tillotson, *Letters: Four*, 309.

varieties of sloth, deceit, and intellectual torpor, could hardly be observed among any class of men in the world".<sup>592</sup> A similar remark is made when in Rome,<sup>593</sup> and in this way, Dickens associates priests and monks with misery, stupidity, and laziness, contrasting with his idea that Christians should be both cheerful and actively doing good in the world. Additionally, as well as priests and monks themselves apparently being ugly, their inclusion in art makes that ugly according to Dickens:

When I observe heads inferior to the subject... in Italian galleries, I do not attach that reproach to the Painter, for I have a suspicion that these great men, who were of necessity, very much in the hands of monks and priests, painted monks and priests a great deal too often.<sup>594</sup>

Further, Dickens criticises those who use such art to pretend to a goodness that they do not have, thus being hypocritical and dishonest:

I frequently see, in pictures of real power, heads quite below the story and the painter: and I invariably observe that those heads are of the Convent stamp, and have their counterparts among the Convent inmates of this hour... the lameness was not with the painter, but with the vanity and ignorance of certain of his employers, who would be apostles – on canvas, at all events.<sup>595</sup>

Dickens also has a repeated theme of monks and nuns being especially miserable because they are exiled from the world and cut themselves off from the cheerfulness, companionship,

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<sup>592</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 43.

<sup>593</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 120.

<sup>594</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 146.

<sup>595</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 146.

and sociability which he sees as important to Christian faith. Monks are therefore referred to as “maudlin”<sup>596</sup> in Genoa, and Dunstan as “a sour monk” who “hated all love”.<sup>597</sup>

Additionally, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) includes the line, “No wretched monk who droned his life away in that gloomy place, before me, can have been more tired of it than I am”.<sup>598</sup> The Trappist order was particularly singled out in Edmund Dixon’s 1853 *HW* article, “Cats’ Mount”. Recounting a visit to the Trappist monastery on the Mont des Cats in northern France, it states that the monks are, “as completely dead to worldly things, as they can be without actual suicide. Their profession there is a suicide of the heart, which in some cases may perhaps have prevented a suicide of the body.”<sup>599</sup>

Dixon also describes the porter at the door of the monastery as having “a feeble, half-dead, smothered voice”, and says of the monks that “They have set off on a path, whose only termination is death”,<sup>600</sup> instead of experiencing the joy and life of Dickens’ real Christianity. While Dixon is not entirely negative, noting, for example, that the Trappists give out alms, he does suggest that people must frequently join for negative reasons and then regret it:

A twelvemonth [the probationary period before taking vows] is not long enough for a man of strong feelings to recover from the impulses of disappointed love, thwarted ambition, wounded pride, excessive remorse, or temporary religious melancholy, which may perhaps have had its root in bodily and transient causes. A deliverance from the sway of the impelling motive followed by a return to an ordinary state of

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<sup>596</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 49.

<sup>597</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 25.

<sup>598</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 19-20.

<sup>599</sup> Edmund Dixon, “Cats’ Mount”, *Household Words* VII (170) (25 June 1853), 386; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-vii/page-386.html>.

<sup>600</sup> Dixon, “Cats’ Mount”, 386.

mind, and the subsequent regret, when all was over, at having taken such a dreary and irrevocable step, must be terrible torture to those who suffer it.<sup>601</sup>

Dixon is also surprised by cheerful Trappists, often remarking that he could see no sign of unhappiness in them when he would have expected to, as well as calling their promotion of silence “their insanity”.<sup>602</sup> This is not the only *HW* example of a connection between Trappists and death. For example, Sala compares a man’s “lugubrious cry” to “the Trappist, crying ‘Brothers, we must die!’” in “Further Travels in Search of Beef”,<sup>603</sup> later repeating this imagery in *ATYR*.<sup>604</sup> The same Trappist-death connection also appears in *ATYR* in an article about Benedict Joseph Labre, a Franciscan who initially wished to join the Trappists despite the pleas of his parents.<sup>605</sup> Thus, there is a recurring theme of Trappists especially leading a miserable life of silence and withdrawal that is no better than death, and which contradicts the positive Christian qualities of cheerfulness and sociability as emphasised by Dickens.

Nuns, meanwhile, are also described as unhappy because they are cut off from life. For example, in Genoa Dickens describes,

... a solitary convent parapet... where sometimes... I have seen a little group of dark-veiled nuns gliding sorrowfully to and fro, and stopping now and then to peep down upon the waking world in which they have no part.<sup>606</sup>

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<sup>601</sup> Dixon, “Cats’ Mount”, 388.

<sup>602</sup> Dixon, “Cats’ Mount”, 389.

<sup>603</sup> George Sala, “Further Travels in Search of Beef [ii]”, *Household Words* XIII (316) (12 April 1856), 310; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-xiii/page-310.html>.

<sup>604</sup> George Sala, “Quite Alone”, *All the Year Round* XI (270) (25 June 1864), 457; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-xi/page-457.html>.

<sup>605</sup> “The Last New Saint”, *All the Year Round* III (74) (22 September 1860), 560; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-iii/page-560.html>.

<sup>606</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 55.

George Sala's "Stalls" article in *ATYR* further connects female religious vocation to hysteria, implying that such a way of life is unhealthy and a sign of a disordered mind that is unable to grasp real Christianity. Sala professes to understand female religious vocation because "the monastic state, in its best and purest acceptation, is a dream or an ecstasy; and there are vast numbers of women who pass their whole lives in a dreamy and ecstatic frame of mind, and in a species of unobtrusive hysterics".<sup>607</sup> *Edwin Drood* also refers to nuns "telling their beads for their mortification" while being "walled up alive... for having some ineradicable leaven of busy mother Nature in them...".<sup>608</sup> Thus, instead of accepting their true role, presumably as wives and mothers, such women are cut off from it and therefore miserable. (See Section 4 for more on Dickens and women.)

The presumed misery of monks and nuns also extends to the people among whom they live in a June 1846 letter stating, "There are no Italian-Catholicity-Symptoms here [Lausanne] and no Monks or Friars in the streets. For which the people are all the more thriving and happy".<sup>609</sup> He repeats this observation in a letter to his son Frederick, saying: "There are no Priests or Monks to be seen; and the people seem to be very thriving and industrious".<sup>610</sup> Similarly, in October 1846 Dickens wrote to Forster giving his views on the Geneva Revolution of the same month, which had overthrown the conservative government. Dickens sympathised with the rebels, seeing them as rightfully opposing the horrors of Catholicism and its degrading effects on people. In particular, he states that "their horror of the introduction of Catholic priests and emissaries into their towns, seems to me the most rational feeling in the world".<sup>611</sup> Thus, Dickens reveals that he objects to Catholicism on the grounds

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<sup>607</sup> George Sala, "Stalls", *All the Year Round*, n.s., II (38) (21 August 1869), 277.

<sup>608</sup> Dickens, *Edwin Drood*, 24.

<sup>609</sup> Tillotson, *Letters: Four*, 562.

<sup>610</sup> Tillotson, *Letters: Four*, 562.

<sup>611</sup> Tillotson, *Letters: Four*, 632-633.

that, instead of raising people up and making them cheerful and free, it oppresses and grinds them down.

Moving on to Venice, in a chapter presented as a dream, Dickens describes a man waiting for execution. He is visited by a confessor, but this is not a comforting figure. Instead, the confessor is, “a monk brown-robed, and hooded – ghastly in the day, and free bright air, but in the midnight of that murky prison, Hope’s extinguisher, and Murder’s herald”.<sup>612</sup> This of course partly reflects Dickens’ dislike of capital punishment in this part of his life, but it also gives a sinister air to practices of the Catholic Church, which is seen as suppressing rather than encouraging hope, even though hope is a theological virtue. Dickens also suggests that both priests and monks are no better than ordinary people when it comes to bloodshed, whereas he wishes to emphasise mercy, compassion, and forgiveness, all of which are important Christian qualities. Thus, at an execution in Rome, “Priests and monks elbowed a passage for themselves among the people, and stood on tiptoe for a sight of the knife: then went away”.<sup>613</sup> Dickens similarly criticises priests in *A Child’s History*. For example, when talking about the execution of Joan of Arc, he refers disapprovingly to, “... priests and bishops sitting in a gallery looking on, though some had the Christian grace to go away, unable to endure the infamous scene...”.<sup>614</sup> The reference to some going away through “Christian grace” reveals the Christian significance for Dickens of not becoming involved with public executions or revelling in death and violence.

Dickens also suggests that monks pretend to humility, saying satirically in *Pictures* that they had “their humility gratified to the utmost, by being shouldered about, and elbowed right and left, on all sides”.<sup>615</sup> Here, we see Dickens’ dislike of hypocrisy, as in his criticisms of

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<sup>612</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 81.

<sup>613</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 142.

<sup>614</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 212.

<sup>615</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 120.

Evangelicals. Priests are similarly accused of hypocrisy and vanity when Dickens reports on a procession in Rome and states:

There were... a great many priests... carrying – the good-looking priests at least – their lighted tapers, so as to throw the light with a good effect upon their faces; for the room was darkened. Those who were not handsome... carried *their* tapers anyhow, and abandoned themselves to spiritual contemplation.<sup>616</sup>

Cardinal Wolsey again comes in for particular criticism in *A Child's History*, being described as “wonderfully fond of pomp and glitter” and as having “ambled on a mule with a red velvet saddle and bridle and golden stirrups” in “a wonderful affectation of humility”.<sup>617</sup> Similarly, Thomas a Becket is also described as “proud and loved to be famous”, and a Becket’s change of lifestyle away from riches and luxury after becoming archbishop of Canterbury is described as furthering this aim because “It soon caused him to be more talked about as an Archbishop than he had been as a Chancellor”.<sup>618</sup>

It seems from *Pictures* that much of Dickens’ criticism of religious orders revolves around them being shut off from the world, as he sees it, rather than being fully involved, as well as his distrust of Jesuit influence, and his belief that monks generally want power over others. This last comes out strongly in *A Child's History*, as well, and was a widely held attitude among nineteenth-century Protestants, as already shown. This arises from Dickens sharing in the Victorian cultural ideal of family life, as well as his emphasis on faith as something that should encourage practical action and care for others, with engagement with the world in a

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<sup>616</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 153.

<sup>617</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 258.

<sup>618</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 84.

spirit of sincerity, cheerfulness, and generosity. There is also sadness in the monastic life, though. Nuns especially are seen as living cut off from how their lives should be, in a way which reflects the earlier discussion of Protestant ideas about convent life being unnatural compared to the Victorian ideal of marriage and family. The Trappist order is also singled out in this context, being treated as something no-one healthy would choose willingly due to its more extreme withdrawal from the world and everyday life. Priests, on the other hand, are perhaps too involved in the world in Dickens' view, as they attempt to manipulate rulers, further their own interests, and control ordinary people through trickery.

Overall, the depiction of religious orders and priests in both *Pictures* and *A Child's History* is almost entirely negative. There are a few exceptions, however, although these are not always unqualified. For example, in *A Child's History* Dickens casts doubt on the idea that the monks of Swineshead Abbey (which both he and Keightley mistakenly call "Swinestead Abbey") fatally poisoned King John,<sup>619</sup> something which Keightley alludes to as one among several possible causes of John's death.<sup>620</sup> Thus, here Dickens departs from Keightley in a more positive manner. Additionally, when talking about the dissolution of the monasteries, Dickens says that there was much bad in them but also,

... the King's officers and men punished the good monks with the bad; did great injustice, demolished many beautiful things... The monks had been good landlords and hospitable entertainers of all travellers, and had been accustomed to give away a great deal of corn, and fruit, and meat, and other things.<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>619</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 121.

<sup>620</sup> Keightley, *History of England*, 146; the idea that King John was poisoned comes from Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1563), but it is generally accepted that he died from dysentery.

<sup>621</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 269-270.

Dickens here picks up on Keightley's words about the loss of monastic help, although more positively than Keightley, who refers to "the idle" having been used to relying on handouts, as well as those genuinely in need.<sup>622</sup> However, Dickens also assumes that there was much corruption in monasteries, and also later accuses the displaced monks of stirring people up and causing uprisings,<sup>623</sup> so his sympathies are mixed.

The only religious order to (almost) entirely escape criticism is the Capuchin friars, a branch of the Franciscan order. They are seen as more helpful, actively doing good in the community in the way that Dickens associates with true religion, while being less concerned with gaining power over others:

Perhaps the Cappucini... are... the best friends of the people. They seem to mingle with them more immediately, as their counsellors and comforters; and to go among them more, when they are sick; and to pry less than some other orders, into the secrets of families, for the purpose of establishing a baleful ascendancy [*sic*] over their weaker members; and to be influenced by a less fierce desire to make converts, and once made, to let them go to ruin, soul and body.<sup>624</sup>

As an order that is not cloistered, Dickens seems to have approved of their more obviously outward-looking approach to religious life, focused on serving others and showing charity, in line with the virtues which Dickens places at the centre of Christian faith. Additionally, they have genuine interest in caring for people in a kind manner, rather than solely wishing to convert. In support of this, Dickens wrote to his wife in November 1844 about a monastery

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<sup>622</sup> Keightley, *History of England*, 375.

<sup>623</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 270, 281.

<sup>624</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 44.

devoted to helping travellers and commented, “If all Monks devoted themselves to such uses, I should have little fault to find with them”.<sup>625</sup> His only criticism of this order is their dress, which he refers to as “the ugliest and most ungainly that can well be”.<sup>626</sup> Presumably, Dickens was unaware of their history of being nearly as involved as Jesuits with the Counter-Reformation<sup>627</sup> and attempts to oppose Protestantism, or his evaluation might have been more mixed.

Another partly positive portrayal of monks comes from Edmund Yates in the 1859 *ATYR* article, “Out of the World”. Yates visits a monastery (apparently Cistercian) and praises the welcome, hospitality, and accommodation,<sup>628</sup> as well as the cheerfulness of the guest-master, and of the monks’ work with boys convicted of crimes.<sup>629</sup> Thus, the positivity in this portrayal comes from the monks actively caring for others and being cheerful, generous, kind, and hospitable, all of which were important to Dickens. However, despite this, Yates still comments that the monks “exist indeed, but can be scarcely said to live”, passing their days in apathy and monotony.<sup>630</sup> Then, when the guest master is unexpectedly taken ill and dies, Yates initially considers the other monks to be unfeeling: “A young man, apparently in full health, is struck down... and scarcely the least sign of sorrow, or even of surprise, is exhibited by those among whom several years of his life have been passed.”<sup>631</sup> However, he later revises this upon discovering that the monk had been ill for a while and dreaded a lingering death. Yates additionally considers the monks’ meal allowance and dormitories inadequate but is moved to wonder by worship in the chapel, until he experiences, “a

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<sup>625</sup> Tillotson, *Letters: Four*, 228.

<sup>626</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 58.

<sup>627</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, “Capuchin”; <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Capuchins>.

<sup>628</sup> Edmund Yates, “Out of the World”, *All the Year Round* I (4) (21 May 1859), 89; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-i/page-89.html>.

<sup>629</sup> Yates, “Out of the World”, 90.

<sup>630</sup> Yates, “Out of the World”, 90.

<sup>631</sup> Yates, “Out of the World”, 91.

monotonous chant... which I regard as the most dismal and appalling vocal exercise I have ever listened to”.<sup>632</sup> Thus, while Yates displays some negativity towards the monastery, he does report more favourable impressions also, making his approach more nuanced than the more extreme Protestant horror of all things monastic.

In terms of nuns, Eliza Linton’s 1854 *HW* article “The True Story of the Nuns of Minsk” criticises attempts to suppress Catholicism in Russia and refers to one oppressed order as “much loved” due to them showing “kindness and benevolence to the poor and the afflicted”.<sup>633</sup> Thus, similarly to Capuchin monks, nuns are praised when they are seen to be actively helping the poor, reflecting Dickens’ belief that actively doing good to others is a vital part of true Christian faith. It also reflects Dickens’ dislike of persecution and bigotry against particular religious groups, something which comes out strongly in *Barnaby Rudge* (see Section 3.6).

Individual priests also sometimes receive praise. Thus, in *A Child’s History*, Alphege, archbishop of Canterbury in the early-eleventh century, is described as “courageous” and “noble” for defending Canterbury against Danish invaders and refusing to “purchase his release with gold wrung from the poor”.<sup>634</sup> Another archbishop, Anselm, is also described as “a good man” and “virtuous”.<sup>635</sup> A further example is Dickens’ discussion of the Loveday of 1458, an attempt to reconcile warring nobles in the Wars of the Roses. He states: “White Roses assembled in Blackfriars, the Red Roses in Whitefriars; and some good priests communicated between them, and made the proceedings known at evening to the King and

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<sup>632</sup> Yates, “Out of the World”, 91-92.

<sup>633</sup> Eliza Linton, “The True Story of the Nuns of Minsk”, *Household Words* IX (216) (13 May 1854), 290; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-ix/page-290.html>.

<sup>634</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 31-32.

<sup>635</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 61, 68.

the judges”.<sup>636</sup> Finally, even Wolsey, who is heavily criticised in *A Child’s History*, is given some praise, with Dickens stating, “even in his proud days, he had done some magnificent things for learning and education”.<sup>637</sup> Once again, Dickens reveals that his criticisms of priests and monks are partly founded on a belief that they turn their backs on the world rather than actively carrying out acts of charity and service. When they are seen as not doing this, Dickens praises them instead. This is reinforced in the depiction of Charles Borromeo (archbishop of Milan from 1564 to 1584) in *Pictures*. Borromeo is described as: “A charitable doctor to the sick, a munificent friend to the poor, and this, not in any spirit of blind bigotry, but as the bold opponent of enormous abuses in the Romish church”.<sup>638</sup> As before, Dickens’ approval is based on care for the poor, an important part of Dickens’ religious thinking. Also, though, Dickens is positive about what he perceives as Borromeo’s lack of desire to force people into a particular form of faith, and his tackling of corruption in the Catholic Church. This reveals the other aspect of Dickens’ criticism – that monks and priests aim to control people – and shows once again the importance of freedom and sincerity in Dickens’ thinking.

Additionally, Dickens writes approvingly of a priest, “a gentleman of learning and intelligence”, who refused to allow a statue of the Christ Child to be brought into the room of a sick woman with the intention of healing her on the grounds that it would instead cause harm.<sup>639</sup> Finally, in an example of Dickens’ concern with mercy and kindness as Christian virtues, as well as his acknowledgement of divine judgement, he writes that priests in Rome were delaying the execution of a criminal until he would agree to confess, “for it is their

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<sup>636</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 220.

<sup>637</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 264.

<sup>638</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 94.

<sup>639</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 134.

merciful custom never finally to turn the crucifix away from a man at that pass, as one refusing to be shriven, and consequently a sinner abandoned of the Saviour...<sup>640</sup>

### 3.5.2 Papacy and authority

I showed when discussing Evangelicalism that Dickens disliked authoritarian approaches to faith. Catholicism, however, is strongly associated with authority. For Dickens, this was problematic, and a major issue for him was the position of the pope. In this, he agreed with many English Protestants of his time, who were, as already discussed, suspicious of the pope's motives, fearing both religious and political takeovers of the country.

The idea of papal power attempting to take over England, and Dickens' ensuing criticism of authoritarianism, appears most strongly in *A Child's History*. For example, Dickens several times stresses that interdicts were laid on England due to papal ambitions to control the country. In one such instance, Dickens talks about the dispute between King John and Pope Innocent II over making Stephen Langton archbishop of Canterbury in the early-thirteenth century. Dickens describes the pope excommunicating the king because "he had his own reasons for objecting to either King John or King Philip [of France] being too powerful",<sup>641</sup> thus bringing up papal interference with sovereign states. Later, according to Dickens, England was laid under another interdict during King John's reign, but it is not taken seriously:

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<sup>640</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 142.

<sup>641</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 116.

It did not much matter, for the people had grown so used to it now, that they had begun to think nothing about it... they could keep their churches open, and ring their bells, without the Pope's permission as well as with it".<sup>642</sup>

This is somewhat confused since Dickens both sees the pope as being dangerously ambitious and as unimportant. However, it does reveal Dickens' dislike of authoritarian attitudes and his conviction that they should be repulsed. Other examples of dangerous papal ambition are also given regarding Henry VIII<sup>643</sup> and Elizabeth I,<sup>644</sup> in both cases depicting the pope as wanting to interfere with the English monarchy.

An instance regarding England and Ireland is worth looking at in more detail as it also gives insight into Dickens' already-mentioned attitude towards the Irish (Section 3.3.1). Dickens discusses Henry II wishing to assert his authority in Ireland, shortly after Thomas a Becket's death in 1170. This assertion of power is framed as keeping the pope happy following the murder by helping him to expand his power and wealth and overcome Irish resistance to papal authority, since, "the Irish... considered that the Pope had nothing at all to do with them, or they with the Pope, and accordingly refused to him Peter's Pence, or that tax of a penny a house...".<sup>645</sup> This is a rare example of Dickens approving of the Irish, in this case for taking an anti-papal and anti-authoritarian stand that aligns with his own emphasis on humility and freedom. Once the Irish were seen as having accepted Catholicism, though, Dickens' attitude changed for the worse (see Section 3.3.1). For example, the 1851 *HW* "Chips" article "Ballinglen" claimed:

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<sup>642</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 120.

<sup>643</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 268.

<sup>644</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 301, 309.

<sup>645</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 92.

The greatest difficulty in dealing with the Irish, is their religion ... I am confident there is much to be done with poor Paddy, if people will set about it in the right way... schools and Scripture-readers are, thank God, gradually creeping on, and bringing the greatest of all blessings—the Bible—within reach of these neglected creatures...<sup>646</sup>

This claim combines two ideas. The first is that Ireland's problems stem from Catholicism, which in this view degrades, neglects teaching true faith based on the Bible, and is overly authoritarian. The second is the previously-seen assumption that the English have a duty to help this "lesser" race by modelling a better way and educating them in true faith. The idea of Catholicism as a subversive force working to undermine England is also applied to contemporary Ireland in William Allingham's 1852 *HW* article, "Irish Ballad Singers and Irish Street Ballads". Allingham claims that,

In Ireland, the mass of the people recognise but two great parties; the one, composed of Catholics, patriots, would-be rebels—these being interchangeable ideas; the other, of Protestants, Orangemen, wrongful holders of estates, and oppressors in general—these also being interchangeable ideas.<sup>647</sup>

Despite the historical attempts at power-grabbing that Dickens sees, though, he has a different view of Catholicism's contemporary political power, as seen in the Papal States during his visit to Italy. His first reference to this in *Pictures* comes when he visits Bologna, saying that the "Papal territory... is not, in any part, supremely well governed, Saint Peter's

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<sup>646</sup> Anna Grey and Henry Wills, "Chips: Ballinglen", *Household Words* III (71) (2 August 1851), 451; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-iii/page-451.html>.

<sup>647</sup> William Allingham, "Irish Ballad Singers and Irish Street Ballads", *Household Words* IV (94) (10 January 1852), 364; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-iv/page-364.html>.

keys being rather rusted now...”.<sup>648</sup> On a later occasion he refers to “the dismal dirty Papal Frontier”.<sup>649</sup> Later, this is referred to in *HN* as well, which claims that, “The *Papal States* are infested by banditti, who scour the country in great numbers...”.<sup>650</sup> Thus, the political power of the pope is seen as failing and is no longer worth taking seriously, despite the still-present Protestant fears of political takeover. However, even reduced papal control is still negative since it worsens people’s lives. The same emphasis on the pope’s declining power also appears in *HN* when reporting on Pope Pius IX’s return to power after the fall of the short-lived Roman Republic (1849-1850). Pius IX had been seen as a liberal and reforming pope, but upon his return he became more conservative. The article states: “Still more alas, and well a-day, for poor Pio Nono [Pius IX]... The Cardinals are again his masters, and he is the self-announced willing slave to the College of the Propaganda”.<sup>651</sup> This contrasts with *A Child’s History*, which describes papacy as a dangerous, tyrannical force which must be taken seriously and resisted. Instead, the pope is a mere figurehead for people with real power, who themselves are authoritarian and tyrannical, instead of being humble and favouring freedom.

Dickens’ warnings against the power of the Catholic Church can also become satirical, especially regarding papal infallibility, which he sees as an example of authoritarianism that defies common sense. For example, regarding the eleventh-century rival claims to the papacy of Gregory VII and Clement III, he says, “This led to violent disputes, which were aggravated by there being in Rome at that time two rival Popes; each of whom declared he was the only

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<sup>648</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 73.

<sup>649</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 113.

<sup>650</sup> “Narrative of Foreign Events”, *Household Narrative of Current Events* II (March 1851), 68; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-narrative-of-current-events/year-1851/page-68.html>; italics in original.

<sup>651</sup> “Narrative of Foreign Events”, *Household Narrative of Current Events* I (January 1850); <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-narrative-of-current-events/year-1850/page-20.html>.

real original infallible Pope, who couldn't make a mistake".<sup>652</sup> Although Dickens' comment is based on a common Protestant misunderstanding of the concept of papal infallibility, he is still using it to show the ridiculousness of papal claims as he sees them. This misunderstanding of infallibility tends to regard it as applying to all the pope's words, actions, and behaviours, and involving an assertion that he can never be wrong. However, it applies specifically to teaching on matters of faith and morals, based on the Church's mandate from Christ and the ongoing assistance of the Holy Spirit. It is also grounded in the wider infallibility of the Church and its ecumenical councils, as it is believed that God will not permit the (Catholic) Church to fail.<sup>653</sup> Therefore, Dickens errs by assuming that conflict between two claimants to the papal throne means that infallibility must be wrong. A similar approach is seen when Dickens discusses Catherine of Aragon's marriage to Henry VIII: "There were objections to this marriage on the part of the clergy; but, as the infallible Pope was gained over, and, as he MUST be right, that settled the business for the time".<sup>654</sup>

Dickens also often talks about excommunication, an example of authoritarianism which he explicitly declares unchristian. For example, he says in *A Child's History* that,

Excommunication was, next to the Interdict... the great weapon of the clergy. It consisted in declaring the person who was excommunicated, an outcast from the Church and from all religious offices; and in cursing him all over... This unchristian nonsense would of course have made no sort of difference to the person cursed – who could say his prayers at home if he were shut out of church, and whom none but GOD could judge...<sup>655</sup>

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<sup>652</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 61.

<sup>653</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, "Papal Infallibility"; <https://www.britannica.com/topic/papal-infallibility>.

<sup>654</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 252.

<sup>655</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 85; capitals in original.

Dickens clearly sees no real significance to being cut off from sacraments and the Church. However, he does point to harm in excommunication due to “the fears and superstitions of the people, who avoided excommunicated persons, and made their lives unhappy”.<sup>656</sup> Thus, excommunication also falls short of real Christianity because it encourages oppression, judgement, and social isolation, instead of freedom, kindness, and companionship. It also usurps the authority of God in this quotation, who alone can judge, thus adding arrogance to the mix, instead of humility. The idea that the harm does not come from excommunication itself but from people’s reactions based on its use as an instrument of oppression is emphasised elsewhere also. For example, the excommunication of Simon de Montfort in 1271 is dismissed as meaningless because “neither the Earl nor the people cared about [it] at all”.<sup>657</sup> Dickens also sees the English as reacting similarly to *Regnans in Excelsis* (see Section 3.2), saying, “the people by the reformation [*sic*] having thrown off the Pope, did not care much... for the Pope’s throwing off them”.<sup>658</sup> Therefore, to Dickens there is no real significance in excommunication other than its use as an instrument of control.

Returning to Dickens’ own time, he also accuses the pope of insincerity in *Pictures*. For example, he claims that the pope is merely “counting the minutes”<sup>659</sup> during Holy Week ceremonies, doing “what he had to do, as a sensible man gets through a troublesome ceremony”, and being “very glad when it was all over”.<sup>660</sup> This portrays a pope who knows that much of happens in the Catholic Church is mere empty ritual and who is insincere in his participation, in contrast to Dickens’ stress on sincerity and truth in religious faith.

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<sup>656</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 85.

<sup>657</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 132.

<sup>658</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 309.

<sup>659</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 152, 154.

<sup>660</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 156

However, despite his many negative comments on the papacy, Dickens does occasionally make more positive comments about individual popes in *A Child's History*. These often revolve around the pope making peace-making efforts, thus supporting Dickens' focus on goodness and tolerance as signs of good Christian living and showing his alignment with the Christian idea of peace being part of the fruit of the Spirit. This applies especially under Henry I,<sup>661</sup> Henry II,<sup>662</sup> and James II.<sup>663</sup> These more positive comments suggest that Dickens does not object to political intervention by the papacy in itself, but to intervention that he sees as encouraging tyranny. This further suggests that Dickens does not object to authority as such, but to authority that is used in ways that he sees as harmful to freedom. This also ties in with what we have already seen about the nature of his objections to the use of authority by Evangelicals.

Both *Pictures* and *A Child's History* were (mostly) published before the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy, as was *Pickwick Papers*. This restoration led to a hardening in Dickens' attitude towards Catholicism in line with wider English society, and this attitude continued to the end of his life. Now, rather than seeing Catholicism as a spent force, Dickens was roused into considering it a present danger to English freedoms and Protestantism. He even claimed in an 1851 letter that "a War between the Roman Catholic Religion – that curse upon the world – and Freedom, is inevitable", and that "I believe it [the restoration of the hierarchy] will produce the last, great, long, direful War of the world".<sup>664</sup> Dickens' strength of feeling is also reflected in his magazines, not least *HN*, which devoted many pages and issues to the subject, including parliamentary discussions, letters by significant figures, reports on public

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<sup>661</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 72.

<sup>662</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 81.

<sup>663</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 417.

<sup>664</sup> Storey, Tillotson and Burgis, *Letters: Six*, 466-467; italics in original.

meetings held in protest, and editorial commentary. To take one example by way of illustration, the November 1850 issue of *HN* devoted one-third of its pages to the controversy, including a lengthy leader. This stated:

Of the strength and intensity of the agitation which shakes the kingdom from end to end, there can be no doubt whatever. It [the restoration of the hierarchy] occupies every class and sect to the absolute exclusion of every other interest or subject.<sup>665</sup>

Additionally, the restoration was described as insolent, while a pastoral letter issued by the Catholic Church to reduce tensions was reviled as containing “ridiculous arrogance... uneasily assumed humility... bitter sneers and bursting hate”.<sup>666</sup> The leader further drew a parallel with Dissenting churches, seeing Dissenters as acting better than Catholics. This rare example of positivity towards them helps to support Colley’s claim that the divisions between Protestants were nothing compared to the divisions between Protestants and Catholics (see Section 3.2):

But do the Wesleyan and Baptist reject every other christian [*sic*]?... Do they think it seemly or right to insult a great nation in the very name of its greatest act of religious freedom, to trample on its generous tolerance, to ignore its noble struggles, and for its good return evil, for its charity contumely?

It is interesting that Dickens here abandons his criticism of Evangelicals for attempting to impose their views on others in favour of crediting them with a tolerance towards other

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<sup>665</sup> “The Three Kingdoms”, *Household Words Narrative I* (November 1850), 242; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-narrative-of-current-events/year-1850/page-242.html>.

<sup>666</sup> “The Three Kingdoms”, 242.

Christians that he does not recognise elsewhere. This suggests that, despite Dickens being mostly known as a foe to Evangelicals, he could actually be more an adversary of Catholicism concerning authoritarian attitudes.

The article further accuses the Catholic Church of deliberately carrying out an aggressive and arrogant act designed to force others into submission and eliminate Protestantism, in a way which directly opposed the qualities of tolerance, humility, and kindness:

There is no Protestant in England... who does not... spurn and resist an aggression of which the manifest claim is to apply the rights of freedom to the uses of tyranny, and convert an act of justice into a means of domination... It was quite within the power of the Pope to have provided for the spiritual government of the English branch of his church without offence or insult. He was not called on to assume that the entire country had just been rescued from heathenism and restored to the supremacy of the Papal hierarchy. He needed not to have swept away the whole Protestant population to make room for the hierarchy of something less than a million of his fellow-believers. He needed not to have revelled in the anticipated fall of our national faith by way of exalting and aggrandising his own.<sup>667</sup>

The substance of this attack is that the pope is attempting to impose tyranny and an authority he has no right to possess, while dismissing the Christian faith that already exists, thus insulting all Protestants and the country itself. Given the importance of freedom, tolerance, and humility to Dickens, his anger is understandable.

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<sup>667</sup> "The Three Kingdoms", 242.

However, the *HN* leader also includes the idea that Catholic elements within the Church of England were assisting papal encroachments:

Does any one doubt that our own divisions have been the chief inducement to the papal aggression... It is little to repel the enemy from the gate if the traitor remains in the citadel... The English Church was the result of a compromise with Romanism, which still lingers too much... we have not only to contend against Roman Papacy, but we have to contend against Anglo-Papacy.<sup>668</sup>

A similar view was expressed in the previous month's issue of *HN*, which stated: "The precipitate descent of the Pope and his bishoprics has fluttered the pro-papists in Oxford and elsewhere, and their means of mischief are not at all what they were even so late as ten days ago".<sup>669</sup> Individuals also came in for comment, with one letter remarking that a clergyman was "sensible and moderate... *not* tractarian [*sic*"]".<sup>670</sup> Similarly, Dickens expressed uneasiness about the *HW* article "St Vorax's Singing-Birds" (referring to choristers), published in July of that year, because he detected "a gleam of Puseyism... that I don't like".<sup>671</sup> The strength of Dickens' dislike can be seen from the fact that the article was actually almost entirely critical about Anglo-Catholicism, apart from one sentence.<sup>672</sup>

It should be noted that dislike of Anglo-Catholicism was not new to Dickens' writings, and contributed to him joining the Unitarian Church for a period in the 1840s, as he said in a

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<sup>668</sup> "The Three Kingdoms", 244; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-narrative-of-current-events/year-1850/page-244.html>.

<sup>669</sup> "Narrative of Literature and Art", *Household Narrative of Current Events* I (October 1859), 239; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-narrative-of-current-events/year-1850/page-239.html>.

<sup>670</sup> Storey, Tillotson and Burgis, *Letters: Six*, 726.

<sup>671</sup> Storey, Tillotson and Easson, *Letters: Seven*, 113.

<sup>672</sup> Theodore Buckley and William Wills, "St Vorax's Singing-Birds", *Household Words* VII (172) (9 July 1853), 456; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-vii/page-456.html>.

March 1843 letter: “Disgusted with our established church, and its Puseyisms, and daily outrages on common sense and humanity, I have carried into effect an old idea of mine, and joined the Unitarians”.<sup>673</sup> In the same month he wrote another letter, saying, “I am getting horribly bitter about Puseyism... to talk in these times of most untimely ignorance among the people, about what Priests shall wear, and whither they shall turn when they say their prayers...”.<sup>674</sup> In these cases, though, Dickens does not directly accuse Anglo-Catholics of working with the pope. Rather, he focuses on what he considers pointless arguments over doctrine, theology, and liturgical practice, carried out at the expense of displaying Christian charity and helping those in need. However, the same letter discussed above that foretold a war with Catholicism also showed a sharp change of attitude towards the Oxford Movement:

I feel quite certain that but for the *laissez-aller* dealing with the Candlestick and Confessional matters, we never should have got to this pass – for the Pope was made, through that medium, to believe that there was a tendency towards him in England which does not exist...<sup>675</sup>

Discussion of the restoration was not confined to 1850, either, but continued into 1851 and 1852 in both *HN* and *HW*, as well as in letters. In *HW*, for example, a February 1851 article on beer stated that the pope had caused “a fermentation in this country” and included a hope that this would end in “a sinking of the dregs; a going off of nightly volatile gas; and strength communicated to the good stuff in the barrel”.<sup>676</sup> In his letters, Dickens wrote to Wills in August 1851 criticising a proposed article for *HW* for not taking seriously “the Roman

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<sup>673</sup> House, Storey and Tillotson, *Letters: Three*, 455-456; see Section 4.3 of this thesis.

<sup>674</sup> House, Storey and Tillotson, *Letters: Three*, 455-456.

<sup>675</sup> Storey, Tillotson and Burgis, *Letters: Six*, 466-467.

<sup>676</sup> Percival Leigh, “The Chemistry of a Pint of Beer”, *Household Words* II (47) (15 February 1851), 498; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-ii/page-498.html>.

Catholic attempt against the progress of the World”, in an apparent reference to the restoration of the hierarchy.<sup>677</sup> This reveals Catholicism to be an enemy to all goodness and progress in Dickens’ eyes.

Additionally, contrary to claims in the literature that Dickens was uninterested in doctrinal disputes, he commented on the role of Henry Phillpotts, bishop of Exeter, in the Gorham controversy, even years after it ended. Phillpotts had refused to institute George Gorham to a parish in 1847 due to the latter’s Calvinistic views on baptism. The case was ultimately settled by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in Gorham’s favour in 1850, after much wrangling and changing of legal decisions. However, the case raised great controversy over whether secular courts should decide on Church of England doctrine, as well as leading to conversions to Roman Catholicism among some prominent Anglo-Catholics. Angela Burdett-Coutts was a friend of the bishop, despite their different types of churchmanship, but this did not stop Dickens writing to her in February 1857 about him, saying, “I think he has done about as much harm to real Christian brotherhood and good will, by his uniform conduct since he has been a Bishop, as any mere mortal man could well do in his life time”.<sup>678</sup>

In July 1859 Dickens even referred to the Catholic Church as “that wicked old Babylonian woman of ill fame”<sup>679</sup> in a letter to Thomas Trollope, reflecting the words and imagery used by the more extreme Protestants of his time, rather than his usual more moderate and mainstream Protestantism. He seemed to pull back slightly in September 1859 when he wrote to Trollope again, saying that he had made changes to the latter’s *ATYR* article “The Sack of

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<sup>677</sup> Storey, Tillotson and Burgis, *Letters: Six*, 474.

<sup>678</sup> Storey and Tillotson, *Letters: Eight*, 272.

<sup>679</sup> Storey, *Letters: Nine*, 95.

Perugia”, as “moderation should be displayed”.<sup>680</sup> (The city of Perugia, Italy, had rebelled against the authority of the pope in June 1859 but the insurrection was violently put down by papal troops.) However, the article still states that papal claims to be Christ’s Vicar were “blasphemous” given the events in Perugia.<sup>681</sup> In this case, understandably given the violence displayed, Dickens’ criticism of Catholicism for its misuse of authority and power seems to have trumped even his own commitment to moderation and tolerance as expressions of real Christianity. Indeed, as shown especially in sections 3.5.4 and 3.6, Dickens has a particular horror of anything involving both religion and violence, regardless of the perpetrator.

Dickens’ hardened attitude towards the papacy continued into the 1860s, as well. For example, he claimed “natural antagonism to a Pope”<sup>682</sup> in February 1861, and in August 1863 he expressed his horror at the idea of anyone wanting to re-establish papal authority in England, exclaiming: “To think that any human creature should seek out this time of day to set up the tottering monster in England here!”.<sup>683</sup> Finally on Dickens’ hardened attitude, we come to the arguments preceding disestablishment of the Church of Ireland under the 1869 *Irish Church Act*. Dickens expressed disbelief in September 1868 that many politicians and members of the general public saw the Church of Ireland as protecting against papal power in Ireland. Dickens instead saw it as helping papal ambitions, saying:

Could one believe, without actual experience of the fact, that it could be assumed by hundreds of thousands of pestilent boobies... that the Established Church in Ireland

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<sup>680</sup> Storey, *Letters: Nine*, 118.

<sup>681</sup> Thomas Trollope, “The Sack of Perugia”, *All the Year Round* 1 (18) (27 August 1859), 424; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-i/page-424.html>.

<sup>682</sup> Storey, *Letters: Nine*, 382.

<sup>683</sup> Storey, *Letters: Ten*, 279.

has stood between the Kingdom and Popery, when, as a crying grievance, it has been Popery's trump card!<sup>684</sup>

Similarly, Dickens wrote again to de Cerjat in January 1869, remarking that the English would never submit to "Papal aspirations and encroachments". However, he continued, there was danger in Ireland because the Catholic Church was poised to take advantage of Irish grievances about union with England to further its own interests with no regard for the wellbeing of others:

They [the English] know that many things – but especially an artfully and schemingly managed Institution like the Romish Church – thrive upon a grievance, and that Rome has thriven exceedingly upon this, and made the most of it.<sup>685</sup>

Dickens does draw back from more extreme opinions on Irish disestablishment, though, acting more in line with his expressed concern for tolerance. For example, a July 1869 letter reports on a sermon at Higham Church, preached by the curate, Lewis Price. Dickens reports Price claiming that Irish disestablishment was,

a wickedness committed in consequence of one of the Ministers having Popish connexions; and that if "that act of Apostacy and blasphemy" be carried out, Our Saviour will very shortly appear upon earth "to assert and avenge himself" by the establishment of his Kingdom!! – Pretty well this, within 30 miles of London, halfway through 1869!!!<sup>686</sup>

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<sup>684</sup> Storey, *Letters: Twelve*, 182.

<sup>685</sup> Storey, *Letters: Twelve*, 267.

<sup>686</sup> Storey, *Letters: Twelve*, 379.

In this case, Dickens distances himself from Protestant angst, dismissing it as ridiculous and backward, as opposed to his approval of toleration, progress, and reasonableness.

The above discussion has focused on the leadership of the Catholic Church and Dickens' criticisms of it. These criticisms often focused on authoritarianism, arrogance, manipulation, and the negative effect that Dickens saw Catholicism as having on people's lives and happiness in general. However, Dickens did not confine himself to just attacking the leadership of the Church in these terms. He was also concerned about how worship, ritual, and architecture were also used to further Catholic aims, as well as how these things reflected Catholic beliefs and "errors". While Dickens refers to these less often, they are important parts of his critique, and reveal something of his view of Christianity, so I will discuss them now.

### **3.5.3 Worship, ritual, and architecture**

Dickens visited many churches and experienced Catholic worship and ritual while on his journey to Italy. The exteriors of Catholic churches were sometimes referred to approvingly, such as in Parma,<sup>687</sup> and there are a few scattered examples of interiors meeting Dickens' approval.<sup>688</sup> However, he frequently described Catholic church interiors as dark, dreary, and nearly empty of worshippers. For example, he describes Lyons Cathedral as dirty,<sup>689</sup> and another cathedral as "grim, and swarthy, and mouldering and cold".<sup>690</sup> There were also

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<sup>687</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 66.

<sup>688</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 110, 117, 183; see also, "Two Hot Days in Rome", *All the Year Round* XIII (324) (8 July 1865), 570; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-xiii/page-570.html>.

<sup>689</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 17.

<sup>690</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 15.

references to decay inside churches, reinforcing the idea seen earlier that Catholicism was a relic of the past, in contrast to living faith. For example, Avignon Cathedral's paintings are "defaced by time and damp",<sup>691</sup> although he does comment positively on the effect of the sun shining through the windows. The reference to the sun making things beautiful suggests that the beauty and life of the natural world is being contrasted with dark, gloomy, and dead buildings. A similar contrast occurs in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* in the following lines:

Old Time heaved a mouldy sigh from tomb and arch and vault; and gloomy shadows began to deepen in corners; and damps began to rise... In the free outer air, the river, the green pastures, and the brown arable lands, the teeming hills and dales, were reddened by the sunset... In the Cathedral, all became grey, murky, and sepulchral...<sup>692</sup>

In this case the building is an Anglican cathedral, suggesting that Dickens' criticism was not always confined to Catholicism, although on the other hand its Roman Catholic origins are emphasised in references to "monastic graves" and "the dust of abbots and abbesses".<sup>693</sup> In Dickens' words we see an indication that such buildings are failing by not representing the beauty and goodness of God in the same way as the beauty, life, and bright goodness of nature.

Outside of *Pictures* there are a couple of more positive references to Catholic architecture, but these are often paired with negative comments. For example, an 1865 *ATYR* article about St Peter's, Rome states: "The church was in grand gala, the walls and pillars draped with red

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<sup>691</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 19.

<sup>692</sup> Dickens, *Edwin Drood*, 94-95.

<sup>693</sup> Dickens, *Edwin Drood*, 23.

and gold, assimilating harmoniously with the brilliant coloured marbles and mosaics”, but also that “Part-singing... is monotonous” and that postural changes during worship are “meaningless”.<sup>694</sup> Thus, even when Catholic architecture is viewed more positively, Dickens balances this out with criticisms of Catholicism.

When not dreary, church buildings are often seen as gaudy, especially in Genoa. Thus, one church in the city is “a very gaudy place, hung all over with festoons and bright draperies”,<sup>695</sup> while another contains “the veriest trash and tinsel ever seen”.<sup>696</sup> This points to Dickens’ Protestant dislike of highly decorated churches, as well as his feeling that true, sincere worship is conducted in simplicity and calm, as seen in his descriptions of English rural churches. This is further reinforced in another comment about St Peter’s: “I have been infinitely more affected... in many English country churches...”.<sup>697</sup> Meanwhile, Catholic churches are seen as being all about appearance, rather than true worship, and thus lacking in sincerity: “It [St Peter’s] might be a Pantheon, or a Senate House, or a great architectural trophy, having no other object than an architectural triumph”.<sup>698</sup> Elsewhere, similar criticisms were also levelled at English churches displaying Catholic leanings, reflecting the view that the Oxford Movement was leading the Church of England towards Catholicism. For example, the 1865 *ATYR* article “Richard Cobden’s Grave” talks about the church where Cobden is buried, stating:

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<sup>694</sup> “Two Hot Days in Rome”, 570.

<sup>695</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 35.

<sup>696</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 48-49.

<sup>697</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 117.

<sup>698</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 119.

Two Romeward clergymen spent, it is said, seven thousand pounds in getting it up; the stained glass windows are kaleidoscopic, the arches of the aisles ugly and ill proportioned, the chancel separated from the pews by an iron gate and padlock...<sup>699</sup>

As with Evangelicalism, Catholicism was seen as not attracting worshippers because it was not giving a true picture of Christianity. For example, talking about Lyon Cathedral, he says “divers old women, and a few dogs, were engaged in contemplation”.<sup>700</sup> Avignon Cathedral, similarly, is has a Mass attended by “several old women, a baby, and a very self-possessed dog”.<sup>701</sup> Catholic worship is also frequently described as tedious and melancholy, with no real sense of living, sincere worship such as that which Dickens describes in his idealised view of rural Anglican worship. For example, Parma Cathedral is accused of having,

... worshippers within, who were listening to the same drowsy chaunt, or kneeling before the same kinds of images and tapers, or whispering with their heads bowed down, in the selfsame [*sic*] dark confessionals, as I had left in Genoa and everywhere else.<sup>702</sup>

Similar pictures are also given of both Modena Cathedral<sup>703</sup> and Rome’s churches.<sup>704</sup> Thus, Dickens portrays Catholic worship as lacking real life or meaning, being just a series of meaningless rituals. This also links with Dickens’ comments about the coronation of Mary I in *A Child’s History*. The queen, he says, “had a liking too for old customs, without much

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<sup>699</sup> “Richard Cobden’s Grave”, *All the Year Round* XIII (315) (6 May 1865), 344; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-xiii/page-344.html>; see also, Frances Trollope, “Mabel’s Progress”, *All the Year Round* XVII (418) (27 April 1867), 409; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-xvii/page-409.html>.

<sup>700</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 17.

<sup>701</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 19.

<sup>702</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 67.

<sup>703</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 68.

<sup>704</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 135.

sense in them”.<sup>705</sup> Dickens’ dislike of chanting is further revealed in a letter to Forster in February 1845, where he claims that a “priest was chanting lustily – and as badly as the priests invariably do. Their noise is horrible”.<sup>706</sup> Dickens especially disparages Holy Week in Rome because he sees it as having a weariness and lack of interest that contrasts with his own desire for sincerity in religion, describing it in a March 1845 letter as “unmitigated hum[bug]”.<sup>707</sup> He also says, in *Pictures*, “The ceremonies, in general, are of the most tedious and wearisome kind...”.<sup>708</sup> He adds that it was impossible to hear the Miserere among the crowds, stating, “Sometimes, there was a swell of mournful voices that sounded very pathetic and sad, and died away, into a low strain again; but that was all we heard”.<sup>709</sup>

There are a few exceptions to this negative view of Catholic worship, though. One comes at St Peter’s, Rome, with “the raising of the Host, when every man in the guard dropped on one knee instantly, and dashed his naked sword on the ground; which had a fine effect”.<sup>710</sup> Dickens does not explain why this appealed to him, but it does suggest some aesthetic appreciation of ritual and symbolism, despite his many criticisms. Further, on Easter Day in Rome Dickens says:

...what a sight it was to see the Great Square full once more, and the whole church, from the cross to the ground, lighted with innumerable lanterns... And what a sense of exultation, joy, delight, it was... to behold one bright red mass of fire, soar gallantly from the top of the cupola to the extremest summit of the cross, and the moment it

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<sup>705</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 288.

<sup>706</sup> Tillotson, *Letters: Four*, 266.

<sup>707</sup> Tillotson, *Letters: Four*, 288.

<sup>708</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 151.

<sup>709</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 103.152.

<sup>710</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 121.

leaped into its place, become the signal of a bursting out of countless lights, as great, and red, and blazing as itself...<sup>711</sup>

Dickens clearly saw in this act of worship something more vibrant, joyful, and sincere, and thus it fitted better with his ideas about what Christianity should be like than most Catholic worship.

Another issue that comes up multiple times in *Pictures* is beggars in churches. While Dickens generally favours helping others, he appears to see these people as waiting to pounce on the faithful and take advantage of worshippers by approaching them in holy spaces where refusal would presumably be harder. For example, he says that a subterranean church in Parma is “supported by marble pillars, behind each one of which there seemed to be at least one beggar in ambush”.<sup>712</sup> In Rome, also, he describes “the same dirty beggars stopping in their muttered prayers to beg; the same miserable cripples exhibiting their deformity at the doors; the same blind men, rattling little pots like kitchen pepper-castors: their depositories for alms...”.<sup>713</sup> Dickens does not comment beyond noting their presence but light may be shed on him highlighting these people by Harriet Martineau’s 1852 *HW* article, “The Irish Union”. Martineau claims that,

In Ireland, working for wages never was the rule among the poorer classes, while subsistence upon charity always was encouraged by the old custom of society, and by

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<sup>711</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 160.

<sup>712</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 67.

<sup>713</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 135.

the popular religion, which makes alms-giving, without stint and without inquiry, a duty and privilege of religion.<sup>714</sup>

While written much later and about Ireland, not Italy, in both of these Catholic countries there are many people living on the charity of others. This is seen as being encouraged by Catholicism itself, rather than taking action to resolve the problem and doing something positive to help lift these people out of poverty. Thus, people beg because they are not encouraged to do otherwise. As I showed in the Evangelicalism section, Dickens had a high view of the potential for the poor to improve their situation if they were given appropriate help and charity and empowered to take control of their lives. He saw this, rather than simply handing out money, as living out the Christian injunction to love one's neighbour.

The idea of giving alms is also mentioned negatively in relation to Purgatory, with Dickens seeing giving to free souls from Purgatory as ridiculous and an attempt to wring more money out of people rather than being a sincere expression of faith:

Above all, there is always a receptacle for the contributions of the Faithful... often as you are walking along, thinking about anything rather than a tin canister, that object pounces upon you... and on its top is painted, "For the souls in Purgatory"... And this reminds me that some Roman altars of peculiar sanctity, bear the inscription, "Every Mass performed at this altar frees a soul from Purgatory". I have never been able to find out the charge for one of these services, but they should needs be expensive.<sup>715</sup>

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<sup>714</sup> Harriet Martineau, "The Irish Union", *Household Words* VI (137) (6 November 1852), 169; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-vi/page-169.html>.

<sup>715</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 136.

The presumed lack of sincerity is also highlighted when Dickens remarks,

With the money collected at a festa, they usually pay for the dressing of the church, and for the hiring of the band, and for the tapers. If there be any left (which seldom happens, I believe), the souls in Purgatory get the benefit of it.

Dickens further denounces using images of judgement to encourage contributions. These are criticised because, instead of encouraging kindness, gentleness, and freedom, they use ideas about the judgement of God to control the actions of others: “Still further to stimulate the charitable, there is a monstrous painting... representing a select party of souls, frying... for the gratification and improvement (and the contributions) of the poor Genoese”.<sup>716</sup> Similarly, Dickens condemns paintings on the walls of St Stefano Rotundo, Rome because they “represent the martyrdoms of saints and early Christians; and such a panorama of horror and butchery no man could imagine in his sleep...”.<sup>717</sup> Such pictures contradict Dickens’ desire to express Christianity as cheerful and positive, without attempts to frighten people into moral behaviour in an authoritarian manner. Rather, people are to be encouraged to greater goodness through gentleness and kindness (see Section 4).

Dickens also mentions votive offerings in churches on several occasions in *Pictures*. He appears to be ambivalent towards them, seeing them as having pagan origins but as ultimately harmless, and indeed as displaying some of what he sees as important Christian virtues, giving a clear example of the importance of virtues in Dickens’ approach to faith:

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<sup>716</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 46.

<sup>717</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 821.

Though votive offerings were not unknown in Pagan Temples, and are evidently among the many compromises made between the false religion and the true, when the true was in its infancy, I could wish that all the other compromises were as harmless. Gratitude and Devotion are Christian qualities; and a grateful, humble, Christian spirit may dictate the observance.<sup>718</sup>

Dickens appears to particularly dislike penance, seeing it as frequently meaningless, and used to avoid true repentance or genuine attempts to change one's life, in contrast to his stress on the importance of sincerity in Christian faith. In *Pictures*, for example, he describes the work of a religious guild which cares for the bodies of the dead "as a kind of voluntary penance".<sup>719</sup> Dickens recognises that they are doing good work but also sees the idea of penance as being liable to abuse as an attempt to win favour with God, as well as a meaningless ritual which does no real good for others:

Although such a custom may be liable to the abuse... of being recognised as a means of establishing a current account with Heaven, on which to draw, too easily, for future bad actions, or as an expiation for past misdeeds, it must be admitted to be a good one, and a practical one, and one involving unquestionably good works. A voluntary service like this, is surely better than the imposed penance... of giving so many licks to such and such a stone in the pavement of the cathedral...<sup>720</sup>

His main criticism of penance in *Pictures*, though, is reserved for the Scala Santa (Holy Stairs) in Rome. He asserts that "of all the many spectacles of dangerous reliance on outward

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<sup>718</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 20.

<sup>719</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 49.

<sup>720</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 50.

observances, in themselves mere empty forms, none struck me half so much as the Scala Santa... which I saw... to the greatest advantage, or disadvantage, on Good Friday”.<sup>721</sup>

Dickens describes the scene, saying,

On Good Friday, there were... a hundred people, slowly shuffling up these stairs, on their knees, at one time... I never, in my life, saw anything at once so ridiculous, and so unpleasant, as this sight – ridiculous in the absurd incidents inseparable from it; and unpleasant in its senseless and unmeaning degradation... But most of the penitents came down, very sprightly and fresh, as having done a real good substantial deed which it would take a good deal of sin to counterbalance...<sup>722</sup>

Here, Dickens reveals his dislike of what he sees as meaningless attempts to display penitence. Not only are such attempts ridiculous because they are meaningless, but he also considers them as undermining people’s dignity, and thus oppressive. This contrasts with doing good deeds that have meaning and purpose to show a person’s faith in action, which he considers central to Christian life.

The same idea about penance is expressed strongly in *A Child’s History*, as well, when Dickens talks about the tenth-century Queen Elfrida. Dickens sees her as having had a malignant influence over her son until he came of age, and states that she “then... built churches and monasteries, to expiate her guilt. As if a church, with a steeple reaching to the very stars, would have been any sign of true repentance...”.<sup>723</sup> Thus, Elfrida’s efforts are meaningless because they do not address her actions or show any sign that she is truly trying

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<sup>721</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 156.

<sup>722</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 157-158.

<sup>723</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 28.

to live a better life by helping others. Rather, in Dickens' eyes, she is insincerely trying to buy her way out of trouble and attempting to improve her reputation without addressing the real issue in a spirit of true Christian repentance. Similarly, King Canute is described as becoming "sorry... for the blood he had shed at first and going "to Rome in a Pilgrim's dress, by way of washing it out".<sup>724</sup> The point is made even clearer when Dickens describes William I repenting of his violence: "He ordered money to be given to many English churches and monasteries, and – which was much better repentance – released his prisoners of state..."<sup>725</sup>

Dickens further reveals a Protestant dislike of statues, images, and relics. While in Rome, he visits the church of Santa Maria in Ara Coeli, where he encounters a wooden statue representing the Christ Child. Dickens dismisses this item by describing it as a "wooden doll" and claiming that it looks "very like General Tom Thumb, the American dwarf".<sup>726</sup> Comparing a holy statue to a circus act revealed Dickens' flippant attitude towards such items of worship. However, Dickens also saw this statue as having a darker side, since he described its use in cases of illness or childbirth as having a negative effect: "making its appearance at the bedside of weak and nervous people in extremity... it not unfrequently frightens them to death".<sup>727</sup> Thus, Dickens' criticism also focuses on its inability to bring joy, help, and hope in a Christian fashion. Additionally, he reveals his Protestant objections to such statues in a January 1844 letter comparing them to idols. Commenting on William Prescott's 1843 book, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, Dickens states:

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<sup>724</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 35.

<sup>725</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 56.

<sup>726</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 132-133; Tom Thumb (real name, Charles Stratton) was an internationally known dwarf child circus performer in P.T. Barnum's circus.

<sup>727</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 134.

I only wonder that having such an opportunity of illustrating the Doctrine of Visible Judgments, he never remarks when Cortes and his men tumble the Idols down the Temple Steps and call upon the people to take notice that their Gods are powerless to help themselves – that possibly if some intelligent Native had tumbled down the Image of the Virgin or patron saint after them, nothing very remarkable might have ensued, in consequence.<sup>728</sup>

Relics are also criticised as ridiculous. For example, Dickens comments negatively on an “Exhibition of Relics” in St Peter’s, although he does admit that it was having some effect:

The gloom, and the general upturning of faces to the balcony, and the prostration of true believers on the pavement, as shining objects, like pictures or looking-glasses, were brought out and shown, had something effective in it, despite the very preposterous manner in which they were held up for the general edification, and the great elevation at which they were displayed; which one would think rather calculated to diminish the comfort derivable from a full conviction of their being genuine.<sup>729</sup>

Dickens’ scorn about relics is most strongly revealed in *A Child’s History*. For example, he claims that Harold, son of Earl Godwin of Wessex, was made to swear an oath of loyalty to Duke William of Normandy over some (alleged) saints’ bones and scornfully remarks: “As if the great name of the Creator of Heaven and earth could be made more solemn by a knuckle-bone, or a double-tooth, or a finger-nail, of Dunstan!”<sup>730</sup> Dickens thus clearly sees relics as superstition, not sincere worship, and unworthy of true faith in God. Additionally, Dickens

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<sup>728</sup> Tillotson, *Letters: Four*, 4.

<sup>729</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 152.

<sup>730</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 44.

claims that monasteries were full of supposed relics and images that were used to fool people, showing again that his dislike of relics was based on seeing them as tools of manipulation to trick people and not expressions of sincere faith and worship:

...they had images moved by wires, which they pretended were miraculously moved by Heaven... they had among them a whole tun measure full of teeth, all purporting to have come out of the head of one saint ... they had bits of coal which they said had fried Saint Lawrence, and bits of toe-nails which they said belonged to other famous saints... all these bits of rubbish were called Relics, and adored by the ignorant people.<sup>731</sup>

Another issue for Dickens revolves around visions, which he generally dismisses as either signs of mental illness which are taken advantage of by the unscrupulous, or as deliberate attempts at dishonesty and manipulation. In an example of the first, *A Child's History* attempts to explain away the idea that Joan of Arc (c.1412-1431) saw visions and heard heavenly voices. Dickens sees Joan as mentally ill, looking for fame, and sensitive, and he dismisses her as an ignorant child encouraged by people who should have known better. Thus, he describes Joan telling her father that she had seen visions of saints and heard a voice telling her to fight for France, and comments:

There is no doubt, now, that Joan believed she saw and heard these things. It is very well known that such delusions are a disease which is not by any means uncommon... She had long been a moping, fanciful girl, and, though she was a very good girl, I

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<sup>731</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 269.

dare say she was a little vain, and wishful for notoriety... The cruelties she saw committed, touched Joan's heart and made her worse.<sup>732</sup>

Dickens wishes to discourage any idea of seeing visions of saints, something which forms part of Catholic but not Protestant spirituality, along with discrediting Joan as a child with problems. However, he does not blame Joan herself, but the climate in which she lived, as he declares that Joan led "a religious, an unselfish, and a modest life, herself"<sup>733</sup> and that "on the bread of sorrow and the water of affliction, the visions and the Voices soon returned. It was quite natural that they should do so, for that kind of disease is much aggravated by fasting, loneliness, and anxiety of mind".<sup>734</sup> Thus, this can be seen as an example of negative Catholic influence on an innocent person through encouraging mistaken ideas to achieve particular aims and gain control. An example of deliberate manipulation comes with Elizabeth Barton, the Maid of Kent (1506-1534). Dickens is much harsher here, perhaps because Elizabeth was older than Joan when she began claiming her visions (19 rather than Joan's 13 years) and so could not be dismissed as a misguided child. Dickens calls her "another of those ridiculous women who pretended to be inspired, and to make all sorts of heavenly revelations, though they indeed uttered nothing but evil nonsense".<sup>735</sup> Thus, Dickens rejects her visions as attempts to gain attention and cause trouble, insisting that they form no part of sincere and honest faith.

However, despite Dickens' dismissal of visions, he famously described a dream he had in Italy in which he saw a vision of his deceased and much-missed sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth (died, 1837). Writing to Forster in September 1844, Dickens explained:

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<sup>732</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 206-207.

<sup>733</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 211.

<sup>734</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 212.

<sup>735</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 267-268.

I was visited by a Spirit... It wore a blue drapery, as the Madonna might do in a picture by Raphael... I knew it was poor Mary's spirit... It was so full of compassion and sorrow for me... "But answer me one other question!" I said... "What is the True religion?" As it paused a moment without replying, I said..."You think, as I do, that the Form of religion does not so greatly matter, if we try to do good? – or", I said, observing that it still hesitated, and was moved with the greatest compassion for me, "perhaps the Roman Catholic is the best? perhaps it makes one think of God oftener, and believe in him more readily?" "For *you*", said the Spirit, full of such heavenly tenderness for me, that I felt as if my heart would break; "for *you*, it is the best!".<sup>736</sup>

It is hard to know what to make of this, and Dickens' own reaction is mixed. In the same letter, he puts the subject of the dream partly down to where he was staying. He particularly mentions an old altar in his bedroom, the outline of an old religious picture, and hearing convent bells during the night. However, he has described the dream in detail, suggesting it is important to him, and he continues by saying, "And yet, for all this... I wonder whether I should regard it as a dream, or an actual Vision!".<sup>737</sup> Forster himself puts this dream forward as evidence that Dickens was struggling with his beliefs, stating, "it strengthens other evidences... of his not having escaped those trying regions of reflection which most men of thought and all men of genius have at some time to pass through".<sup>738</sup> Additionally, Dickens had begun attending a Unitarian chapel in the 1840s, in a sign that he was questioning where his spiritual home should be. Dickens' questioning of the spirit also certainly suggests that, as Mark Eslick puts it, Dickens was looking for "spiritual certainty in formal religion".<sup>739</sup>

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<sup>736</sup> Tillotson, *Letters: Four*, 196; italics in original.

<sup>737</sup> Tillotson, *Letters: Four*, 196-197.

<sup>738</sup> Forster, *Life*, 164.

<sup>739</sup> Eslick, "Charles Dickens", 2.

However, as Eslick further points out, the spirit's answer that Catholicism was best for Dickens "is anathema to the orthodox teachings of the Catholic Church as it implies Catholicism may not be the best religion for everyone".<sup>740</sup> Eslick asserts that this dream reveals a conflicted approach to Catholicism on Dickens' part,<sup>741</sup> as it suggests a hidden yearning for the faith. Dickens himself dismissed the dream, though, as resulting from his location and thoughts while in Italy. Also, the unorthodox approach to Catholic faith expressed by the spirit, and Dickens' own commentary on Catholicism varying from dismissive to hostile, in both public and private writings, suggest that the idea of a secret yearning for Catholicism is overstated. Dickens may well have been fascinated by the faith, but this is not to say that he had a hidden wish to embrace it, especially given his many criticisms.

Another element of Catholicism that Dickens sometimes criticises is auricular confession, and especially dedicated confessionals. As mentioned in Section 3.3.5, confessionals were sometimes seen among Protestants as places in which acts of immorality could be carried out. Dickens does not seem to have attached much importance to this aspect of Catholic faith but did sometimes reference it. I have already mentioned Dickens referring to dark confessionals in Genoa, and he briefly mentions them in *A Child's History*.<sup>742</sup> However, these are the only times he mentions confession in these books. It appears a few times in magazine articles, though. The main example of this is Thomas Trollope's "The Confessor's Hand-book", published in *ATYR* in June 1859. The article sets up a conflict between two parishes over whether to use auricular confession. The narrator of the article is charged with settling the question, which he does by studying *The Handbook for Confessors* by Agostino Valentine

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<sup>740</sup> Eslick, "Charles Dickens", 2.

<sup>741</sup> Eslick, "Charles Dickens", 3.

<sup>742</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 280.

(1853). The narrator notes that the book spends a great deal of time cataloguing sins and laying down rules about severity and how sins accumulate, and remarks on,

the infallible tendency of the system to lose sight of sinfulness, while busying itself in counting up sins and classing them; and to destroy all action of the natural conscience of mankind by making the question, whether and how grievously a man is sinning, one which can be decided only by his Confessor.<sup>743</sup>

The criticism here is clearly that in busying themselves with numbers and severity of sins, Catholics are losing sight of what really matters: leading a life of true Christian faith and action. In the process they ignore their God-given sense of what is right and wrong in favour of leaving such things to others, who may use this power in harmful or self-serving ways. As the narrator goes on to comment: “In some cases, the decisions of the scholastic casuists are quite beyond the comprehension of the untrained mind”.<sup>744</sup> The article also accuses the confessional system of “subserviency to the worst manifestations of worldly meanness and flunkeyism”; saying, for example, that according to the hand-book, “the seducer is bound to make to his victim the reparation of marriage; unless he be much richer than she is, or of higher rank; or his family would consider the match a disgrace”.<sup>745</sup> Thus, the system allows worldly concerns to take the place of sincerity and an honest desire to do good. The narrator finally comes down against confessionals, saying:

the cut-and-dry formalism, of such a system... substituting, as it does, for the broad eternal laws of right and wrong which the Creator has written in our hearts, a network

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<sup>743</sup> Thomas Trollope, “The Confessor’s Hand-book”, *All the Year Round* I (6) (4 June 1859), 127; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-i/page-127.html>.

<sup>744</sup> Trollope, “Confessor’s Hand-book”, 129.

<sup>745</sup> Trollope, “Confessor’s Hand-book”, 130.

of minute precepts deduced... from the logical thimble-rigging of a number of casuistical principles, must have the effect of destroying all the natural workings of the conscience.<sup>746</sup>

This article sets up a conflict between, on one side, a legalistic system that takes no account of natural laws of right and wrong, and, on the other side, a God-given knowledge of good and evil. The latter is much preferred because it is human and natural. This reflects Dickens' own approach to Christianity as a following of God-given impulses towards doing good, as well as his dislike of authoritarian approaches which tell people what is or is not right.

Again in *ATYR*, the 1865 article "Monastic Mysteries" asserted that confession was especially harmful to women, something that contrasts with Dickens' desire for faith to be a source of help, joy, and comfort:

If the practice of confession is simple and easy for monks, it is quite a different thing for nuns. It is an affair which absorbs them day and night, incessantly occupies their thoughts, and supplies inexhaustible employment for every leisure hour. Little by little it becomes for them the sine qua non of their existence, an occult science.<sup>747</sup>

The article continues by detailing the excessive hold that it sees confessors having over nuns, in an example of criticism based on perceptions of authoritarianism:

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<sup>746</sup> Trollope, "Confessor's Hand-book", 130.

<sup>747</sup> "Monastic Mysteries", *All the Year Round* XIII (301) (28 January 1865), 8; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-xiii/page-8.html>.

She inquired why the nuns made their confession seated, contrary to the universal custom. The reply was, that it was impossible to remain kneeling for three or four hours, and that the penitents only knelt at the moment when absolution was given... we confess not only our venial sins...but we also desire that our confessor... should direct every act of our lives. We tell him our thoughts, our affairs, our projects; for he is the only friend, the only support we have... With nuns, an affair touching their confessor is a matter of state, a casus belli. What reconciles them to their prison is the liberty they enjoy of seeing and writing to the priest for whom they have formed an attachment... There are even nuns who will not incur the responsibility of making out their own washing-bill without the intervention of their confessor.<sup>748</sup>

I have shown that Dickens had many criticisms of Catholic worship and ritual and was rarely positive about them. However, he was understandably even more critical regarding religious violence, as I discuss now.

### 3.5.4 Religious violence

Dickens' comments on religious violence mainly focus on the Inquisition<sup>749</sup> and the Crusades, although he also refers to anti-Semitic violence. While there is not much on these topics in Dickens work, what there is gives us further insight into Dickens' conception of faith by showing his rejection of anything other than loving action, especially when violence is used to enforce beliefs. In *Pictures*, Dickens speaks about visiting the Palace of the Popes

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<sup>748</sup> "Monastic Mysteries", 9.

<sup>749</sup> Dickens does not generally distinguish between Inquisition activities and characteristics in different countries, so it will be discussed as a uniform organisation here, although I recognise there were differences between countries and at different times.

in Avignon, and comments on visiting “the ruins of the dreadful rooms in which the Inquisition used to sit”.<sup>750</sup> He especially notes that there had been a picture in these rooms showing the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10.25-37), commenting on its incongruity: “Conceive the parable of the Good Samaritan having been painted on the wall of one of these Inquisition chambers! But it was, and may be traced there yet”.<sup>751</sup> This is not the only time Dickens uses this parable to make a point about people or organisations claiming to be Christian while acting in an unchristian manner. In *Oliver Twist*, in a conversation between Mr Bumble, the beadle, and the undertaker about the beadle’s buttons, Bumble comments:

‘The die is the same as the parochial seal – the Good Samaritan healing the sick and bruised man... I put it on, I remember, for the first time to attend the inquest on that reduced tradesman who died in a doorway at midnight.’<sup>752</sup>

It then transpires that the man died due to “exposure to the cold, and want of the common necessities of life”.<sup>753</sup> The undertaker then attempts to bring up some criticism that was made of the relieving officer (whose job it was to administer poor relief) but is cut off by Bumble before he can finish. It is clear, though, that the man might not have died if he had been properly looked after. In both *Oliver Twist* and the description of the Palace of the Popes, the implication is clear: both parties fail in their proper Christian duty of caring for the poor and unfortunate and are instead cruel and uncaring. Secondly, they reveal their hypocrisy by using images of the Good Samaritan while failing to act on the parable’s message about caring for others, even enemies. This cruelty, hypocrisy, and deafness to the Christian

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<sup>750</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 21.

<sup>751</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 22.

<sup>752</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 29.

<sup>753</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 29.

message is further emphasised in Avignon when Dickens describes the tortures used by the Inquisition, ending satirically by saying,

... know us [the Inquisition] for His chosen servants, true believers in the Sermon on the Mount, elect disciples of Him who never did a miracle but to heal: who never struck a man with palsy, blindness, deafness, dumbness, madness, any one affliction of mankind; and never stretched His blessed hand out, but to give relief and ease!<sup>754</sup>

Dickens' feelings about the Inquisition as an unchristian institution that failed to follow the example of Jesus also appear in *A Child's History*, where he says that it was "the most UNholy [*sic*] and the most infamous tribunal that ever disgraced mankind, and made men more like demons than followers of Our Saviour".<sup>755</sup> The magazines also contain frequent passing comparisons between the Inquisition and tortuous appliances, work, and situations, and occasional direct references. For example, in 1854 an article states: "Of the Inquisition—that dreadful police of Roman Catholicism... Peter relates an anecdote in connection with it that is worth transcribing, as a sign of the horror with which it was regarded even in its native land".<sup>756</sup> Thus, the Inquisition is positioned as uniquely terrible, even to some Catholics, suggesting that Dickens does not intend to blame all Catholics for its work, in line with his horror of fanaticism and intolerance of others, as seen in *Barnaby Rudge* (see Section 3.6).

The strongest denunciation in the magazines, though, comes in the February 1859 article, "The Inquisition's Gala-Day", by (George) Walter Thornbury. The article's narrator reads a book by someone who had escaped the Spanish Inquisition and uses it to write a story about

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<sup>754</sup> Dickens, *Pictures*, 23.

<sup>755</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 187.

<sup>756</sup> Edmund Ollier, "An Old Book of Geography", *Household Words* IX (207) (11 March 1854), 76; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-ix/page-76.html>.

their work and methods. First, he details various kinds of torture used to force confessions of heresy from people, before commenting on a banner carried in procession before their prisoners by Dominicans, who he describes (not entirely accurately) as founding the Inquisition:

Before them flaunted the banner of the order, representing... the frocked Saint, holding a threatening sword in one hand, and, in the other, an olive-branch, with the motto Justice and mercy. God of love, what a mockery of thy attributes!<sup>757</sup>

The procession then reaches a church, with an altar “that seemed to bar out God and his mercy from us, and to wrap the very sun in a grave-cloak”. A description of another procession also explicitly refers to the importance of the theological virtues:

on which six gilded and illuminated missals laid open; those books of the Gospels, too, in which I had once read such texts as—God is love; Forgive as ye would be forgiven; Faith, hope, charity: these three, but the greatest of these is charity.<sup>758</sup>

The prisoners then enter the church and experience condemnation and judgement before receiving their sentences. Meanwhile, the priests, far from showing compassion and kindness, are described as “surfeited... with their enemies’ blood”,<sup>759</sup> while the Dominicans “had been all night singing hymns and thirsting for our blood”.<sup>760</sup> Finally, the narrator throws down the

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<sup>757</sup> (George) Walter Thornbury, “The Inquisition’s Gala-Day”, *Household Words* XIX (464) (12 February 1859), 246; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-xix/page-246.html>.

<sup>758</sup> Thornbury, “Inquisition’s Gala-Day”, 247.

<sup>759</sup> Thornbury, “Inquisition’s Gala-Day”, 248.

<sup>760</sup> Thornbury, “Inquisition’s Gala-Day”, 248.

book, exclaiming: "How long... is man to turn earth into hell? how long to use Thy name as a mask for his most loathsome wickedness—how long—?".<sup>761</sup>

This article expresses the full horror of the Inquisition in more detail than Dickens himself but is very much in line with his idea that Christianity should be a religion of goodness, mercy, kindness, and tolerance, not domination, retribution, and judgement directed at those who have differing beliefs. There is, in all the writings about the Inquisition, only one small attempt to soften this stance, and this comes again from Thornbury, despite the condemnation above, only a few months later. In "The Spain of Cervantes and the Spain of Gil Blas" (May 1859) Thornbury blames the Spanish Inquisition's approach on the harshness of the time and especially Spain's fight against Islam:

Have we not to thank Spain for scotching the snake of Mohammedanism... And if we do think rather harshly of the Inquisition... let us review these doings with kind pity, remembering the stubborn and unforgiving bigotry that ages of struggles with armed Mohammedanism had produced...<sup>762</sup>

While obviously promoting anti-Islamic prejudice, the article does try to put the Inquisition into context, rather than judging it entirely by the standards of a later age. Thus, it perhaps attempts to show some of the same tolerance and understanding that Dickens wishes to promote.

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<sup>761</sup> Thornbury, "Inquisition's Gala-Day", 249.

<sup>762</sup> (George) Walter Thornbury, "The Spain of Cervantes and the Spain of Gil Blas", *Household Words* XIX (478) (21 May 1859), 581; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-xix/page-581.html>.

Other than Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, Dickens rarely wrote about members of other religions, except as subjects of the British Empire, but he did cover the Crusades in *A Child's History*. We might expect wholehearted condemnation, given his hatred of the Inquisition, but his approach was actually more nuanced, apparently influenced by his commitment to Christianity. This commitment is seen not only in his upholding of Christian virtues and stress on sincere and active Christian faith, but also in his abovementioned negative comments on pagan influences in Christianity, and in *A Child's History* when he praises the Romans for bringing Christianity to Britain and “freeing” its inhabitants from the Druids.<sup>763</sup> In terms of the Crusades themselves, Dickens states that the aim of the First Crusade (1096-1099) was to help Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem who were being badly treated.<sup>764</sup> Genuine crusaders are described as “zealous” and “valiant”<sup>765</sup> but, mixed in with them, are those with less worthy motives:

Among them were vast numbers of the restless, idle, profligate, and adventurous spirit of the time. Some became Crusaders for the love of change; some, in the hope of plunder; some, because they had nothing to do at home; some, because they did what the priests told them; some, because they liked to see foreign countries; some, because they were fond of knocking men about, and would as soon knock a Turk about as a Christian.<sup>766</sup>

Later, regarding the Third Crusade (1189-1192), Dickens again criticises crusaders for their behaviour, but not crusades themselves:

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<sup>763</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 9.

<sup>764</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 62.

<sup>765</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 62-63.

<sup>766</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 62.

Wherever the united army of Crusaders went, they agreed in few points except in gaming, drinking, and quarrelling, in a most unholy manner; in debauching the people among whom they tarried, and whether they were friends or foes; and in carrying disturbance and ruin into quiet places.<sup>767</sup>

For the Ninth Crusade (1271-1272), Dickens appears to be more critical again, stating that Prince Edward (later, Edward I) “stormed Nazareth, at which place, of all places on earth, I am sorry to relate, he made a frightful slaughter of innocent people...”.<sup>768</sup> This is a more direct attack on crusader warring, based on it affecting those who were not directly involved in the fighting. Thus, while Dickens entirely condemns violence by the Inquisition, he is less clear in his condemnation of the Crusades, at least to start with, given that he supports their defence of Christianity. However, he clearly condemns those who pretend to holiness while in fact wishing to indulge their own unsavoury desires and thus displaying hypocrisy.

One place in which Dickens does not condone violence against non-Christians, however, also comes in *A Child's History*, and concerns the massacring of Jews on the day of Richard I's coronation in 1189. There is no ambiguity in Dickens' condemnation. This is despite the accusations of anti-Semitism that have arisen from “the notorious anti-Semitic stereotype of Fagin” as an “eternal vagabond” who preys upon respectable Christians<sup>769</sup> in *Oliver Twist*, making Fagin the archetypal “villainous Jew”.<sup>770</sup>

In *A Child's History*, Dickens states that,

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<sup>767</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 104.

<sup>768</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 136.

<sup>769</sup> James Buzard, “Race, Imperialism, Colonialism, and Cosmopolitanism”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Charles Dickens*, edited by Robert L. Patten, John O. Jordan, and Catherine Waters (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 520.

<sup>770</sup> Butterworth, Butterworth, *Dickens, Religion and Society*, 47.

... a dreadful murdering of the Jews took place, which seems to have given great delight to numbers of savage persons calling themselves Christians... This great cruelty lasted four-and-twenty-hours, and only three men were punished for it. Even they forfeited their lives not for murdering and robbing the Jews, but for burning the houses of some Christians.<sup>771</sup>

Then, while talking about Jews taking refuge in York Castle from anti-Semitic attacks in 1190 and being burned to death, Dickens states,

When the populace broke in, they found... only heaps of greasy cinders, with here and there something like part of the blackened trunk of a burnt tree, but which had lately been a human creature, formed by the beneficent hand of the Creator as they were.<sup>772</sup>

Looking at the above, it seems that the Crusades were justified on the grounds of needing to protect Christian pilgrims and protect Christian holy sites, thus defending the Christian faith, something which reveals its importance to Dickens despite those scholars who have tried to downplay it. Meanwhile, there was no reason for Jewish persecution under Richard other than bigotry, and the violence in the latter was unjustified, revealing a complete lack of tolerance, kindness, and charity. Thus, Dickens reveals his belief in these virtues, mixed in with his commitment and faithfulness to Christianity. With the Inquisition, similarly, it was intolerance of differing opinions to which Dickens objected, combined with using violence to

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<sup>771</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 100-101.

<sup>772</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 102.

impose doctrinal conformity through fear. This he ascribed to Catholicism being, in his view, an intrinsically intolerant faith, unlike real Christianity.

Dickens' focus on tolerance and kindness as central Christian virtues also meant that, despite his dislike of Catholicism, he refused to support bigotry and persecution aimed at Catholics. This is shown most clearly in *Barnaby Rudge*, his only novel dealing with Catholicism, and one in which he strongly criticised religious violence aimed at Catholics.

### **3.6 *Barnaby Rudge* and tolerance**

Dickens began *Barnaby Rudge* in 1839, with the first apparent reference to it coming in a letter to Forster in January of that year,<sup>773</sup> before finally publishing it in 1841. *Barnaby Rudge* thus comes well before the real hardening of Dickens' attitudes that I have shown above, but it did arrive within a social atmosphere of increasing anti-Catholicism. Many critics have considered the book to be about Chartism rather than religion, though. Both Humphry House and Andrew Sanders have argued this based on the idea that Dickens was not interested in the past but preferred to look to the future.<sup>774</sup> While it is true, as I have shown, that Dickens was interested in progress rather than nostalgia, *A Child's History* suggests he was interested in the past also, if only "to warn his own times of contemporary dangers and to show the way forward".<sup>775</sup> In another example of linking the book to Chartism, Peter Ackroyd claims that,

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<sup>773</sup> House and Storey, *Letters: One*, 491; see also footnote on this page.

<sup>774</sup> See also, Kathleen Tillotson, Edgar Johnson, Patrick Brantlinger, and Steven Marcus, for further examples.

<sup>775</sup> Denis Paz, *Dickens and Barnaby Rudge: Anti-Catholicism and Chartism* (Monmouth: Merlin Press, 2006), [1].

His interest in the London mob which had rampaged through the streets of London and set fire to Newgate Prison, for example, must have been considerably increased by the fact that now in his own period Chartism and the Chartists seemed about to provoke civil rebellion of a similar kind.<sup>776</sup>

However, while Chartist upheavals may have provided a spark of inspiration, we cannot dismiss the importance of the religious world in which Dickens lived or fail to give proper weight to the importance of faith to Dickens and Victorian society in general. Jhirad recognises this, noting that “Dickens forcefully attacks anti-Catholic prejudice in this novel whose sympathetic Catholic characters are sharply contrasted with a violent group of Protestant fanatics”.<sup>777</sup> Additionally, the 1841 preface to *Barnaby Rudge* shows that Dickens saw the Gordon Riots as having an important lesson to teach about religious faith and ideas of right and wrong:

It is unnecessary to say, that those shameful tumults... teach a good lesson. That what we falsely call a religious cry is easily raised by men who have no religion, and who in their daily practice set at nought the commonest principles of right and wrong; that it is senseless, besotted, inveterate, and unmerciful; all History teaches us.<sup>778</sup>

Dickens was clear that this was to be a historical book about the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots of 1780, writing in a February 1839 letter that it was, “a tale of the riots of Eighty, before factories flourished...”.<sup>779</sup> However, he also wanted his contemporaries to draw important lessons about religious tolerance. Further, Paz has shown that Dickens’ contemporaries saw

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<sup>776</sup> Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 187.

<sup>777</sup> Jhirad, *Dickens’ Inferno*, 5.

<sup>778</sup> Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge: A Tale of the Riots of ‘Eighty* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 3.

<sup>779</sup> House and Storey, *Letters: One*, 507.

*Barnaby Rudge* as being about religion rather than politics, even though they disagreed about the precise targets of the criticisms and warnings within the novel.<sup>780</sup>

As Robert Butterworth notes, while Dickens' other historical novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, is about revolution, *Barnaby Rudge* is about opposition to revolution, as the rioters "attempt to hold back progress towards a more enlightened society",<sup>781</sup> one in which religious tolerance is key. Butterworth continues by pointing out that Gordon and those who follow him are, despite professing to be Christian, missing what Dickens sees as central aspects of Christian faith: a "sense of the brotherhood of man and of 'Universal Love'".<sup>782</sup> As we have seen, Dickens objected to much about Roman Catholicism, but *Barnaby Rudge* shows him "deeply sympathetic to the plight of victimised Catholics" and displaying "scepticism about Protestant fears of Catholic conspiracy".<sup>783</sup>

While the book takes a long time to get to the riots themselves, religious intolerance can be seen from early on, starting with parental opposition to marriage between Emma Haredale, from a Catholic family, and Edward Chester, a Protestant. However, it seems that such scruples could be overcome if Emma were sufficiently wealthy, in a display of hypocrisy and lack of sincerity: "In a religious point of view alone, how could you ever think of uniting yourself to a catholic [*sic*] unless she was amazingly rich?".<sup>784</sup> We are also introduced to Gabriel Varden's wife, Martha, depicted as a fervent, judgemental, bad-tempered Protestant who is always reading the "Protestant Manual" (a reference to *The Protestant Manual of Christian Devotions*, published in 1750). To give one example: "... Mrs Varden was most

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<sup>780</sup> Paz, *Dickens and Barnaby Rudge*, 99-120.

<sup>781</sup> Butterworth, *Dickens, Religion and Society*, 145.

<sup>782</sup> Butterworth, *Dickens, Religion and Society*, 145.

<sup>783</sup> Eslick, "Charles Dickens", 40.

<sup>784</sup> Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, 136.

devout when most ill-tempered. Whenever she and her husband were at unusual variance, then the Protestant Manual was in high feather”.<sup>785</sup>

In contrast, the title character, Barnaby Rudge, is developmentally disabled, yet Dickens sees in his happiness, childlike enjoyment, and wonder a lesson about true faith and the nature of God. This brings to mind Matthew 18.1-3’s words about the need to become childlike to enter Heaven, as well as contrasting with the sterner views of those who have a serious view of religion:

Ye men of gloom and austerity, who paint the face of Infinite Benevolence with an eternal frown; read in the Everlasting Book... the lesson it would teach. Its pictures are not in black and sombre hues, but bright and glowing tints; its music... is not in sighs and groans, but songs and cheerful sounds... learn some wisdom even from the witless, when their hearts are lifted up they know not why...<sup>786</sup>

Lord Gordon himself is depicted interestingly by Dickens. Rather than portraying an inflexible fanatic, Dickens says that his face “was thin and mild, and wore an air of melancholy; but it was suggestive of an indefinable uneasiness, which infected those who looked upon him, and filled them with a kind of pity for the man...”.<sup>787</sup> This conveys a certain sympathy with Gordon which is reinforced by a June 1841 letter, commenting:

Say what you please of Gordon, he must have been at heart a kind man, and a lover of the despised and rejected, after his own fashion. He lived upon a small income, and

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<sup>785</sup> Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, 47.

<sup>786</sup> Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, 208.

<sup>787</sup> Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, 293.

always within it; was known to relieve the necessities of many people; exposed... the corrupt attempt of a minister to buy him out of Parliament; and did great charities in Newgate. He always spoke on the people's side, and tried... to expose the profligacy of both [political] parties...<sup>788</sup>

Here, Dickens recognises aspects of Gordon that align with his own view of Christianity, singling out for praise Gordon's kindness, charity, honesty, and care for the poor. Thus, Dickens' dislike of persecution and desire for fairness and tolerance extended even to the leader of the Gordon Riots. Gordon's secretary, Gashford, comes out less well, however, and is in many ways the real instigator of the violence in *Barnaby Rudge*. Mark Eslick persuasively argues that Gashford, depicted as the cunning and manipulative orchestrator of the riots, is shown using "language and images commonly used in anti-Jesuit literature and feeds into Victorian Protestant paranoia surrounding Jesuit intrigues".<sup>789</sup> For example, Gashford is described as:

...taller, angularly made, high-shouldered, bony, and ungraceful. His dress... was demure and staid in the extreme; his manner, formal and constrained... His manner was smooth and humble, but very sly and slinking... he looked patient – very patient – and fawned like a spaniel dog... though he knew his lord was not regarding him, he looked into his face from time to time, and, with a meek and deferential manner, smiled as if for practice.<sup>790</sup>

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<sup>788</sup> House and Storey, *Letters: Two*, 294-295.

<sup>789</sup> Eslick, "Charles Dickens", 41.

<sup>790</sup> Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, 293; italics in original.

The words “sly” and “slinking” are especially striking, given that Dickens uses them elsewhere to describe Jesuits. Additionally, the view of Jesuits as underhand, insincere, and deceitful, pretending to humility and virtue while patiently working towards a sinister goal, was also widespread in Victorian society, as I have previously discussed. Thus, in an inversion of the stereotype, Gashford the fanatical Protestant is given Jesuitical characteristics. He is also, like Jesuits, portrayed as a threat to both religious faith and the political order as he “preys upon the disenfranchised and incites their anarchic passions” and “recruits and manipulates disillusioned characters”<sup>791</sup> into joining the riots. In this characterisation, Dickens reveals that fanaticism, plots, and attempts at destabilisation are not the preserve only of Jesuits or even of Catholics in general – they are symptoms of fanaticism and bigotry in all their forms and are contrary to real Christianity.

*Barnaby Rudge* also conveys sympathy for Catholics in general, beginning with Mr Haredale, who rails against anti-Catholic legislation, saying:

‘Is it not enough... that I, as good a gentleman as you, must hold my property, such as it is, by a trick at which the state connives because of these hard laws; and that we may not teach our youth in schools the common principles of right and wrong; but must we be denounced and ridden by such men as this!’<sup>792</sup>

The plight of ordinary Catholics caught up in the riots is described as well, in terms designed to rouse pity and compassion. For example:

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<sup>791</sup> Eslick, “Charles Dickens”, 46.

<sup>792</sup> Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, 362.

...they met... more than one poor catholic [*sic*] family who, terrified by the threats and warnings of their neighbours, were quitting the city on foot, and who told them they could hire no cart or horse for the removal of their goods, and had been compelled to leave them behind, at the mercy of the crowd... <sup>793</sup>

Additionally, despite its use of anti-Jesuit imagery, *Barnaby Rudge* also pours scorn on the idea of Catholics plotting against England. The book describes the idea as simply a recruiting tool for Protestant extremists, who lack tolerance and manipulate others in order to achieve their ends, in a denial of real Christianity:

To surround anything, however monstrous or ridiculous, with an air of mystery, is to invest it with a secret charm, and power of attraction which to the crowd is irresistible... when vague rumours got abroad, that in this Protestant association, a secret power was mustering against the government for undefined and mighty purposes; when the air was filled with whispers of a confederacy among the Popish powers to degrade and enslave England... when terrors and alarms which no man understood were perpetually broached... and by-gone bugbears which had lain quietly in their graves for centuries, were raised again to haunt the ignorant and credulous... then the mania spread indeed, and the body, still increasing every day, grew forty thousand strong. <sup>794</sup>

Later years also saw Dickens revealing a dislike of bigotry and persecution of Catholics, despite his hardening attitude toward the faith. For example, the *HW* April 1850 article, “A

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<sup>793</sup> Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, 506.

<sup>794</sup> Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, 304-305.

Tale of the Good Old Times”, by Percival Leigh, dismisses nostalgia for an imagined better past while also condemning religious bigotry and persecution, thus situating them as things that should be left behind:

Suppose Everybody's lot had been cast under Elizabeth... How would Everybody have liked to see his Roman Catholic and Dissenting fellow-subjects, butchered, fined, and imprisoned for their opinions; and charitable ladies butchered, too, for giving them shelter in the sweet compassion of their hearts? What would Everybody have thought of the murder of Mary Queen of Scots?<sup>795</sup>

Further, Dickens' own article, “The Last Words of the Old Year”, which appeared in *HW* in January 1851, and therefore after the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy, also warns against prejudice, despite also speaking about the need to deal carefully with the threat of resurgent Catholicism. It is said of the dying year 1850 that,

Occasionally, in the months of November and December, he exclaimed, "No Popery!" with some symptoms of a disordered mind; but, generally speaking, was in the full possession of his faculties, and very sensible.<sup>796</sup>

Even following the provocation of the restoration, fanatical anti-Catholicism is considered the product of a disturbed mind, and not something that sane, rational people should indulge in, let alone Christians, who are to display tolerance, kindness, gentleness, and acceptance.

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<sup>795</sup> Percival Leigh, “A Tale of the Good Old Times”, *Household Words* I (5) (27 April 1850), 105; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-i/page-105.html>.

<sup>796</sup> Charles Dickens, “The Last Words of the Old Year”, *Household Words* II (41) (4 January 1851), 337; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-ii/page-337.html>.

Similarly, in *A Child's History* Dickens downplays the idea of Catholic plots against England on several occasions, suggesting that ideas about such plots were being unfairly overstated, leading to greater intolerance. For example, he claims that under Elizabeth I “the English people were too ready to believe in plots”,<sup>797</sup> although he simultaneously suggests that there were good reasons for this, given recent Catholic outrages. He also approves of Elizabeth’s refusal to move against English Catholics in the face of the approaching Spanish Armada:

Some of the Queen’s advisers were for seizing the principal English Catholics, and putting them to death; but the Queen... rejected the advice, and only confined a few of those who were the most suspected... The great body of Catholics deserved this confidence; for they behaved most loyally, nobly, and bravely.<sup>798</sup>

Even when it came to the Gunpowder Plot, Dickens avoided painting all Catholics as bad, saying, “the Catholics, in general, who had recoiled in with horror from the idea of the infernal contrivance, were unjustly put under more severe laws than before...”.<sup>799</sup> In other examples, Dickens also dismisses the idea that Catholics were to blame for the 1666 Great Fire of London<sup>800</sup> and criticises Titus Oates for falsely claiming knowledge of a Catholic plot.<sup>801</sup> Thus, in both *A Child's History* and *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens displays a dislike of condemning all Catholics and using this as an excuse for violence and persecution, even if in the former there is a sense that Catholics have at least partly brought this upon themselves. While Dickens had “no sympathy with the Romish Church”,<sup>802</sup> his view of Christianity as a

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<sup>797</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 313.

<sup>798</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 318.

<sup>799</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 333.

<sup>800</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 396.

<sup>801</sup> Dickens, *Child's History*, 400.

<sup>802</sup> Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, 3.

religion of love, kindness, charity, gentleness, and tolerance does not allow him to condone violence, bigotry, or false accusations against Roman Catholicism.

Having shown the nature of Dickens' objections to both Evangelicalism and Catholicism, I now turn to what we can learn about what he did believe and how he revealed this in a more positive sense.

## Section 4: Dickens' Faith

### 4.1 Introduction

The preceding sections of this thesis have revealed much about Dickens' faith based on his critique of Evangelicalism and Catholicism. However, the purpose of this thesis is not just to discover what he objected to in expressions of Christian faith, or to look at what he did not believe in. These things are much-discussed in literature relating to Dickens and faith, but I wish to provide a positive view of his faith and how he expressed it. Therefore, I now examine his views and criticisms for the light they shed on his positive religious beliefs. In this section I will look at Dickens' church involvement throughout his life, his interests in Unitarianism, and his approaches to the Bible, judgement, death, the afterlife, and women. Finally, I will discuss the important role of Christian virtues in Dickens' religious thinking.

As explained earlier in this thesis, Dickens did not greatly engage in theological arguments, possibly giving the impression that he had little interest in questions of faith. Many, therefore, have dismissed his religious beliefs as incoherent or irrelevant. However, early biographers, for example, Forster and Chesterton, were convinced of his Christian faith, and contemporary Christian writers including Dostoyevsky also considered him to be Christian (see Section 1.2). Dickens was very interested in how Christians should live, and the qualities they should display, as shown by his concept of real Christianity (see Section 1.1 for definition). Further, his son, Sir Henry Dickens, said of him that,

He made no parade of religion, but he was at heart possessed of deep religious convictions...What he did hate and despise was the cant of religion, of the Pecksniffs,

Chadbands and Stigginses in life, and these he attacked with all the weight of his genius.<sup>803</sup>

Thus, we can see Dickens as being more interested in virtue and character within a Christian context than in rules, dogma, and traditions. Therefore, many of his criticisms were aimed at those who wished to assert doctrine and theology without concern for living out Christianity through the displaying of virtues. If we take this into account, we can see many ways in which Christian faith was very significant to him.

To begin with, though, I will look at Dickens' religious upbringing and spiritual exploration to provide more context for his approach to Christianity, as well as his children's New Testament, *The Life of Our Lord*. This book is perhaps the closest we get to a clear statement of Dickens' beliefs, yet is an underestimated work rarely considered within the scholarship.

## 4.2 Upbringing and church involvement

Dickens' early life can give us clues to both Dickens' early religious understanding and the beliefs he was raised with, which may have affected him into his later years. There is little evidence concerning Dickens' early religious life, but we do know that he was baptised at St Mary's Church, Portsea in 1812, and his parents were at least nominally Anglican. However, as a young child he spent some time in a school run by the son of a local Baptist minister, and may have attended Baptist services in the church run by his teacher's father.<sup>804</sup> In contrast to

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<sup>803</sup> Sir Henry Dickens, *The Recollections of Sir Henry Dickens*, K.C. (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1934), 41.

<sup>804</sup> Walder, *Dickens and Religion*, 7; both father and son were named William Giles.

his later dislike of much of Evangelicalism and negative portrayals of nonconformists, Dickens had a good relationship with his teacher, as both child and adult.<sup>805</sup> In contrast, though, in May 1860 an *ATYR* article generally considered autobiographical described a more negative experience of childhood church-going:

Not that I have any curiosity to hear powerful preachers. Time was, when I was dragged by the hair of my head, as one may say, to hear too many... I have in my day been caught in the palm of a female hand by the crown, have been violently scrubbed... and have then been carried off...to be steamed like a potato in the unventilated breath of the powerful Boanerges<sup>806</sup> Boiler and his congregation... I have been hauled out of the place of meeting, at the conclusion of the exercises, and catechised respecting Boanerges Boiler...until I have regarded that reverend person in the light of a most dismal and oppressive Charade. Time was, when I was carried off to platform assemblages at which no human child, whether of wrath or grace, could possibly keep its eyes open...<sup>807</sup>

It is unknown to whom this “female hand” belonged, but Walder suggests it may have been either the family servant, Mary Weller, who was known to be religious, his mother, who had a period of Evangelical fervour, or his mother’s widowed sister, Mrs Allen, who was involved in Dickens’ upbringing. Walder additionally suggests that the “Boanerges” of this article may have been his teacher’s father, although there is no way to know this for certain.<sup>808</sup>

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<sup>805</sup> Andrew Sanders, *Charles Dickens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3-4.

<sup>806</sup> “Boanerges”, meaning “sons of thunder”, is a name applied to fiery preachers. The name was given by Jesus to his followers, James and John, who were especially bold and zealous (Mark 3.17).

<sup>807</sup> Charles Dickens, “The Uncommercial Traveller [viii]”, *All the Year Round* III (54) (5 May 1860), 85; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-iii/page-85.html>.

<sup>808</sup> Walder, *Dickens and Religion*, 6-7.

Dickens' biographers appear to have little or no interest in his church-going as an adult, outside of his time at a Unitarian chapel in the 1840s, so information on his involvement is sparse. However, letters shed some light since Dickens refers to taking on godparenting duties, attending church services, and inviting friends to his own children's baptisms. For example, he apologised in May 1837 for missing a visitor because "I was at Church when you called this morning",<sup>809</sup> and in December 1837 he invited Thomas Beard to attend the baptism of his first child.<sup>810</sup> We cannot tell just from this whether Dickens' church-going and the baptising of his children were based on faith or simple adherence to contemporary conventions, but put together with other evidence I believe they are part of a pattern of sincere attachment to faith. Additionally, some support for Dickens seeing godparenting as important may come from the 1850 *HW* article, "Baptismal Rituals", by Wills. The article comments:

It is to be regretted that, at the present time, the grave responsibilities of the sponsors of children is [*sic*] too often considered to end with the presentation of... gifts... the ties between sponsors and god-children, were much closer, and held more sacredly in times which we are pleased to call barbarous.<sup>811</sup>

In support of the idea that religion was important to Dickens, we can also look to Humphry House, despite his general rejection of the idea that Dickens had real Christian faith. House contradictorily points out that "The Established Church is firmly built into the Dickens

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<sup>809</sup> House and Storey, *Letters: One*, 261.

<sup>810</sup> House and Storey, *Letters: One*, 338.

<sup>811</sup> W.H. Wills, "Baptismal Rituals", *Household Words* I (5) (27 April 1850), 108; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-i/page-108.html>.

landscape”, and that, “when virtue and truth require a special burst of eloquence, he returns again and again to the scenes and forms and language of the Church”.<sup>812</sup>

However, as referred to above, most of what is written about Dickens’ church-going relates to his apparent attraction to Unitarianism in the 1840s, and so I will consider this now, alongside *The Life of Our Lord*, which was written during this time and shows some Unitarian influences. Discussing this neglected book will help to shed more light on Dickens’ religious beliefs since it is his most private and personal account of his views of Christian faith.

### 4.3 Unitarianism and *The Life of our Lord*

As their name indicates, Unitarians are primarily known for rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity, and thus the divinity of Christ. As George Chryssides notes, it is hard to pin down the starting point of Unitarianism, with different people pointing to Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808), John Biddle (1616-1662), or Francis Dávid (1510-1579).<sup>813</sup> It is also beyond the scope of this thesis to give an in-depth account of all the complexities of Unitarian developments and thinking, which go beyond simply an objection to the Trinity.<sup>814</sup> Additionally, a good explanation of Unitarianism’s development has already been given by Leonard Smith, in *The Unitarians: A Short History*.<sup>815</sup>

Very briefly, however, as Chryssides explains, the 1662 *Act of Uniformity* was an important moment for English Unitarians. The *Act* made using the Book of Common Prayer

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<sup>812</sup> House, *Dickens World*, 110.

<sup>813</sup> George Chryssides, *The Elements of Unitarianism* (Shaftesbury: Element Books, 1998), 9.

<sup>814</sup> Chryssides, *Elements*, 38.

<sup>815</sup> Leonard Smith, *The Unitarians: A Short History*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: Blackstone Publications, 2008).

compulsory in the Church of England, resulting in around 2,000 clergy leaving in protest (“The Great Ejection”). It was from these clergy that nonconformist groups emerged, and especially the Presbyterians and Congregationalists,<sup>816</sup> with the former being the group from which the denomination of Unitarianism is generally seen as emerging in England.<sup>817</sup> However, regarding nineteenth-century Unitarianism, Michael Ledger-Lomas explains that it is difficult to “pin down”, since,

... the term describes at once the heretical denial of the Trinity and the deity of Christ; a denomination that inherited chapels from English and Irish Presbyterianism and created its own institutions; or simply what Klein<sup>818</sup> called a “reverent freedom in human thought”, which attracted numerous religious seekers.<sup>819</sup>

As Ledger-Lomas alludes to, Unitarianism is further complicated by it being both a denomination in its own right and a name used to refer to particular ways of thinking. Thus, in eighteenth-century England, Unitarian views were widely accepted among Dissenters, especially Presbyterians.<sup>820</sup> However, while the links between English Unitarianism and Presbyterianism have been extensively discussed in the literature, and claimed by Unitarians themselves,<sup>821</sup> Ledger-Lomas also reminds us that Unitarianism’s origins are “a complicated matter” with conflicting denominational backgrounds, religious opinions, and approaches among groups all calling themselves Unitarian.<sup>822</sup>

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<sup>816</sup> Chryssides, *Elements*, 17.

<sup>817</sup> Russell E. Richey, “Did the English Presbyterians Become Unitarian?”, *Church History* 42 (1) (March 1973), 58.

<sup>818</sup> Louis Leopold Martial Baynard de Beaumont Klein, a nineteenth-century Unitarian minister.

<sup>819</sup> Michael Ledger-Lomas, “Unitarians and Presbyterians”, in *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume II: The Nineteenth Century*, edited by Timothy Larsen and Michael Ledger Lomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 99.

<sup>820</sup> E.A. Livingstone, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 580.

<sup>821</sup> See, for more on this, Richey, “Did the English Presbyterians Become Unitarian?”, 58-63.

<sup>822</sup> Ledger-Lomas, “Unitarians and Presbyterians”, 101-103.

One such nineteenth-century division is described by Dennis Wigmore-Beddoes as being between a “more conservative, Biblically based” faction and a “finally more dominant wing... which recognised supreme authority not in Scripture but in reason, conscience and the soul, and, in accordance with its English Presbyterian heritage, stood for a generous breadth in the sphere of doctrine”.<sup>823</sup> Chryssides also notes a longstanding tension in Unitarianism “between trusting one’s reason to lead where it will, and trusting the Bible as the ultimate authority on religious truth”, which he sees as coming to a head in the work of James Martineau (1805-1900) addressing this problem.<sup>824</sup> The broader, more liberal and rational tradition is what Unitarianism is associated with today, but it is important to remember the historical existence of a more conservative approach in the nineteenth century since it reveals an added layer of complexity. As this section continues, I will show how Dickens encountered both of the sides in Wigmore-Beddoes’ analysis, thus complicating his relationship to both Unitarianism and more conventional Christian thought.

As a denomination, Unitarianism was not numerically significant in the nineteenth century. They had about 50,000 members across Britain in 1851, mainly because Unitarianism was geared towards intellectuals rather than ordinary people.<sup>825</sup> However, Unitarian influence far outstripped its numbers, as it became “a potent force in the religious, educational, cultural, social, economic, and political life of those places in which it flourished, particularly Britain

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<sup>823</sup> Dennis Wigmore-Beddoes, *Yesterday’s Radicals: A Study of the Affinity between Unitarianism and Broad Church Anglicanism in the Nineteenth Century*. Library of Ecclesiastical History. (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1971), 27.

<sup>824</sup> Chryssides, *Elements*, 20-22.

<sup>825</sup> Janelle Pötzsch, “Unitarianism”; <https://victorianweb.org/religion/unitarian/1.html>.

and the United States”.<sup>826</sup> This was due to high levels of involvement in political, cultural, and social issues by members of the faith.

Dickens attended a Unitarian chapel led by Edward Tagart for two or three years in the 1840s. Tagart appears to have belonged to the more conservative Unitarian perspective, as seen in the sermon he gave when being inducted as minister of the Octagon Chapel, Norwich, in 1825. Tagart rejected creeds as “made by fallible men, and of contradictory nature”<sup>827</sup> but had a high view of scriptural authority:

the Protestant seizes the Bible as the only standard of infallibility, and to that the Unitarian points, as the only authority to which he will bow, the only guide he dares to follow... to search the Scriptures... is the only way to attain God’s truth...”.<sup>828</sup>

Thus, far from being a liberal influence upon Dickens, Tagart aligned with strongly Protestant and even Evangelical values, since he shows signs of biblicism. Dickens also pointed to the Bible, or at least the New Testament, as the ultimate guide for life, as I will discuss in Section 4.4. In this, both he and Tagart have some similarities to Evangelicals, even though Tagart used his biblicism to reject the Trinity, unlike Evangelicals and wider mainstream Christian thought.

In contrast, though, Dickens also met and wrote to the Unitarian minister William Channing in Boston, Massachusetts in 1842 and was on friendly terms with him.<sup>829</sup> Channing

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<sup>826</sup> Ruth Watts, “Unitarianism”; <https://www-oxfordbibliographies-com.nottingham.idm.oclc.org/display/document/obo-9780199799558/obo-9780199799558-0121.xml>.

<sup>827</sup> Edward Tagart, *The Service at the Settlement of the Rev. Edward Tagart, as Minister of the Octagon Chapel, Norwich, August 10th, 1825* (London: Arthur Taylor, 1825), 22.

<sup>828</sup> Tagart, *Service*, 21-22.

<sup>829</sup> House, Storey and Tillotson, *Letters: Three*, 31.

represented the more liberal element of Unitarianism, and his influence can be seen on Dickens. For example, Channing claimed in his well-known 1819 sermon, “Unitarian Christianity”, that the New Testament was more important than and had supplanted the Old Testament: “The dispensation of Moses, compared with that of Jesus, we consider as adapted to the childhood of the human race, a preparation for a nobler system, and chiefly useful now as serving to confirm and illustrate the Christian Scriptures”.<sup>830</sup> Channing also asserted that “the Bible is a book written for men, in the language of men, and that its meaning is to be sought in the same manner as that of other books”,<sup>831</sup> in a way that would later be echoed by *Essays and Reviews* (1860) and approved of by Dickens (see Section 4.4 for Dickens’ alignment with both these positions). Channing further insisted on the importance of reason in Bible-reading to distinguish between truth and allegory, and to discover what was universally true and what should be left behind as referring to a particular time, society, or way of thinking.

However, Forster, himself a Unitarian, had doubts about Dickens’ Unitarianism, writing that, “upon essential points he had never any sympathy so strong as with the leading doctrine and discipline of the Church of England”.<sup>832</sup> Similarly, Chesterton also considered him a true Anglican, saying that Dickens “had a definite tenderness for the Church of England” and claiming that he had only left in “a puff of anger at the Church’s political stupidity” which soon subsided.<sup>833</sup> Gary Colledge further argues that Dickens was essentially Anglican on the grounds that his beliefs aligned with what Frances Knight has described as core nineteenth-century lay Anglican beliefs.<sup>834</sup>

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<sup>830</sup> William Channing, “Unitarian Christianity”; <https://uuwestport.org/unitarianchristianity/>.

<sup>831</sup> Channing, “Unitarian Christianity”.

<sup>832</sup> Forster, *Life*, 136; Dickens also wrote to Taggart in friendly terms; see, House, Storey and Tillotson, *Letters: Three*, 449.

<sup>833</sup> Chesterton, *Charles Dickens*, 76.

<sup>834</sup> Colledge, *God and Charles Dickens*, 3.

Knight explains these beliefs as encompassing a stress on both the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, a concern with salvation and the reality of Heaven and Hell, the effectiveness of prayer, and salvation by both faith and works, alongside a mixed allegiance to both church and chapel, and a focus on domestic piety.<sup>835</sup> Dickens did indeed have a concern with the Bible (see Section 4.4) and sometimes alluded to the Book of Common Prayer. Chesterton also felt that the Book of Common Prayer appealed to Dickens since “he had in him a central part that was pleased only by the most decent and the most reposeful rites, by things of which the Anglican Prayer-book is very typical”.<sup>836</sup> Dickens was also interested in death and the afterlife, although he focused on Heaven and tended to avoid the question of Hell (Section 4.4). Dickens can additionally be seen as mixing salvation by faith and works in his emphasis on the importance of both having real Christian faith and expressing it in practical action. Finally, although Dickens did not combine church and chapel attendance at the same time, he was very interested in religion in the home (see Section 4.6).

Additionally, as Wigmore-Beddoes has explored, there was an overlap between at least liberal Unitarians and Broad Church Anglicans, although the latter did not reject the Trinity. Broad Church Anglicans were a moderate group in the Church of England that similarly avoided strict theological definitions and favoured a liberal approach to doctrine, as well as being interested in reason, science, biblical criticism, and trying to approach church teaching in a way that fit the changes of nineteenth-century society.<sup>837</sup> Broad Church Anglicanism also

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<sup>835</sup> Frances Knight, *The Nineteenth-Century Church and English Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 21-60.

<sup>836</sup> Chesterton, *Charles Dickens*, 76.

<sup>837</sup> Wigmore-Beddoes, *Yesterday's Radicals*, 15.

attracted intellectuals in a similar way to Unitarianism.<sup>838</sup> Thus, an overlap between Dickens' Anglican beliefs and aspects of Unitarianism is unsurprising. As seen in Section 3, and as will be explored below, Dickens' attraction to Unitarianism seems to have been based on followers displaying virtues and a faith in action of which he approved rather than theological conviction, and it would seem that the Unitarian influences on him were mixed. It has been argued, though, that Unitarian influences can be seen in *The Life of Our Lord*, and it does appear that, despite Forster's assertion, there were some potentially Unitarian elements to Dickens' beliefs, as I will discuss after a general introduction to the book.

In 1846 Dickens told Forster that he had, "Half of the children's New Testament to write, or pretty nearly",<sup>839</sup> this being his *The Life of Our Lord*. The book was never intended for publication but was solely for reading with his children. Dickens' last-surviving child, Sir Henry Dickens (1849-1933), eventually suggested that the book be published in his will. While Dickens did not explain publicly why he had not published the book, Sir Henry claimed that his father did not want it published because it was "not intended as a literary effort".<sup>840</sup> Thus, the book was not finally made public until 1934, and we can therefore expect it to reflect his beliefs free from potential concern about public reactions. As Colledge explains, the book is "a deliberate attempt to acquaint his children with the specifics of Christianity, as he understood it, that they might come to feel and know 'real Christianity' for themselves".<sup>841</sup>

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<sup>838</sup> Butterworth, Dickens, *Religion and Society*, 4.

<sup>839</sup> Tillotson, *Letters: Four*, 573.

<sup>840</sup> Sir Henry Dickens, *Recollections*, 41.

<sup>841</sup> Gary Colledge. "Revisiting the Sublime History: Dickens, Christianity, and The Life of Our Lord" (PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, 2007), 6.

Dickens' book, despite claims by some that it is simply a retelling of Luke's Gospel, is essentially a harmonised retelling of part of the New Testament. It draws on all four canonical gospels and some of the beginning of Acts (dealing mainly with the conversion of Saul), with Dickens' own arrangement, paraphrasing, and commentary. Many of the accounts he includes appear in all of the canonical gospels, at least in some form, for example the Feeding of the 5000. Dickens also includes stories that are not found in Luke, such as the Wedding at Cana from John 2. One example of Dickens' harmonisation concerns the birth and childhood of Jesus. Dickens has an angel (not multiple angels) appearing to the shepherds (Luke 2), followed by the visit of the wise men and escape to Egypt (Matthew 2), and then the visit to the temple when Jesus was twelve (Luke 2). Colledge argues strongly for the importance of *The Life of Our Lord* to understanding the extent and nature of Dickens' faith. For example, he asserts that the work involved in putting together this harmonised version of the gospels, with commentary, paraphrasing, linking passages, and the need for careful editing to ensure consistency and flow, is an indication that this was a carefully thought-out work that was important to Dickens.<sup>842</sup> Therefore, *The Life of Our Lord* is worth taking seriously as an indication of his ideas and beliefs as an adult and I will use it to add extra depth to my observations about Dickens' faith and help to fill the gap left by the book's relative neglect.

As well as Dickens' interest in the New Testament, which aligns with Taggart's focus on Scripture, as well as with Protestants in general, possible connections to Unitarianism are especially evident in two ways. The first possible connection is that Dickens emphasises Jesus as an example to follow and stresses human beings' ability to live like Jesus, as opposed to focusing on his theological status or Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. This echoes the

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<sup>842</sup> Colledge, "Sublime History", 14-15.

Unitarian thought of Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), from whom Unitarians also gained the name “Socinians” due to his importance to Unitarian thought.<sup>843</sup> Thus, Dickens both reveals his focus on faith in action and aligns with Unitarian thinking.

In Tagart’s service, also, a similar focus is seen in the introductory prayer, which includes the line: “we behold in the character and conduct of Jesus Christ a model of all that is pure in virtue, fervent in devotion, and sincere in kindness” and includes a petition that the minister will help his congregation grow in virtue,<sup>844</sup> thus suggesting that it is possible for human beings to follow the example of Jesus by being good. While Evangelicals do normally believe in sanctification of some kind, and believe it is appropriate to pray for God’s grace to live a holy life, the Evangelical focus is generally on Jesus as the Saviour who enables forgiveness of sins rather than seeing him primarily as a teacher who provides instruction in how to live a good life. Regarding the idea of Jesus as Saviour, though, Dickens does reveal possible signs of a more mainstream Christian approach as he frequently refers to Jesus as “Our Saviour”, something which is not a Unitarian term (see, for examples, sections 3.5.1, 3.5.2, and 3.5.4) and implies Dickens’ recognition of sin, judgement, and redemption. However, as discussed below, Dickens does differ from the mainstream in his interpretation of the term “Saviour”.

The second possible connection to Unitarianism is that Dickens mainly avoids suggestions that Jesus might be a divine figure and omits references to the Holy Spirit. Both of these things reveal a Unitarian-inspired way of thinking.

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<sup>843</sup> Chryssides, *Elements*, 14.

<sup>844</sup> Tagart, *Service*, 4.

On Jesus as an example, as well as providing instruction in how to live, in the first chapter of *The Life of Our Lord* Dickens first states, “No one ever lived, who was so good, so kind, so gentle, and so sorry for all people who did wrong, or were in anyway ill or miserable...”.<sup>845</sup> Thus, Jesus is special because of his goodness as a person, rather than any divine characteristics. Jesus is also clearly someone who wishes to be an example and help others, with his forty days in the wilderness not being about resisting temptations but instead him “praying that he might be of use to men and women, and teach them to be better, so that after their deaths, they might be happy in Heaven”.<sup>846</sup> As followers of Jesus, in this understanding Christians are to not only believe the right things but also live out their faith in active ways by acting as Jesus did and showing the same virtues. This is reinforced by Dickens urging his children to follow Jesus’s example and “Never be proud or unkind... to any poor man, woman, or child” and saying that,

when people speak ill of the Poor and Miserable, think how Jesus Christ went among them and taught them, and thought them worthy of his care. And always pity them yourselves, and think as well of them as you can”.<sup>847</sup>

Further, Jesus forgiving a woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7.36-50) is described as an example to imitate,<sup>848</sup> and at the end of the book Dickens urges his children to “remember the life and lessons of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and try to act up to them” so that “God will forgive us our sins and mistakes, and enable us to live and die in Peace”.<sup>849</sup>

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<sup>845</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Life of Our Lord: Written Expressly for his Children* (London: Associated Newspapers Ltd., 1934), 11.

<sup>846</sup> Dickens, *Life of Our Lord*, 24.

<sup>847</sup> Dickens, *Life of Our Lord*, 28.

<sup>848</sup> Dickens, *Life of Our Lord*, 45.

<sup>849</sup> Dickens, *Life of Our Lord*, 127.

Attempting to follow the example of Jesus is part of various expressions of Christian spirituality, and so by itself this does not necessarily imply Unitarianism. However, the downplaying of Jesus's divinity, and the way Dickens deals with the Holy Spirit, are more uniquely Unitarian. Trinitarian implications are avoided in multiple places in *The Life of Our Lord* through both Dickens' commentary and paraphrasing, and what he chooses to leave out. Looking at how he deals with Jesus and the Holy Spirit in turn reveals this.

Upon discussing the birth of Jesus, Dickens has an angel say to the shepherds that,

“There is a child born today in the City of Bethlehem near here, who will grow up to be so good that God will love him as his own son...”.<sup>850</sup>

Dickens here suggests that Jesus is described as God's Son not because he has divine origins but because he has earned this status and God's love by means of his moral goodness.

Dickens thus appears to be espousing a form of adoptionism,<sup>851</sup> something that is also a feature of Unitarian thinking, as an alternative to a Trinitarian view of God.<sup>852</sup> Other examples of Dickens downplaying Jesus's divine origins can also be seen throughout *The Life of Our Lord*. Thus, when discussing Jesus being found in the Temple at the age of 12 (Luke 2.41-52), Dickens leaves out Jesus's reference to being in his Father's house, and later John the Baptist does not refer to Jesus as the Lamb of God. God does call Jesus his son at his baptism (and later at the Transfiguration) but Dickens does not comment on this, again leaving open the possibility of adoptionism. Later, Dickens states that Jesus is referred to as

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<sup>850</sup> Dickens, *Life of Our Lord*, 14.

<sup>851</sup> The belief that Jesus was adopted as the Son of God at his baptism, resurrection, or ascension, rather than eternally being the Son of God.

<sup>852</sup> Roger Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 143.

Saviour because “he did such Good, and taught people how to love God and how to hope to go to Heaven after death”,<sup>853</sup> making Jesus saviour because he was good rather than linking Jesus’s saving power to the doctrine of the Incarnation. Also, while Jesus is referred to as having the power to forgive sins, this is not in his own right but because “God had given it to Him”.<sup>854</sup>

Dickens’ approach does differ in Jesus’s appearance to Thomas after the Resurrection and the latter’s declaration of him as Lord and God.<sup>855</sup> Dickens does not comment on this but lets it stand without explanation, making it hard to know what to make of this exception (and Unitarian interpretations of this account vary). Dickens also includes the Ascension and the idea that Jesus would sit at the right hand of God and return as judge, but it is not clear what he makes of this in Trinitarian terms, either. It may be that these elements are examples of Dickens’ lack of systematic theological thinking, evidence of a more conservative influence on his thinking, or that he is taking a more liberal Unitarian approach of not imposing doctrinal conformity.

It is noticeable in *The Life of Our Lord* that Dickens seems to have deliberately removed references to the Holy Spirit and downplayed any sense of the Spirit playing an active role in incorporating people into the life of Christ. Dickens is here interpreting the New Testament in a way similar to that of the early adoptionist theologian Paul of Samosata (200-275 AD) who, as Roger Olson describes, “virtually ignored the Holy Spirit except as a force of divine power and presence in the world”.<sup>856</sup> Dickens’ approach additionally fits with the Unitarian view that God and the Holy Spirit are interchangeable terms, rather than the Holy Spirit being a

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<sup>853</sup> Dickens, *Life of Our Lord*, 34.

<sup>854</sup> Dickens, *Life of Our Lord*, 45.

<sup>855</sup> Dickens, *Life of Our Lord*, 119.

<sup>856</sup> Olson, *Mosaic*, 143.

person of the Trinity, in that he sees no need to mention the Spirit apart from general references to God.

At the beginning of *The Life of Our Lord*, Dickens omits the Annunciation, and Gabriel's declaration to Mary that "'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God'" (Luke 1.35). It is possible, though, that this was because Dickens felt that the details of Jesus's conception and birth were not suitable for children. However, John the Baptist is not described as being filled by the Spirit and neither does he mention Jesus baptising with the Spirit. When Jesus is baptised, Dickens also refers only to a bird flying down, with no reference to this representing the Spirit. Then, Jesus goes out into the wilderness with no mention of the Spirit sending or leading him there.

The exclusion of the Spirit continues when Dickens moves into the beginning of the Book of Acts, as Pentecost is omitted, and with it the idea that the Spirit is alive in the followers of Jesus. Instead, Dickens merely says that, "When Christ was seen no more, the Apostles began to teach the People as He had commanded them".<sup>857</sup> The closest Dickens gets to mentioning the Spirit at this point is to say that, "And through the power He had given them they healed the sick, and gave sight to the Blind, and speech to the Dumb, and Hearing to the Deaf, as he had done".<sup>858</sup> Thus, as with Paul of Samosata, the Spirit is reduced to just being God's power, given to Jesus by God and then passed on to his followers. A reference to Pentecost that conveys a similar idea also comes in *Dombey and Son* (1848). Florence, grief-stricken after

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<sup>857</sup> Dickens, *Life of Our Lord*, 120.

<sup>858</sup> Dickens, *Life of Our Lord*, 121.

the death and funeral of her brother, finds that the storm of her emotion softens over time, and Dickens, as narrator, comments:

But it is not in the nature of pure love to burn so fiercely and unkindly long. The flame that in its grosser composition has the taint of earth, may prey upon the breast that gives it shelter; but the sacred fire from heaven, is as gentle in the heart, as when it rested on the heads of the assembled twelve, and showed each man his brother, brightened and unhurt.<sup>859</sup>

Here, again, there is no sense of personal agency on the part of the Spirit. Rather, the coming of the Spirit is again a power and a force, this time with a focus on love and gentleness coming from God to console and comfort Florence.

Given the above, it is reasonable to argue that Dickens had taken on much Unitarian thinking, at least while writing *The Life of Our Lord*, given both his underplaying and exclusion of New Testament elements that could lead to Trinitarian thinking and his strong focus on Jesus as a moral example to be followed. However, his approach is not always clear-cut, as I have shown. Therefore, we cannot say he was entirely Unitarian, especially given the different Unitarian approaches at the time and the overlap between Unitarian and Broad-Church approaches to faith, as well as the convictions of others that he remained Anglican at heart. What also comes out in Dickens' references to Scripture, though, is the importance he attached to the New Testament as a guide for life and faith, and so I will look at how Dickens approached the Bible.

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<sup>859</sup> Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 274.

## 4.4 The Bible and judgement

Dickens' interest in the Bible, and the New Testament especially, appears strongly in the letters he wrote to his children as they grew up and left home. For example, he wrote to his son Alfred in May 1865, saying,

You know that I never interfere with the religious opinions of my children, preferring that they should reflect for themselves, as they grow old enough to do so: but in parting from you, as in parting from Sydney & Frank I tell you that if you humbly try to guide yourself by the beautiful new testament, you can never go wrong: also that I hope you will never omit under any circumstances to say a prayer by yourself night and morning.<sup>860</sup>

This is contradicted by Dickens writing *A Child's History* with the express intention of steering his first child away from Catholicism at a young age. Nonetheless, he continued in a similar vein in other letters to both his son, Edward (known as 'Plorn'),<sup>861</sup> and another son, Henry.<sup>862</sup> These letters share a view that the New Testament's message is "fundamentally concerned with lessons on how to live daily life", rather than "theological and metaphysical realities".<sup>863</sup> This further links to the abovementioned idea of Jesus as moral example in that the New Testament enables people to learn from Jesus and copy him.

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<sup>860</sup> Storey, *Letters: Eleven*, 418.

<sup>861</sup> Storey, *Letters: Twelve*, 187-188.

<sup>862</sup> Storey, *Letters: Twelve*, 202.

<sup>863</sup> Mary Lenard, "The Gospel of Amy: Biblical Teaching and Learning in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit*", *Christianity and Literature* 63 (3) (Spring 2014), 339.

Apart from his children, Dickens also expressed the importance of the New Testament in a letter in June 1870, saying,

I have always striven in my writings to express veneration for the life and lessons of Our Saviour; because I feel it; and because I re-wrote that history for my children – every one of whom knew it from having it repeated to them, long before they could read, and almost as soon as they could speak.<sup>864</sup>

Finally, Dickens devoted the last part of his will to commending the New Testament to his children in the way he thought it should be received. He stated: “...I exhort my dear children humbly to try to guide themselves by the teaching of the New Testament in its broad spirit, and to put no faith in any man's narrow construction of its letter here or there”.<sup>865</sup> A similar sentiment was expressed in an 1860 letter:

...I dwelt upon the Christianity of taking broad kind views of the *spirit* of our religion, and not binding any human creature hand and foot to the uncertain *letter* – for which, I need not remind you, there is higher authority than mine”.<sup>866</sup>

The last remark about a higher authority appears to be a reference to 2 Corinthians 3.6's statement that “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”. Such comments reveal Dickens' dislike of seeing the Bible in terms of rules, something which he saw in both Sabbatarians and temperance advocates, as well as in the authoritarianism of Catholicism. Instead of being bound by literal interpretations and narrow definitions, and attempting to impose these on

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<sup>864</sup> Storey, *Letters: Twelve*, 548.

<sup>865</sup> Forster, *Life*, 137.

<sup>866</sup> Storey, *Letters: Nine*, 221.

others, Dickens advocated for a broader, more open interpretation of faith, in which following rules was less important than trying to live a good life following the broad principles of Christianity as revealed in the New Testament. This was bound to lead him into conflict with those who took a stricter view.

The view that the New Testament was the best guide for life was widespread in the nineteenth century, even as challenges mounted to how the Bible was received and understood in the light of scientific discoveries and biblical criticism. Indeed, Timothy Larsen has argued that the idea of a Victorian crisis of faith has been exaggerated by various writers.<sup>867</sup> Perhaps supporting Larsen's argument, Dickens appears unphased by these challenges, including the highly controversial *Essays and Reviews* (1860). As Glenn Everett explains, this collection of essays was by seven liberal authors, mostly clergy and labelled by critics as "The Seven Against Christ". The fact that Anglican clergy were involved, and that it appeared only one year after Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, added to its notoriety. The book "summed up a three-quarter-century-long challenge to Biblical history by the Higher Critics and to Biblical prehistory by scientists working in the new fields of geology and biology", continues Everett. Especially important was Benjamin Jowett's "On the Interpretation of Scripture", which argued that the Bible should be interpreted in the same way as any other book and undermined the idea of divine inspiration. Additionally, the "higher critics" also suggested that biblical accuracy could be doubted by attempting to confirm events with outside sources. None of this was new (see Section 4.3) but it was now coming from inside the Established Church.<sup>868</sup> In May 1863 a Dickens letter regarding *Essays and Reviews* approved of the latter's approach to the Old Testament:

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<sup>867</sup> Timothy Larsen, *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>868</sup> Glenn Everett, "Essays and Reviews"; <https://victorianweb.org/religion/essays.html>.

The position of the writers of “Essays and Reviews” is, that certain parts of the Old Testament have done their intended function in the world as it *was*; but that mankind, like the individual man, is designed by the Almighty to have an infancy and a maturity, and that as it advances, the machinery of its education must advance too. For example: inasmuch as ever since there was a sun and there was vapour, there *must have* been a rainbow under certain conditions, so surely it would be better now to recognise that indisputable fact.<sup>869</sup>

The example of the rainbow appears to refer to the story of Noah and the great flood (Genesis 6-9). Particularly, it concerns the idea in Genesis 9.9-15 that God created the rainbow and placed it in the sky as a sign of his promise that he would never flood the earth again. Dickens is here suggesting that humanity has advanced in understanding and maturity enough to learn that the rainbow is simply a natural phenomenon that appears under the right conditions; that is, when sunlight is scattered by water, as would happen with the sun reflecting off flood waters. Therefore, Dickens believes, the interpretation of the rainbow’s appearance given in the Bible is outdated and humanity has grown past such ideas with new scientific discoveries. He added in the same letter that he saw scientific discovery as part of God’s ongoing revelation to humanity, commenting: “Nothing is discovered without God’s intention and assistance, and I suppose every new knowledge of His works... to be distinctly a revelation...”. Thus, not only was Dickens comfortable with the ideas put forward in *Essays and Reviews*, but also even seems to have welcomed its challenge to the literal truth of the Old Testament.

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<sup>869</sup> Storey, *Letters: Ten*, 252-253; italics in original.

Dickens understood *Essays and Reviews* as fitting with his own dislike of the Old Testament, based on him seeing it as being about wrath and judgement, and his belief in God's ongoing revelation of truth to humanity, with the Old being superseded by the New, as in Channing's thought. This reveals Dickens' Marcionite<sup>870</sup> approach to the Old Testament, arising from his dislike of "those parts of the Bible that depicted God as a God of wrath and judgment".<sup>871</sup> His approach was expressed not only in expressions of disgust and dislike aimed at the Old Testament in his fiction but also in how *The Life of Our Lord* ignores Jesus's Jewish heritage. For example, Jesus is not presented in the Temple as a baby, he does not read from the Jewish Scriptures in the synagogue, and there is no suggestion that Jesus is fulfilling Jewish prophecies. Rather, in a somewhat Johannine manner, Jews are treated as enemies with no recognition by Dickens that Jesus was Jewish. This has echoes of the way in which Marcion saw Judaism as "not a precursor to Christianity" and tried to "expunge Jewish influences from Christianity", as well as his attempt to limit the Christian Scriptures "to only a few portions of the apostles' writings that he considered Gentile...".<sup>872</sup>

Indeed, Dickens often portrayed focusing on the Old Testament as being behind things like judgmentalism, hypocrisy, cruelty, and constant infighting, especially in his fiction and letters. Such attitudes, in turn, were seen as driving people away from faith and preventing them from making necessary changes in order to live a truly Christian life<sup>873</sup> based on Dickens' interpretation of faith as being primarily about displaying virtues and living a good

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<sup>870</sup> Marcionism, based on the teachings of Marcion of Sinope (85-160 AD), believed that there were two gods: one vindictive and wrathful (seen in the Old Testament), and one good (seen in the New Testament).

<sup>871</sup> Brenda Ayres, "'Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth' and Dickens' Non-Christian Theology", in *The Theological Dickens*, 56.

<sup>872</sup> Olson, *Mosaic*, 75.

<sup>873</sup> Lydia Craig, "'Gazing at All the Church and Chapel Going': Social Views of Religious Nonconformity in Dickens' Fiction", in *The Theological Dickens*, 193.

life following the example of Jesus. For example, Dickens wrote to Angela Burdett-Coutts more than once on the subject, saying in November 1847 that,

I trust that those enlightenments to which you refer, are to be found in the *New* Testament? I am confident that harm is done to this class of minds by the injudicious use of the old [*sic*] – and I am hardly less confident that I could shew you how...<sup>874</sup>

Then, in March 1855 he wrote that “individually I would never refer any one – but especially a child – to the Old Testament”.<sup>875</sup> Letters to others on this subject can also be found, including in December 1858:

Half the misery and hypocrisy of the Christian world arises... from a stubborn determination to refuse the New Testament as a sufficient guide in itself, and to force the Old Testament into alliance with it – whereof comes all manner of camel-swallowing and of gnat-straining.<sup>876</sup>

Here, Dickens appeals to Matthew 23.24, which denounces those who “strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!”; that is, those who concern themselves with small matters while neglecting what is truly important.

Again, in 1864, Dickens criticised doctrinal arguments and infighting, seeing them as ignoring the message of the New Testament, and thus of real Christianity:

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<sup>874</sup> Storey and Fielding, *Letters: Five*, 181-182.

<sup>875</sup> Storey, Tillotson and Easson, *Letters: Seven*, 577; italics in original.

<sup>876</sup> Storey and Tillotson, *Letters: Eight*, 718-719.

The spectacle presented by the indecent squabbles of priests of most denominations... utterly repel me... the Master of the New Testament put out of sight, and the rage and fury almost always turning on the letter of obscure parts of the old [*sic*] Testament...<sup>877</sup>

There is little which directly signals dislike of the Old Testament in Dickens' magazines, but what there is, comes from Elizabeth Gaskell. This is mostly in her fiction (*Lizzie Leigh* and *The Heart of John Middleton*), but she also contributed a historical article on the Cagot people of France and Spain. This was a persecuted minority group in both countries, accused of being heretics and carriers of disease. Gaskell describes people using the Old Testament to justify treating Cagots badly, saying:

...it was stated that their ancestors...were in fact descendants of Gehazi, servant of Elisha... who had been... doomed, he and his descendants, to be lepers for evermore... And if... you tell us that the Cagots are not lepers now; we reply that there are two kinds of leprosy, one perceptible and the other imperceptible, even to the person suffering from it.<sup>878</sup>

However, Dickens' dislike of the Old Testament appears strongly in his novels through his treatment of Evangelicals, as Calvinist Evangelicals made significant use of themes from the Old Testament. As Valentine Cunningham notes, "What Dickens finds amiss with these child-abusing, sin-and-judgment obsessives [in his novels] is that they are stuck fast in the Old Testament, are imperceptive about the New Testament's rewritings of the Old, the

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<sup>877</sup> Storey, *Letters: Ten*, 444.

<sup>878</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, "An Accursed Race", *Household Words* XII (283) (25 August 1855), 76; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-xii/page-76.html>.

Christian dispensation's abolition of Judaic law".<sup>879</sup> Dickens preferred to stress goodness, grace, and forgiveness, and so opposed the Calvinist focus on wrath and condemnation, without distinguishing between Calvinistic and other Evangelicals. This was based on his idea of the New Testament as a positive guide to virtue and active faith, as opposed to his sense of the Old Testament as being the source of wrath, judgementalism, and legalistic attitudes.

*Little Dorrit*, for example, as discussed under Sabbatarianism, reinforces the link between the Old Testament and oppression by showing that Arthur's religious upbringing by an Evangelical woman favoured rules and restrictions taken from the Old Testament over the freedom, charity, kindness, and joy to be found in the New. Arthur's mother is a cold, stern woman living a restricted life, imprisoned by her own beliefs, and caught up with ideas of judgement and wrath, with no hint of the New Testament qualities of freedom, kindness, constancy, faithfulness, and forgiveness which are exemplified by Little Dorrit herself:

She [Mrs Clennam] then put on the spectacles and read certain passages aloud from a book – sternly, fiercely, wrathfully – praying that her enemies (she made them by her tone and manner expressly hers) might be put to the edge of the sword, consumed by fire, smitten by plagues and leprosy, that their bones might be ground to dust, and that they might be utterly exterminated.<sup>880</sup>

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<sup>879</sup> Valentine Cunningham, "Dickens and Christianity", in *A Companion to Charles Dickens*, edited by David Paroissien. Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 268.

<sup>880</sup> Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 51.

As Walder puts it, “in Little Dorrit the obsessive centre would seem to lie in the contrasting views of Mrs Clennam’s imprisoning Old Testament ethos and Little Dorrit’s liberating New Testament spirit...”.<sup>881</sup>

Certain Evangelical attitudes are also paired with the Old Testament in *Pickwick Papers*, specifically with Stiggins. Shortly after his first appearance, Stiggins expresses his disapproval of Sam with an allusion to Ecclesiastes 1.2 when he says, “‘It’s all vanity’”, before referring to Sam’s father as “‘A man of wrath’”, referring to Proverbs 19.19.<sup>882</sup> In this manner, Stiggins is portrayed as stern and judgemental, based on allusions to the Old Testament.

In *Bleak House*, similarly, Miss Barbary is depicted as stern, judgemental, and cruel, telling Esther that it would have been better for her never to have been born as she was an illegitimate child. Miss Barbary then pushes this message of disapproval and judgement home by referring to Numbers 14.18, saying, “pray daily that the sins of others be not visited upon your head, according to what is written”.<sup>883</sup> Shortly afterwards, when Esther attempts to read to Miss Barbary the story of the woman taken in adultery (John 8.1-11), the latter has a fatal reaction to the idea of only those without sin being able to cast stones, unable to cope with her own hypocrisy being pointed out:

I was stopped by my godmother’s rising, putting a hand to her head, and crying out, in an awful voice, from quite another part of the book:

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<sup>881</sup> Walder, *Dickens and Religion*, 171.

<sup>882</sup> Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 355.

<sup>883</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 30.

“Watch ye, therefore!” lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!”.

In an instant, she fell down on the floor... To the very last, and even afterwards, her frown remained unsoftened.<sup>884</sup>

In this case, Miss Barbary does use a New Testament verse (Mark 13.35-37) but only in an attempt to deny the wider New Testament message that Dickens is trying to convey, of charity, kindness, and forgiveness. *Bleak House* also sets up a similar opposition between characters to that found with Mrs Clennam and Little Dorrit. While Miss Barbary represents a closed and judgemental life of faith, Esther represents a true follower of Jesus. As Dickens explained to Macrae in 1861, “one of my most constant and most earnest endeavours has been to exhibit in all my good people some faint reflections of the teachers of our great ‘Master’”.<sup>885</sup> Thus, Esther is “a disciple of Jesus in the precise way that Dickens understood the idea of discipleship—the imitation of Jesus”.<sup>886</sup> This is further reinforced by Esther’s repeated desire to be of good to someone, which reflects Dickens’ emphasis regarding Jesus’s nature and ministry in *The Life of Our Lord*.

Similar misuse of the New Testament (1 Timothy 6.10) is found in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, when Mr Pecksniff accuses Westlock of greed for simply referring to money, despite Pecksniff’s own greed: ““Money, John... is the root of all evil. I grieve to see that it is already bearing evil fruit in you””.<sup>887</sup> Thus, it is not only actual Old Testament verses that are used to convey

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<sup>884</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 32-33.

<sup>885</sup> Storey, *Letters: Nine*, 556.

<sup>886</sup> Colledge, *God and Charles Dickens*, 9.

<sup>887</sup> Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, 30.

Dickens' view but also New Testament verses misused (and in this case misquoted) to uphold Old Testament attitudes or hypocrisy.

Further linking of cruelty and hypocrisy to the Old Testament and the view that this is contradicted by the New can also be seen in a discussion about the Murdstones towards the end of *David Copperfield*. This pair comprises David's cruel stepfather and the latter's sister, who takes over the household from David's mother. David asks the doctor, Mr Chillip, "Does he [Mr Murdstone] gloomily profess to be (I am ashamed to use the word in such association) religious still?"<sup>888</sup> Chillip responds by saying that his wife has remarked that Murdstone "sets up an image of himself, and calls it the Divine Nature" and that she says, "the darker tyrant he has lately been, the more ferocious is his doctrine", as well as that "what such people miscall their religion, is a vent for their bad humours and arrogance". Chillip then concludes, "I *don't* find authority for Mr. and Miss Murdstone in the New Testament".<sup>889</sup> David agrees with this sentiment, revealing him to be representing New Testament values as opposed to Old Testament ones. Given that *David Copperfield* is considered Dickens' most autobiographical novel, this further suggests that Dickens sees himself as aligning with New Testament values.

Dickens' dislike of talk about wrath and judgement fed into his criticism of Evangelicals. This does not mean that Dickens had no conception of sin, though, as some have argued,<sup>890</sup> as without sin there would be no need for the forgiveness which he stresses. For example, in *Oliver Twist*, Rose attempts to persuade Nancy to repent, saying, "It is never too late... for penitence and atonement".<sup>891</sup> Further, Dickens frequently uses the phrase "Our Saviour" to

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<sup>888</sup> Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (London: Penguin Books, 2004, 839.

<sup>889</sup> Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 839; italics in original.

<sup>890</sup> See, for examples, Ayres, "'Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth'" in *The Theological Dickens*, 56-57.

<sup>891</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 336.

refer to Jesus, clearly implying that he recognises the need for some kind of salvation. In *The Life of Our Lord*, Dickens also includes mentions of doing wrong and includes stories about needing to forgive others in order to be forgiven by God.<sup>892</sup> Dickens additionally sometimes refers to judgement after death. For example, in *Great Expectations*, when Magwitch receives his death sentence, Dickens refers to “the greater Judgment that knoweth all things and cannot err”.<sup>893</sup> What Dickens does not like is using the idea of God’s wrath as a way to force obedience or conversions, as seen in the discussion of Catholicism, preferring a more positive modelling of goodness and faith to lead people gently in the right direction.

Further, he was,

quite opposed to the idea of the wrath of God in the distorted form of Calvinism that seemed to hold the wrath of God as a central and defining tenet and make the majority of humanity the object of that wrath, excluding or ignoring God’s love and grace.<sup>894</sup>

Where the wrath of God is mentioned, it is specific to certain individuals due to particular acts, not a general condemnation of humanity. For example, Barnaby Rudge’s father reflects in prison that, “His double crime, the circumstances under which it had been committed, the length of time that had elapsed, and its discovery in spite of all, made him, as it were, the visible object of the Almighty’s wrath”.<sup>895</sup>

Dickens also notably includes the story of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16.19-31) in *The Life of Our Lord*, with its depiction of Heaven and Hell, and separation and judgement between the

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<sup>892</sup> See, for example, *Dickens, Life of Our Lord*, 43-45.

<sup>893</sup> Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 458.

<sup>894</sup> Colledge, *God and Charles Dickens*, 69.

<sup>895</sup> Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, 537.

virtuous and the sinful.<sup>896</sup> Here again, though, judgement concerns an individual matter of specific wrongdoing. The inclusion of this parable also touched on the subject of Hell, which Dickens rarely mentions elsewhere, as well as him veering away from mentions of Satan or evil spirits in most cases. Evil spirits appear only once in the work – in the story of the Gerasene demoniac, found in all three synoptic gospels: “Jesus, coming near him, perceived that he was torn by an Evil Spirit, and cast the madness out of him, and into a herd of swine...”.<sup>897</sup> It is unclear why Dickens made this an exception. It may be the healing that attracted him, as he included various other healing stories, or it may reflect the interest in mental health that was revealed while discussing temperance.

There is also an idea of judgement beyond the grave in *A Christmas Carol* in the words of Marley’s ghost when Scrooge asks him why spirits walk the earth:

“It is required of every man... that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world... and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!”.<sup>898</sup>

Further, Marley explains that the chains he is wearing symbolise his sins during life:

“I wear the chain I forged in life... I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it”.<sup>899</sup>

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<sup>896</sup> Dickens, *Life of Our Lord*, 74-76.

<sup>897</sup> Dickens, *Life of Our Lord*, 40.

<sup>898</sup> Dickens, *Christmas Carol*, 47.

<sup>899</sup> Dickens, *Christmas Carol*, 47-48.

Thus, Dickens sets up the idea that ghosts must walk the earth powerless to do good as penance for not doing what they could to help others while alive, reinforcing his stress on active faith. This is supported by the spirits that Scrooge watches from his window while Marley tries to save him from this fate: “The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power for ever”.<sup>900</sup>

Mark Eslick sees an allusion to Purgatory in Marley’s situation, as the latter is neither in Heaven nor in Hell, as in Protestant teaching, but in a third place.<sup>901</sup> However, as I have shown, Dickens is very dismissive of Purgatory, and it does not seem entirely clear that this is what Dickens meant. While Marley is depicted as attempting to make good his sins and do penance by warning Scrooge, Dickens leaves it unclear whether or not Marley will ever escape from his chains, even though the idea of penance suggests repentance and a satisfaction for sin that is not possible with the idea of Hell.<sup>902</sup> Further, the idea mentioned above that spirits have lost the power to do good suggests they cannot change their situation, despite Marley’s intervention in Scrooge’s life. This also does not fit with the idea of Purgatory as a temporary place of cleansing and atonement before entering Heaven. On top of this, not all of the spirits that Dickens sees in the novella are individuals, as Dickens says some “might be guilty governments”.<sup>903</sup> This more corporate idea of spirits representing social and political ills does not fit with individual salvation via Purgatory. Thus, Dickens’ depiction of the realm which Marley and other spirits inhabit is too unclear to draw firm conclusions about Dickens’ beliefs regarding the afterlife. Finally, the ambiguity surrounding Marley and other spirits in this story may be explained by Dickens’ self-

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<sup>900</sup> Dickens, *Christmas Carol*, 52.

<sup>901</sup> Eslick, “Charles Dickens”, 81.

<sup>902</sup> Eslick, “Charles Dickens”, 85.

<sup>903</sup> Dickens, *Christmas Carol*, 52.

confessed reluctance to draw firm conclusions about life after death: “Don’t suppose that I am so bold and arrogant as to settle what can and what cannot be, after death.”<sup>904</sup>

However, more often than placing judgement in the next life, Dickens is inclined to place judgement in this life as a natural consequence of wrongdoing, making his characters create their own hells on earth. For example, in *Great Expectations* Miss Havisham is treated as a figure to be pitied and forgiven by Pip because her own actions and bitterness have led to her downfall:

That she had done a grievous thing... I knew full well. But that... in seclusion, she had secluded herself from a thousand natural and healing influences; that, her mind, brooding solitary, had grown diseased... I knew equally well. And could I look upon her without compassion, seeing her punishment in the ruin she was, in her profound unfitness for this earth on which she was placed, in the variety of sorrow which had become a master mania, like the vanity of penitence, the vanity of remorse, the vanity of unworthiness, and other monstrous vanities that have been curses in this world?<sup>905</sup>

Thus, Miss Havisham brings disaster upon herself by cutting herself off from goodness, rather than being condemned by God. Indeed, Pip displays the Christian qualities of forgiveness and compassion which were so important to Dickens, and which he saw as coming from the New Testament. Self-inflicted punishment again appears in this life in *Oliver Twist*, after Sikes murders Nancy and goes on the run, with Dickens writing: “Let no man talk of murderers escaping justice, and hint that Providence must sleep. There were

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<sup>904</sup> Storey, *Letters: Nine*, 116.

<sup>905</sup> Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 399.

twenty score of violent deaths in one long minute of that agony of fear”.<sup>906</sup> Fagin similarly brings horrors upon himself as he awaits execution and refuses all opportunities for repentance and religious comfort:

One time he raved and blasphemed, at another howled and tore his hair. Venerable men of his own persuasion had come to pray beside him, but he had driven them away with curses... He grew so terrible at last in all the tortures of his evil conscience, that one man could not bear to sit there, eyeing him alone...<sup>907</sup>

Oliver himself also attempts to comfort Fagin and pray with him, again representing a New Testament approach of forgiveness and compassion, but is similarly driven away.<sup>908</sup> With both Miss Havisham and Fagin, thus, a contrast is set up between someone consumed by their own wrongdoing, and experiencing suffering because of it, and a hero who represents Dickens’ real Christianity of forgiveness and compassion for the helpless. In such scenes there is no room for judgementalism or hypocrisy by someone who considers themselves to be a better person but instead the focus is on a faith that desires to help others.

Additionally, Dickens spoke firmly against the idea of eternal damnation and divine wrath in a letter in July 1839, and especially against teaching this to children:

I think it monstrous to hold the source of inconceivable mercy and goodness perpetually up to them as an avenging and wrathful God... I daily see such evil and

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<sup>906</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 402.

<sup>907</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 445-446.

<sup>908</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 449.

misery springing up from this fatal mistake, that whenever I see the slightest approach to it, I cannot in my conscience let it go by without my most solemn protest.<sup>909</sup>

Again, in November 1840, Dickens wrote a letter containing criticism of some poems he had been sent, and objected to a deathbed scene, saying,

... to have him struggling with Death in all its horrors, yelling about foul fiends and bats' wings, with starting eyes and rattles in his throat, is a ghastly, sickening, hideous end, with no beauty, no moral, nothing in it but a repulsive and most painful idea.<sup>910</sup>

Dickens objected to this depiction because it did not allow for,

...hope, comfort and room for repentance. The imagination rather than opening heaven to the dying man, served only to accentuate his despair, and Horrell seemed to have stifled any chance of the redemption of either a desolate past or a horrific present.<sup>911</sup>

Thus, Dickens' objection was based on a lack of Christian hope for forgiveness, and the omission of any sense of kindness or compassion in the poem's depiction.

At times, Dickens appears to be a pluralist. This is supported by a letter he wrote in April 1841, in which he stated,

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<sup>909</sup> House and Storey, *Letters: One*, 568.

<sup>910</sup> House and Storey, *Letters: Two*, 155.

<sup>911</sup> Sanders, *Resurrectionist*, 35.

In the love of virtue and hatred of vice, in the detestation of cruelty and encouragement of gentleness and mercy – all Men who endeavour to be acceptable to their Creator in any way, may freely agree. There are more roads to Heaven, I am inclined to think, than any Sect believes; but there can be none which have not these Flowers garnishing the way.<sup>912</sup>

Thus, Dickens is apparently inclined towards a broad acceptance of differing beliefs, based on tolerance and charity, in contrast to those who he criticises for judgementalism and narrowmindedness. He also argues in a September 1848 letter that children should be taught to “include some saving clause for all clause for all good people and an equal tenderness for all the Human works of the Almighty’s Hand”.<sup>913</sup> However, despite his openness to a wide scope of salvation, Dickens does see a need for conversion to Christianity. This is expressed in his support for missionary work (at least when done in accordance with his principles),<sup>914</sup> in his praising of the Romans for bringing Christianity to Britain in *A Child’s History*,<sup>915</sup> and in his promotion of the New Testament as the supreme guide for all in matters of faith and life. Additionally, in *The Life of Our Lord* he writes about the persecution of the Early Church, saying, “The religions that were then in the World were false and brutal, and encouraged men to violence”.<sup>916</sup> Thus, Dickens appears to take the view that Christianity is the true faith but there is still hope for non-Christians who display virtue, in line with his focus on charity, kindness, and generosity of spirit.

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<sup>912</sup> House and Storey, *Letters: Two*, 257.

<sup>913</sup> Storey, Tillotson and Easson, *Letters: Seven*, 891.

<sup>914</sup> See, for example, Wilkie Collins, “Thanks to Doctor Livingstone”, *Household Words* XVII (409) (23 January 1858); <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-xvii/page-121.html>.

<sup>915</sup> Dickens, *Child’s History*, 9.

<sup>916</sup> Dickens, *Life of Our Lord*, 123.

Dickens' views on judgement beyond this life were not always consistent, not least due to his self-expressed reluctance to make firm pronouncements on the subject. However, regardless of how unclear he may be about the details he did have a belief in an afterlife along Christian lines, he firmly rejected the idea of God being wrathful towards all of humanity, and he was strongly opposed to using judgement and wrath as a way to force people into conformity with particular doctrines and ways of behaving. This dislike springs from his focus on trying to follow the example of Jesus by being kind, compassionate, and loving towards others, rather than insisting on doctrinal or theological conformity above all else or attempting to use fear to persuade others of their sinfulness and thus assert control.

However, judgement after death was not the only thing Dickens referred to concerning the afterlife, as I will now show.

#### **4.5 Death, angels, and women**

Dickens' attitude toward death and the afterlife is a key area for understanding his faith, since the Christian hope in life after death is a central concept of the religion. Given this, Michelle Gadpaille notes that the moment of death was greatly significant to many Protestants, due to fears or uncertainties about judgement and the afterlife.<sup>917</sup> The same would apply to Catholics, also, but Gadpaille focuses on Protestants. In order to deal with this situation, the concept of the "good death" was developed, constituting "reassurance for the dying, comfort for the family, and a lesson for the community", and including "witness, testimony, requests and advice, music, scripture, and confident hope of Heaven. Some deathbeds even became

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<sup>917</sup> Michelle Gadpaille, "The Discourse of the 'Good Death' in Nineteenth-Century Fiction and a Historical Case Study", *ELOPE: English Language Overseas Perspectives and Enquiries* 21(1) (2024), 211.

virtual stages or pulpits, with the dying person at the centre”.<sup>918</sup> There was also a tradition of seeing the deathbed as an opportunity for conversion and repentance, with devotional manuals being produced by both Evangelicals and Catholics to encourage this.<sup>919</sup>

Dickens is well-known for his fictional deathbed scenes, but he also participated in the widespread practice of writing condolence letters following deaths. These letters are a key, neglected area for understanding Dickens’ faith, since they contain many religious sentiments. Such letters were also, according to Pat Jalland, “a vital part of the important process of rallying the support and sympathy of friends, family, and community”.<sup>920</sup> The contents of condolence letters tended to vary according to the age and closeness of relationship of the deceased. Letters on the death of a young child, for example, tended to focus on how the child was saved from the struggles and sins of this life, and there was an idea with the death of a younger person that there had been less time for emotional attachment on the part of parents.<sup>921</sup> There were many such letters referring to the loss of a child, due to the high death rate among children and young people, estimated to be nearly 30,000 each year between 1820 and 1850.<sup>922</sup> Thus, in 1835, Dickens wrote to John Macrone regarding the death of Macrone’s first child at less than a month old, with the idea that an earlier death was easier for the parents to bear:

... it may afford you some relief to reflect that you lost your poor little boy at an age when death is an easy transit to a better World; and before years of solitude and anxiety, and the recollection of the thousand holds upon your affection created in that

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<sup>918</sup> Gadpaille, “The ‘Good Death’”, 211.

<sup>919</sup> Sanders, *Resurrectionist*, 23-26.

<sup>920</sup> Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 307.

<sup>921</sup> Jalland, *Death*, 312-314.

<sup>922</sup> Hooper, *Charles Dickens*, 140.

time would have rendered the shock far harder to bear, and infinitely more difficult to forget.<sup>923</sup>

In another example, Dickens wrote to Henry Burnett following the death of his disabled son in January 1849. Dickens suggested that the child's death was a merciful release:

... I cannot but believe that the mercy of God has removed your poor dear boy...a child so afflicted... must, if he lived, be inevitably doomed to great mental anguish, to a weary struggle with the difficulties of life... I hope that if I were you, I could – when the first burst of my love and grief was past – thankfully confide him to that better Father to whom he has passed, and to that enduring world, where, we may believe, he has rejoined his mother, and for ever cast away his early sorrows and infirmities.<sup>924</sup>

In both of these examples we see Dickens confidently asserting his belief in a better world after this one, a faith that allows him to be sanguine about death since the deceased person has gone to a better place. Also, in the second letter, Dickens points to a compassionate and merciful God saving the child from suffering. Both of these sentiments reveal Dickens' Christian faith in both a loving God and an eternally blissful life after death.

A consolation letter written in 1839 also reveals another element of Dickens' beliefs about the afterlife with a reference to angels:

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<sup>923</sup> House and Storey, *Letters: One*, 94; see also, for a similar example sent to John Leech, Storey and Fielding, *Letters: Five*, 505-506.

<sup>924</sup> Storey and Fielding, *Letters: Five*, 482.

The certainty of a bright and happy world beyond the Grave, which such young and untried creatures (half Angels here) must be called away by God... the happiness of always being able to think of her as a young and promising girl... above all, the thought of one day joining her again where sorrow and separation are unknown – these are all sources of consolation...<sup>925</sup>

Here, Dickens refers to children as “half Angels” and, if we combine this with other letters, his ideas about the angelic nature of the afterlife can be seen, as expressed in a May 1841 letter to Basil Hall about the death of Hall’s youngest son at the age of four: “It must be something to you, even in your grief, to know, that one of the angels called you father upon Earth”.<sup>926</sup> The theology of both the Catholic and most Protestant churches does not state that people become angels after death but the idea is common in popular religious thinking. Dickens also refers to it in *The Life of Our Lord*, saying, “The most miserable, the most ugly, deformed, wretched creatures that live, will be bright Angels in Heaven if they are good here on earth”.<sup>927</sup>

Dickens’ approach initially appears quite similar to the ideas of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). A scientist, Christian mystic, philosopher, and theologian, Swedenborg wrote many works in an attempt to reform Christianity in line with various dreams and visions. The Swedenborgians, or New Church, follow his teachings and are part of Restorationist Christianity.<sup>928</sup> The best-known of Swedenborg’s books is *Heaven and Hell* (first published,

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<sup>925</sup> House and Storey, *Letters: One*, 515-516.

<sup>926</sup> House and Storey, *Letters: Two*, 285.

<sup>927</sup> Dickens, *Life of Our Lord*, 27-28.

<sup>928</sup> Also known as Christian primitivism, this takes the view that the beliefs and practices of Jesus’s initial followers have been lost or adulterated and must be restored.

1758), which gives an account of the nature of the afterlife, including his thoughts on the characteristics of angels.

However, Dickens' views were not identical to those of Swedenborg. In *Heaven and Hell*, Swedenborg claims that all human beings can become angels<sup>929</sup> and that "in their form, angels are completely human... they lack nothing that belongs to humans except that they are not clothed with a material body".<sup>930</sup> Children who die are especially destined for Heaven and to grow up there into angels, according to Swedenborg, regardless of their or their parents' faith.<sup>931</sup> Thus, children are not immediately angels but grow into angelhood as they mature.<sup>932</sup> Perhaps influenced by this book, Dickens wrote to Mrs Hogarth in October 1841 consoling her on the death of one of her children, saying, "There *is* consolation in the knowledge that you have treasure there [Heaven], and that while you live on earth, there are creatures among the Angels, who owed their being to you".<sup>933</sup> Where Dickens seems to differ from Swedenborg, as seen in this letter extract, is in his idea that children are immediately angels in Heaven. Dickens also seems to see deceased children as remaining eternally young, shown in an epitaph he wrote in April 1842 for a child who died at 13 months, claiming that even when the parents were old they could think of their infant "*As a Child*, In Heaven".<sup>934</sup>

Thus, a child's death is in some ways a blessing, especially if the child has been suffering, since the child is spared the difficulties of life on Earth and remains innocent and joyful in

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<sup>929</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell: Drawn from Things Heard & Seen*, trans. George F. Dole. New Century Edition. (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2000), 144.

<sup>930</sup> Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 155.

<sup>931</sup> Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 331.

<sup>932</sup> Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 333.

<sup>933</sup> House and Storey, *Letters: Two*, 408; italics in original.

<sup>934</sup> House, Storey and Tillotson, *Letters: Three*, 187; italics in original.

Heaven. This is seen even after the death of his own daughter, Dora, at only eight months-old in April 1851. Dickens wrote in a letter shortly afterwards that,

...it is a blessed thing to know, as I do thoroughly in my heart, that if, with a wish, I could cancel what has happened and bring the little creature back to life, I would not do it. God be thanked!<sup>935</sup>

The same kind of idea is seen in Dickens' "A Child's Dream of a Star", which first appeared in *HW* in April 1850, shortly after the death of his sister, Fanny, at the age of 38. The story tells of a boy and his sister looking up at a star and the boy finding comfort from it after his sister's death as a child and the deaths of others throughout his own long life. The star's rays are depicted as forming a road into Heaven, up which people are guided by angels. Many go on into Heaven, but others wait for loved ones in angelic form:

But, there were many angels who did not go with them, and among them one he knew... His sister's angel lingered near the entrance of the star, and said to the leader among those who had brought the people thither: "Is my brother come?".<sup>936</sup>

The boy's sister continues to wait throughout his life, later joined at the entrance to the star by another brother and his mother, until he finally dies as an old man and is reunited with all his loved ones. Here again, people are depicted as entering Heaven as angels after death, although still not in the same way as Swedenborg described as they are immediately full angels, and children remain young rather than growing and maturing into angelic form.

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<sup>935</sup> Storey, Tillotson and Burgis, *Letters: Six*, 355.

<sup>936</sup> Charles Dickens, "A Child's Dream of a Star", *Household Words* I (2) (6 April 1850), 25; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-i/page-25.html>.

Indeed, there is a suggestion that older people may become young again, given how the brother's eventual death is described:

They whispered one another [*sic*] "He is dying".

And he said, "I am. My age is falling from me like a garment, and I move towards the star as a child".<sup>937</sup>

This is closer to Jesus's words in Matthew 18, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven", than it is to a purely Swedenborgian conception of the afterlife. It seems, as Sanders comments, that Dickens "readily associated children and child-like states with heavenly innocence and angelic metamorphosis".<sup>938</sup> Another fictional death which mentions a child becoming an angel is that of Jenny's baby in *Bleak House*. After comforting Jenny, Esther lifts the handkerchief laid over the child and thinks to herself: "I only thought that perhaps the Angel of the child might not be all unconscious of the woman who replaced it with so compassionate a hand...".<sup>939</sup> We also see Esther here displaying active compassion and love, not just expressing pious sentiments in the way that Dickens often criticises Evangelicals for. In *Dombey and Son* also, immediately after the death of the young Paul Dombey, Dickens writes, "And look upon us, angels of young children, with regards not quite estranged, when the swift river bears us to the ocean!".<sup>940</sup>

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<sup>937</sup> Dickens, "A Child's Dream", 26.

<sup>938</sup> Sanders, *Resurrectionist*, 6

<sup>939</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 136.

<sup>940</sup> Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, 253.

Dickens' best-known depiction of a death, though, concerns Little Nell, in *Old Curiosity Shop*. This novel has been "rightly identified as one of Dickens's most religious novels",<sup>941</sup> according to Keith Hooper, and has a strong stress on death and the afterlife given its "pervasive concern with mortality".<sup>942</sup> Little Nell is generally thought to have been inspired by Mary Hogarth, Dickens' sister-in-law, whose death at the age of 17 in 1837 affected him deeply. The description of Nell's death paints a picture of her as pure, innocent, and untouched by life:

She was dead... She seemed a creature fresh from the hand of God, and waiting for the breath of life; not one who had lived and suffered death... Dear gentle, patient, noble Nell, was dead... Where were the traces of her early cares, her sufferings, and fatigues? All gone. Sorrow was dead indeed in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born; imaged in her tranquil beauty and profound repose.<sup>943</sup>

Little Nell's death is portrayed as a release and blessing to her, in a way similar to what we have seen above. It is thus more a restoration to goodness and an ultimate healing than an evil, even though it causes great grief to those around her. This idea of goodness arising from suffering and death is reinforced following her burial, when Dickens writes:

When Death strikes down the innocent and young, for every fragile form from which he lets the panting spirit free, a hundred virtues rise, in shapes of mercy, charity, and love, to walk the world, and bless it. In every tear that sorrowing mortals shed on such green graves, some good is born, some gentler nature comes. In the Destroyer's steps

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<sup>941</sup> Hooper, *Charles Dickens*, 140.

<sup>942</sup> Sanders, *Resurrectionist*, 66.

<sup>943</sup> Dickens, *Old Curiosity Shop*, 539-540.

there spring up bright creations that defy his power, and his dark path becomes a way of light to Heaven.<sup>944</sup>

In such sentiments Dickens is reflecting a Christian idea of goodness and virtue coming out of suffering, and the ultimate victory of life and goodness over evil and death. Rather than being a source of terror about judgement and sin, death becomes a gateway to happiness. This stands in contrast to the judgementalism, stern warnings, and depictions of post-mortem horrors that Dickens saw among both Evangelicals and Catholics, and sheds light on his criticisms of the latter.

Elsewhere in the novel there are also frequent references to life beyond death which reinforce a Christian view of an eternal life of happiness for those who are good. This starts in Chapter 6, where Nell describes how her grandfather used to talk about her dead mother: “Then, he used to take me on his knee, and try to make me understand that she was not lying in her grave, but had flown to a beautiful country beyond the sky, where nothing ever died or ever grew old...”<sup>945</sup> At the very end of the novel there is another reference which reveals Dickens’ view of life after death: “...she had gone to Heaven, as all good people did... if they were good like her, they might hope to be there too one day, and to see and know her...”<sup>946</sup> This reveals Dickens’ view that salvation lay in a person living a good life as best they could, within a broadly Christian framework, rather than attempting to impose beliefs on others in the way he saw among various Evangelicals and Catholics. In all his references to death and Heaven, Dickens avoids mention of whether people have believed certain doctrines or behaved according to particular standards approved by others. These were much less

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<sup>944</sup> Dickens, *Old Curiosity Shop*, 544.

<sup>945</sup> Dickens, *Old Curiosity Shop*, 57.

<sup>946</sup> Dickens, *Old Curiosity Shop*, 556.

important and interesting to him than whether or not people had active faith in terms of living out the virtues and qualities he saw embodied in the person of Jesus. Therefore, in his eyes, arguments over the Sabbath, theatre, or drinking, or Catholic beliefs and worship were at best an irrelevance and at worst actively destructive to real Christianity. As Andrew Sanders notes, “Doctrinal dispute, niceties of scriptural interpretation, the dissidence of dissent, the Catholic revival, Tractarianism, Evangelicalism and agnosticism seem equally to have enraged him rather than to have engaged his mind, ever intolerant of party spirit and narrowness”.<sup>947</sup>

Another interesting aspect of the way in which Dickens approached death and death scenes was how he saw women playing an almost priestly or even Christ-like role in mediating between life and death within a domestic context, something in which he was not alone. Perhaps the best-known example of this is Agnes Wickfield, in *David Copperfield*. Agnes’ well-known propensity for “pointing upwards” towards Heaven reveals her as symbolising the theological virtue of hope as she directs attention towards Heaven and God. However, it also gives Agnes a heavenly connection as she points towards the angelic realm. This further links to the common Victorian image of woman as the “Angel of Death”. This figure was seen as “easing through her benign presence by the deathbed the passing of the troubled soul from the earthly life to Heaven and mediating between the human creature and its Makers”.<sup>948</sup> Thus, following the death of Dora, Agnes comes to David with, “That face, so full of pity and of grief, that rain of tears, that awful mute appeal to me, that solemn hand upraised towards Heaven!”.<sup>949</sup> The imagery culminates in the closing words of the novel, where she is still present, still calm, and still pointing upwards to Heaven:

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<sup>947</sup> Sanders, *Resurrectionist*, xi.

<sup>948</sup> Slater, *Dickens and Women*, 307.

<sup>949</sup> Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 774.

But, one face, shining on me like a Heavenly light by which I see all other objects, is above them and beyond them all... O Agnes, O my soul, so may thy face be by me when I close my life indeed; so may I... still find thee near me, pointing upward!<sup>950</sup>

That this connection between women and easing the passage to death was common is shown by an article published in *The Metropolitan* in 1843. The article discussed a woman's role in soothing men's fears about death and judgement, stating:

It is for woman – tender, sympathising, watchful, prayerful woman – alone to comprehend those struggles, alone to soothe them, alone to invoke forgiveness and mercy for them, alone to feel the blessed assurance that her prayers are gone up an acceptable sacrifice before the throne of the Most High, alone to indulge the hope that him she mourneth as dead has awakened to life and immortality in the cloudless realms of everlasting light.<sup>951</sup>

This passage suggests that women have a priest-like role in smoothing men's passage through death to Heaven with prayer, forgiveness, and a sustaining hope in the face of death.

However, we might ask, what qualified women for such a role in the Victorian mind? The answer lies in the Victorian conception of women's spiritual and moral role within the home and how female virtue and goodness were perceived as uniquely special and even superior to that of men.

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<sup>950</sup> Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 882.

<sup>951</sup> Mrs Edward Thomas, "Woman", *The Metropolitan* 36 (141) (January 1843), 319.

## 4.6 Women, morality, and spirituality

The many ways in which gender roles were sharply delineated in the Victorian era have been much-discussed and need not be repeated here. Similarly, the symbolic place of women as moral and spiritual figures within the home is also a well-trodden path. Briefly, though, while working-class women often had little choice but to work outside of the home, the middle-class ideal for women is generally understood as having been a sphere of influence revolving round the home and family, morality, and spiritual influence. In this social context, according to Walter Houghton, the home was seen as a place in which virtues and feelings could be safeguarded from the negative pressures of modern business and society in the increasingly competitive and industrialised world of the nineteenth century.<sup>952</sup> Thus, home was a refuge and protection from aspects of modernity which were seen as threatening traditional ways of life, making it “a sacred place, a temple”.<sup>953</sup> At the centre of this temple was the woman, playing her expected roles of wife and mother, while the man’s role was to protect her.

John Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), on the duties and nature of men and women, is often seen as confirming the view outlined by Houghton and emphasising that men and women had separate realms, with the woman’s being purely the home. However, a woman’s domestic role is also her source of power and influence, both within the home and outside it.<sup>954</sup> A woman’s power is not to be shown in physical strength and the ability to fight and destroy, though, as with men. Instead, Ruskin portrays women as having a Christ-like role in a way that echoes descriptions of Jesus’s ministry:

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<sup>952</sup> Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), 342.

<sup>953</sup> Houghton, *Frame of Mind*, 343.

<sup>954</sup> John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*. 12<sup>th</sup> ed. (Orpington: George Allen, 1891), 136-138.

Power to heal, to redeem, to guide, and to guard. Power of the sceptre and shield; the power of the royal hand that heals in touching, – that binds the fiend, and looses the captive; the throne that is founded on the rock of Justice, and descended from only by steps of Mercy.<sup>955</sup>

Finally, the female position as spiritual guide and exemplar is also expanded on when Ruskin argues that women need to be creatures of high moral worth and goodness, taking on the roles of moral guides and models of virtue and service.<sup>956</sup>

Such a picture of women makes them ideal figures for Dickens in terms of promoting his view of Christianity, given its focus on goodness and virtue. Dickens' female characters are often criticised as one-dimensional and idealised. However, their idealised nature is used by Dickens to display a Christian understanding of virtue, and the positive qualities Dickens wishes to promote, based on an understanding of women as possessing moral and spiritual superiority. This not only aligns Dickens with Ruskin, but it also seems that Dickens is even unconsciously making his ideal women into something like Protestant saints.

The main text concerning how Dickens sees and portrays women is considered to be Michael Slater's *Dickens and Women*. Slater primarily takes a psychological approach, considering the women in Dickens' life and how his relationships with them appear and are worked through in his fiction. He sometimes refers to other writing, but in a secondary sense. While such psychological insights do throw light on Dickens' writing and thinking process,

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<sup>955</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, 166.

<sup>956</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, 138-139.

they are not the focus of this research. There is also much less focus on spiritual elements relating to womanhood in Dickens' work in most of Slater's book; however, those elements which do appear are of interest to this research, and so I will refer to Slater's work where relevant.

*Oliver Twist's* Rose Maylie is an early example of a woman showing the virtues which Dickens wished to promote. I have already mentioned Rose attempting to save Nancy through repentance and forgiveness but when we first meet Rose she is introduced in angelic terms. This imagery reveals the influence of late-eighteenth century Gothic writing<sup>957</sup> and elevates her into a being who is particularly good and spiritual, above the male characters in the novel:

The younger lady was in the lovely bloom and spring-time of womanhood; at that age when, if ever angels be for God's good purposes enthroned in mortal forms, they may be without impiety supposed to abide in such as hers... so pure and beautiful that earth seemed not her element, nor its rough creatures her fit companions...<sup>958</sup>

Rose also displays a Christ-like compassion and desire to save and restore the fallen, thus rejecting judgementalism in favour of charity and kindness. For example, she intercedes for Oliver against a doctor's judgement of him as wicked following Oliver being shot while breaking into Rose's house:

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<sup>957</sup> Slater, *Dickens and Women*, 234.

<sup>958</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 235.

‘But can you... really believe that this delicate boy has been the voluntary associate of the worst outcasts of society?’ said Rose anxiously.

The surgeon shook his head in a manner which intimated that he feared it was very possible...

‘But even if he has been wicked’, pursued Rose, ‘think how young he is; think that he may never have known a mother’s love, or even the comfort of a home, and that ill-usage and blows, or the want of bread, may have driven him to herd with the men who have forced him to guilt’.<sup>959</sup>

Not only does Rose represent mercy, forgiveness, and kindness, rather than judgement and vengeance, but a link is made between falling into criminal activity and the lack of a mother-figure or safe home. Thus, the image of home and the maternal role as being vital to providing moral guidance is upheld alongside Rose’s intercession for the guilty Oliver. The kindness which Oliver receives from the Maylie household is then shown to increase genuine faith in Oliver, as his “fervent prayers” lead to “the blessings which the orphan child called down upon them” sinking “into their souls, diffusing peace and happiness”.<sup>960</sup> This links with what we saw earlier concerning Dickens’ view that a harsher, more judgemental approach to Christianity turned people away from the faith, while a kinder, gentler, and more cheerful approach would attract them.

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<sup>959</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 239.

<sup>960</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 255.

Moving on to *David Copperfield*, the previously discussed Agnes, whose name means “pure” or “holy”, is presented as a model of perfection and a moral guide.<sup>961</sup> Further, Slater refers to her as “very much a religious ikon” and as giving off a sense of “superhuman saintliness”.<sup>962</sup> She is also, Slater continues, only concerned with redeeming others, especially David and her father,<sup>963</sup> providing another Christ-like figure. This also makes her similar to Rose in that she is concerned with rescuing and restoring those who have gone astray. Further, F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis see Agnes in the light of religious and spiritual symbolism, describing her as “a willed concession to the Victorian ideal – seen always as the angel on the hearth, in the light from a stained glass window, ‘pointing upward’, or with her ‘patient smile’”.<sup>964</sup> Indeed, in David’s first meeting with Agnes he compares her to a figure in a stained-glass window:

I cannot call to mind where or when, in my childhood, I had seen a stained glass window in a church. Nor do I recollect its subject. But I know that when I saw her turn round, in the grave light of the old staircase, and wait for us, above, I thought of that window; and that I associated something of its tranquil brightness with Agnes Wickfield ever afterwards.<sup>965</sup>

Agnes is introduced as her father’s housekeeper, and it is clear that she is in her element in a domestic context, where she is portrayed as an ever-calm, patient, and positive influence, contrasting with people who use harmful imagery, condemnation, authoritarianism, and judgement to try to keep others in line. The stained-glass imagery recurs when David thinks

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<sup>961</sup> Arlene Jackson, “Agnes Wickfield and the Church Leitmotif in *David Copperfield*”, *Dickens Studies Annual* 9 (1981), 53.

<sup>962</sup> Slater, *Dickens and Women*, 251.

<sup>963</sup> Slater, *Dickens and Women*, 252.

<sup>964</sup> F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis, *Dickens the Novelist*. Faber Finds. (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 98.

<sup>965</sup> Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 233.

about Agnes' good influence on him, which is a continuous theme throughout the novel and shows how Agnes represents his better self:

...I feel that there are goodness, peace, and truth, wherever Agnes is; and that the soft light of the colored window in the church, seen long ago, falls on her always, and on me when I am near her, and on every thing around.<sup>966</sup>

The connection between Agnes and stained glass is described by Arlene Jackson as being part of a leitmotif within *David Copperfield* made up of church imagery. Jackson argues that "David's attempt to identify Agnes with a saint – the usual subject of stained glass windows... forecasts how he will identify Agnes through the rest of the novel".<sup>967</sup> David additionally frequently refers to Agnes as an angel, for example describing her as "the better angel of the lives of all who come within her calm, good, self-denying influence".<sup>968</sup> Thus, saintly and angelic images, the latter of which also often appear in stained-glass windows, are combined in the description of Agnes, and both can be seen as mediating between earthly and heavenly realms, at least in Catholic traditions. This is further emphasised by Dickens juxtaposing this with the idea of Uriah Heep as a gargoyle,<sup>969</sup> in another ecclesiastical image. For example, David looks out of his window at the cathedral but then "seeing one of the faces on the beam-ends looking at me sideways, I fancied it was Uriah Heep got up there somehow, and shut him out in a hurry".<sup>970</sup>

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<sup>966</sup> Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 242.

<sup>967</sup> Jackson, "Agnes Wickfield", 60.

<sup>968</sup> Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 278.

<sup>969</sup> Elizabeth Bridgham, *Spaces of the Sacred and Profane: Dickens, Trollope, and the Victorian Cathedral Town*. Literary Criticism and Cultural Theory. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 111.

<sup>970</sup> Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 235.

Interestingly, given Dickens' criticisms of Catholicism, various scholars have also seen Agnes as a Madonna figure, given her saintliness, self-sacrificing nature, faithfulness, and maternal characteristics.<sup>971</sup> This is strengthened if we consider the fact that the Virgin Mary is often seen as pointing to Christ in Catholic imagery, perhaps similarly to how Agnes points to Heaven. Adding to this is the link between Agnes and Mary Hogarth, as pointed out by Slater and others,<sup>972</sup> combined with Dickens' Madonna-like vision of Mary Hogarth in his Italian dream. Such a link only strengthens the idea that Agnes is being used to portray virtue and goodness and as perfect a Christian life as is possible.

Overall, Agnes' characteristics are the antithesis of the criticisms Dickens levelled at both Evangelicals and Catholics. She is ever-patient, kind, forgiving, uncritical, hopeful, and faithful instead of being quick to judge and condemn. She shows no sign of hypocrisy, fanaticism, or cruelty. She may be, as many have pointed out, rather lifeless and unsatisfying in her excessive saintliness, but nonetheless she plays an important role in showing us more of Dickens' view of real Christianity in the virtues she displays.

Another well-known female character is Esther Summerson, in *Bleak House*. Esther is perhaps a surprising name choice for Dickens given that Esther is a Jewish queen who appears in the Old Testament. Additionally, the book is seldom preached on and is notable for its lack of religious elements. Many critics have made links between Esther Summerson and Queen Esther. Jo Carruthers particularly picks out two approaches taken by Gary Watt and Janet Larson, respectively. Watt sees Esther in *Bleak House* as softening judgements just as Queen Esther saved her people from Haman's edicts, while Larson draws on typological

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<sup>971</sup> Mark Eslick, "Agnes Wickfield and Victorian Mariolatry", *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 122 (Fall 2012), 62-77.

<sup>972</sup> Slater, *Dickens and Women*, 100.

interpretations that see Esther “as a type of the Church or Mary”.<sup>973</sup> However, Carruthers makes different points based on how the story of Queen Esther was generally received at the time. There was, she continues, an association between Esther and heroism in popular thinking, aligned with both England’s current queen and Elizabeth I. This heroic symbolism was also connected with deliverance, such as in Walter Scott’s *The Heart of Midlothian* in 1818, where Jeanie walks to London to appeal to the king for her sister’s life. Jeanie obviously has a different name but the connection between her and Queen Esther is made clear by Jeanie referring explicitly to King Ahasuerus, Queen Esther’s husband. Another element that Carruthers refers to is sexuality, an element of the story with which Victorian commentators were uneasy, Queen Esther having been part of the king’s harem. This and Esther Summerson’s position as an illegitimate child blurs the lines between queenship, chastity, and virtue, and makes judgement impossible,<sup>974</sup> something reiterated when Esther reads the story of the woman caught in adultery, as discussed above. Following Carruthers, Esther thus emerges as a sign of grace, kindness, and forgiveness as opposed to the judgemental attitudes that Dickens so often condemned.

Much can be said about the religious allusions in *Bleak House*, but focusing particularly on how Dickens saw real Christian living brings us to how Esther contrasts with Mrs Jellyby and Mrs Pardiggle. Mrs Jellyby is introduced as someone,

who devotes herself entirely to the public. She has devoted herself to an extensive variety of public subjects at various times and is at present (until something else attracts her) devoted to the subject of Africa, with a view to the general cultivation of

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<sup>973</sup> Jo Carruthers, “Esther Summerson’s Biblical Judgment: Queen Esther and the Fallen Woman in *Bleak House*”, *Religion & Literature* 50 (3) (Autumn 2018), 74.

<sup>974</sup> Carruthers, “Esther Summerson’s Biblical Judgment”, 78-81.

the coffee berry — and the natives — and the happy settlement, on the banks of the African rivers, of our superabundant home population.<sup>975</sup>

Mrs Jellyby is taken up with her “causes”, which always concern those far away, neglecting those around her in the process. Indeed, in our first introduction to her one of her children is found with his head trapped between some railings. Esther, in a recurring pattern, sees the need in front of her and goes to help, in contrast to his own mother’s indifference:

I made my way to the poor child, who was one of the dirtiest little unfortunates I ever saw, and found him very hot and frightened and crying loudly, fixed by the neck between two iron railings... Nobody had appeared belonging to the house except a person in pattens... I therefore supposed that Mrs. Jellyby was not at home, and was quite surprised when the person appeared in the passage... and... announced us as, “Them two young ladies, Missis Jellyby!”<sup>976</sup>

As Esther and her companion enter the house, they also hear a child falling down the stairs, but again there is no reaction from Mrs Jellyby, further reinforcing the latter’s lack of interest in her family and domestic duties. In this criticism of women who focus on the needs of those far away before their own homes and families, Dickens appears aligned with Augustine of Hippo’s assertion that “all men are to be loved equally. But since you cannot do good to all, you are to pay special regard to those who... are brought into closer connection with you”.<sup>977</sup>

In this context, Esther thus displays her nature as a follower of Jesus by following

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<sup>975</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 49-50.

<sup>976</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 51-52.

<sup>977</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine, in Four Books*. Book 1: Chapter 28. (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.), 39.

Augustine's maxim and actively caring for those she comes across, rather than focusing solely on those far away.

Similarly, Mrs Jellyby's friend and fellow-activist Mrs Pardiggle is also portrayed as neglecting her family in favour of activities outside the home and thereby making her children miserable: "We had never seen such dissatisfied children. It was not merely that they were weazen and shrivelled – though they were certainly that too – but they looked absolutely ferocious with discontent".<sup>978</sup> Unlike Mrs Jellyby, Mrs Pargiddle visits the poor in her neighbourhood. However, her only concern is to convert them, and she ignores their immediate needs and problems in favour of preaching her message, regardless of the fact that it is ineffective due to the dire circumstances in which her audiences are living. Mrs Pardiggle's indifference and narrowness of vision culminates in her not noticing that there is a dead baby in the brickmaker's house. In contrast, Esther (along with Ada, Jarndyce's ward) is portrayed as displaying real Christianity, as she notices the mother's plight and attempts to help out of compassion and pity for her suffering, thus representing Christian charity:

...we [Esther and Ada] approached the woman sitting by the fire, to ask if the baby were ill.

She only looked at it as it lay on her lap... Ada bent down to touch its little face. As she did so, I saw what happened and drew her back. The child died... Presently I took the light burden from her lap; did what I could to make the baby's rest the prettier and

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<sup>978</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 125.

gentler; laid it on a shelf, and covered it with my own handkerchief. We tried to comfort the mother, and we whispered to her what Our Saviour said of children.<sup>979</sup>

Esther also represents Christian hope, here, as she uses the New Testament to comfort the grieving mother with a Christian belief in the afterlife and the compassion of God.

As well as the example displayed by Esther, we can also see here a criticism of Evangelicals that pertains especially to Evangelical women and further highlights Dickens' conception of how Christianity should look among women. Slater refers to the Evangelicals Mrs Weller (*Pickwick Papers*) and Mrs Varden (*Barnaby Rudge*) as those "who have been spoiled by becoming addicted to a sensational brand of religion, some form of hell-fire Protestantism".<sup>980</sup> Additionally, in *Old Curiosity Shop* Kit pleads with his mother to keep away from the Evangelical chapel,

for if was to see your good-humoured face that has always made home cheerful, turned into a grievous one, and the baby trained to look grievous too, and to call itself a young sinner... and see little Jacob looking grievous likewise, I should so take it to heart that I'm sure I should go and list for a soldier...<sup>981</sup>

Slater continues by noting that, "It seems as if he [Dickens] regarded Evangelical religion as a noxious addiction to which women were particularly prone, with dismal consequences for their nearest and dearest".<sup>982</sup> Slater describes these consequences in terms of women not being "good providers" for their households as they are taken away from their domestic

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<sup>979</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 133-134; apparently referring to Mark 10.14: "Let the children come to me".

<sup>980</sup> Slater, *Dickens and Women*, 228.

<sup>981</sup> Dickens, *Old Curiosity Shop*, 173.

<sup>982</sup> Slater, *Dickens and Women*, 228.

duties and are disagreeable to their husbands.<sup>983</sup> However, there is also a religious criticism since Dickens holds a particular form of faith responsible for turning women away from kindness, compassion, and cheerfulness, as well as potentially taking them away from their primary duty to home and family, with negative consequences.

As well as Mrs Jellyby and Mrs Pardiggle, Mrs Weller (*Pickwick Papers*) reveals more about Dickens' view of Evangelical women, including the negative spiritual effects of neglecting domesticity. To start with, there is a suggestion that women are especially susceptible to the "gammon" ("nonsense") being spouted by certain Evangelical ministers. This suggestion is given in the context of women going out to raise money and donations instead of remaining at home:

'The worst o' these here shepherds is, my boy, that they reg'larly turn the heads of all the young ladies, about here. Lord bless their little hearts, they thinks it's all right, and don't know no better; but they're the wictims o' gammon, Samivel, they're the wictims o' gammon'.<sup>984</sup>

As such, Evangelical women who are active outside of domestic affairs have, in Dickens' view, been taken away from their proper spiritual roles within the home by their version of faith. This message is later reinforced with the dying words of Mrs Weller, who repents of neglecting her proper role at home under the influence of Stiggins:

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<sup>983</sup> Slater, *Dickens and Women*, 228-229.

<sup>984</sup> Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, 358.

“I begin to see now”, she says, “ven it’s too late, that if a married ‘ooman vishes to be religious she should begin vith dischargin’ her dooties at home, and makin’ them as is about her cheerful and happy, and that vile she goes to church, or chapel, or wot not, at all proper times, she should be very careful not to con-wert this sort o’ thing into an excuse for idleness or self-indulgence, or vurse”.<sup>985</sup>

Here, it is very clear that Evangelical social activism among women is to be condemned for misleading women and drawing them away from their proper work of providing gentle spiritual support in the home and a haven from the cares of the outside world.

Evangelical women are also strongly criticised by Dickens for judgementalism. For example, Mrs Varden (*Barnaby Rudge*) is devoted to the Evangelical cause, as shown through her constant reading of the “Protestant Manual”. She also has a strongly Calvinistic character, rebuking her maid for comparing her to an angel:

How dare you speak of angels in connection with your sinful fellow-beings — mere’ — said Mrs Varden, glancing at herself in a neighbouring mirror, and arranging the ribbon of her cap in a more becoming fashion — ‘mere worms and grovellers as we are!’.<sup>986</sup>

There is also hypocrisy, of course, another of Dickens’ criticisms, as Mrs Varden is still concerned with making sure she looks attractive while proclaiming she is of little worth. Mrs Varden is similar to Mrs Weller as well in that she repents of her Evangelicalism, although it

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<sup>985</sup> Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, 692.

<sup>986</sup> Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, 119.

is a more gradual change in Mrs Varden's case, brought about by seeing the effects of Protestant fanaticism in the Gordon Riots.<sup>987</sup> Thus, for example, Mrs Varden is described as being "quite an altered woman — for the riots had done that good"<sup>988</sup> and she is ultimately shown restored to her "proper" role at the heart of a happy home. The novel also points to the expectations both that women should be better than men and that religion should be a positive force when Gabriel Varden says to his wife, "all good things perverted to evil purposes, are worse than those which are naturally bad. A thoroughly wicked woman, is wicked indeed. When religion goes wrong, she is very wrong, for the same reason".<sup>989</sup>

Similarly, Mrs Clennam in *Little Dorrit* is also portrayed in Calvinistic terms. In this case, Mrs Clennam,

uses her harsh Calvinist religion to justify to herself her long and vindictive revenge... Rejecting forgiveness and mercy of those who have wronged her, Mrs Clennam works out a terrible scheme of vengeance... and for years feeds on her resentment in the dark airless chamber to which she confines herself.<sup>990</sup>

Thus, Mrs Clennam displays the negative characteristics of judgmentalism, gloom, cruelty, and a punitive attitude that Dickens attributes to Evangelicals, and becomes cold and bitter, ultimately ending up both spiritually and physically frozen, rather than displaying the cheerful warmth that Dickens sees as a hallmark of true faith. This contrasts with the much more positive portrayal of Little Dorrit who, despite being born and growing up in prison, is kind, forgiving, gentle, and generous. Thus, Dickens uses her to reflect what he saw as New

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<sup>987</sup> Slater, *Dickens and Women*, 229.

<sup>988</sup> Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, 600.

<sup>989</sup> Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, 428.

<sup>990</sup> Slater, *Dickens and Women*, 270.

Testament religion. As Mary Lenard has noted, “Dickens not only associates her by description with New Testament texts, he makes her the mouthpiece and the actor of them”.<sup>991</sup>

David Holbrook also picks up on the way Little Dorrit represents New Testament values, stating,

The contrast between Old Testament religion and the Christ-following religion of the New is made plain at the end of the book, when Mrs Clennam at last confesses to Little Dorrit about the codicil and the legacy. Little Dorrit forgives her. Mrs Clennam tries to vindicate herself...<sup>992</sup>

Holbrook considers Little Dorrit to be altogether too forgiving and submissive and hence to lose authenticity.<sup>993</sup> However, arguably the strength of the contrast between her and Mrs Clennam serves to convey how firmly Dickens believed in a Christianity of love, compassion, gentleness, and goodness, and the extent to which he saw Old Testament-focused Evangelicalism as a negative force which twisted the Christian message.

Outside of the novels Dickens does not say a great deal about his view of men and women, perhaps because it was unremarkable for his time. However, he does occasionally make references to women that cast them in a spiritual or superior moral light in his letters. For example, he praised Thomas Weller’s daughter as a “spiritual creature”.<sup>994</sup> Dickens’ magazine articles initially seem to be a poor source of information on this subject, also, as

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<sup>991</sup> Mary Lenard, “The Gospel of Amy”, 342.

<sup>992</sup> David Holbrook, *Charles Dickens and the Image of Women* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 1993), 73.

<sup>993</sup> Holbrook, *Dickens and the Image of Women*, 75.

<sup>994</sup> Tillotson, *Letters: Four*, 58.

they often focus on working-class women (or women in other cultures) in ways that reflect his social concern. However, many articles do make general statements about the nature of women that chimed with the general middle-class Victorian view and showed him portraying women as being especially capable of upholding the virtues and characteristics of real Christianity.

In 1854 the *HW* article “Case of Real Distress” claimed that “Women, it is true, can bear adversity better than men”.<sup>995</sup> In 1858, another article claimed that “There is no nursing in the wide world equal to that of the English mother by the bedside of her suffering child”.<sup>996</sup> Additionally, in 1860 an *ATYR* article stated that “women are naturally unselfish”,<sup>997</sup> while an 1861 article claimed that “all women [are] angels”.<sup>998</sup> Adding to this, an August 1865 article was devoted to praising unmarried aunts. These women were described as selflessly sacrificing themselves by choosing to become “old maids”, as well as being “the fairy good godmothers of society, the supplementary mothers who are often more kind and indulgent to the children, than their parents are”.<sup>999</sup> Such aunts were further described in heavenly terms as “a legion of angels upon earth, for ever hovering about us, to pity and to succour”.<sup>1000</sup> The article questioned why such women should be so loving despite never having a husband or children of their own and concluded it was because “women are never *naturally* vain, heartless, and unloving. They are made so”.<sup>1001</sup> Thus, women were considered to be naturally

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<sup>995</sup> George Sala, “Case of Real Distress”, *Household Words* VIII (199) (14 January 1854), 457; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-viii/page-457.html>.

<sup>996</sup> Henry Morley, “The Nurse in Leading Strings”, *Household Words* XVII (429) (12 June 1858), 602; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-xvii/page-602.html>.

<sup>997</sup> Wilkie Collins, “My Girls”, *All the Year Round* II (42) (11 February 1860), 370; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-ii/page-370.html>.

<sup>998</sup> Marguerite Power, “Pet Prejudices”, *All the Year Round* VI (130) (19 October 1861), 84; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-vi/page-84.html>.

<sup>999</sup> Andrew Halliday, “Our Aunts”, *All the Year Round* XIV (330) (19 August 1865), 83; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-xiv/page-83.html>.

<sup>1000</sup> Halliday, “Our Aunts”, 84.

<sup>1001</sup> Halliday, “Our Aunts”, 84; italics in original.

patient, persevering, caring, and so on. Therefore, as mentioned above, women's characteristics made them good candidates for displaying the virtues which Dickens saw as making up real Christianity.

References were also made to general positive female influence, including an article that referenced educating girls in the September 1853 issue of *HN*. It stated that girls' education was important because it prepared them to take on domestic roles in which they could exert their proper influence:

...we all know the important influence which is exerted by women upon the welfare of mankind... [and this] ought to lead us to endeavour to mould and educate the rising portion of the female community, that they may be as well-adapted as possible... to perform the various duties of life, in the capacities of daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers...<sup>1002</sup>

Ten years later, in 1863, an *ATYR* article claimed that the greater influence of women in French society compared to England was positive because, "Wherever women have had most influence, there has society been most virtuous, and manners and intelligence more cared for than mere birth and possessions".<sup>1003</sup> Here, again, women are upheld as intrinsically morally and spiritually superior.

As discussed above regarding his fictional characters, generally Dickens saw women's role as naturally being within a domestic context and criticised women being taken out of this. A

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<sup>1002</sup> "Social, Sanitary, and Municipal Progress", *Household Narrative of Current Events* (September 1853), 202; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-narrative-of-current-events/year-1853/page-202.html>.

<sup>1003</sup> "Literary French Women", *All the Year Round* IX (221) (18 July 1863), 492; <https://www.djo.org.uk/all-the-year-round/volume-ix/page-492.html>.

clear exception in real life, though, was his work with Angela Burdett-Coutts in running Urania Cottage, despite this meaning the latter taking on a public role in good works. Additionally, Dickens had many female magazine contributors and encouraged female literary efforts. This was not entirely unusual as writing and painting were acceptable activities for women, and by the 1850s women's contributions to novel-writing were being recognised. However, aligned with this was a general assumption that such writing was not only different from but also inferior to works produced by men,<sup>1004</sup> something which is not apparent in Dickens. Indeed, he wrote to Catherine Gore in 1853 saying, "how proud I am at heart, to be esteemed by a writer of such power and humour who knows humanity so well, and dissects it so wittily".<sup>1005</sup> In contrast, though, in 1851 he authored a *HW* article which began by stating:

Personally, we admit that our mind would be disturbed, if our own domestic well-spring were to consider it necessary to entrench herself behind a small table ornamented with a water-bottle and tumbler, and from that fortified position to hold forth to the public.<sup>1006</sup>

Here, Dickens revealed that he held to the traditional view that the home was the woman's realm and should not be departed from in his non-fiction, as well as his fiction. Additionally, he published the article "Rights and Wrongs of Women" in 1854. This article was by Eliza Lynn Linton, the first British salaried journalist, who nevertheless generally took a conservative stance on women's rights and opposed attempts to open up their opportunities. It is interesting that Dickens was content to publish this article even though it could be

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<sup>1004</sup> Slater, *Dickens and Women*, 317.

<sup>1005</sup> Storey, Tillotson and Easson, *Letters: Seven*, 17.

<sup>1006</sup> Charles Dickens, "Sucking Pigs", *Household Words* IV (85) (8 November 1851), 145; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-iv/page-145.html>.

considered hypocritical coming from a woman working in a male profession, given his strong condemnations of hypocrisy. However, like all his magazine articles, it was published anonymously, and it may be that this encouraged him to publish it anyway. The article condemns the emerging women's rights movement but also reveals how a woman's domestic and spiritual roles were intertwined in the Victorian mind. Thus, it depicts domestic life for women as "the middle Sacred Way... here have walked the holy women of all ages; a long line of saints and heroines; whose virtues have influenced countless generations..."<sup>1007</sup>

Linton additionally sees those wanting more rights for women as undermining the natural order of things and not recognising the vital importance and true value of home and domesticity for women and the corresponding spiritual graces they bring:

... they see nothing sacred in the fact of maternity, no fulfilment of natural destiny in marriage, and they find no sanctifying power in the grace of self-sacrifice... She must no longer stand in the shade apart, shedding the blessing of peace and calmness on the combatants, when they return home... all that has made angels of humanity must be trampled under foot...<sup>1008</sup>

According to Linton, a woman's true influence must be moral if she is to keep her real power. Thus,

...if you destroy that moral nature, if you weaken its virtues and sully its holiness, what of power or influence remains? She will gain place and lose power; she will gain

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<sup>1007</sup> Eliza Lynn Linton, "Rights and Wrongs of Women", *Household Words* IX (210) (1 April 1854), 158; <https://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-ix/page-158.html>.

<sup>1008</sup> Linton, "Rights and Wrongs", 159.

honours and lose virtues; when she has pushed her father or her son to the wall, and usurped the seats consecrated by nature to them alone.<sup>1009</sup>

Women are meant to devote themselves first to their families, and in doing so will realise that they are themselves “God-given and God-blessed”.<sup>1010</sup> Only then, according to Linton, may a woman turn to charitable activities outside the home, thus reinforcing Dickens’ message about the true spiritual place and influence of women.

Of course, Dickens does also have virtuous male characters, but these tend to be more complex and have a wider mix of characteristics, rather than being a one-sided portrayal of goodness. For example, as discussed in Section 2, *Nicholas Nickleby*’s Crummles is cheerful, generous, and welcoming to Nicholas, helping him in his time of need, but also over the top in his character. Pickwick is another example. While he is naïve, pompous, and sometimes hot tempered, he is also optimistic and cheerful. As the novel progresses his character develops, and he ultimately displays compassion, goodwill, kindness, and charity towards others, culminating in how he deals with Jingle in the Fleet Prison.<sup>1011</sup> Pickwick goes out of his way to help his former tormentor start a new life with repentance and hope. There is no judgementalism but only a sincere desire to help, in a way that displays Christian charity and compassion, and is reminiscent of what we saw with Rose in *Oliver Twist*.

Arthur Clennam provides another example. His arrival in London shows him melancholy and self-pitying, but he also has,

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<sup>1009</sup> Linton, “Rights and Wrongs”, 159.

<sup>1010</sup> Linton, “Rights and Wrongs”, 160.

<sup>1011</sup> Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, 567-569, 605.

...a belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been without. Bred in meanness and hard dealing, this had rescued him to be a man of honorable mind and open hand. Bred in coldness and severity, this had rescued him to have a warm and sympathetic heart. Bred in a creed too darkly audacious to pursue, through its process of reversing the making of man in the image of his Creator to the making of his Creator in the image of an erring man, this had rescued him to judge not, and in humility to be merciful, and have hope and charity.<sup>1012</sup>

Here, again, we see the importance to Dickens of sincerity, kindness, compassion, charity, and a cheerful and hopeful attitude. Arthur contrasts with Mrs Clennam's harsh, unforgiving, and judgemental attitude in an example of the dichotomy Dickens sets up between Old Testament and New Testament.

Mr Crisparkle (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, 1870), a minor canon at Cloisterham Cathedral, also has a range of positive characteristics. He is, among other things, "cheerful, kind, good-natured, social",<sup>1013</sup> innocent and benevolent.<sup>1014</sup> As well as his patient care for his mother, Crisparkle takes care of Neville and Helena Landless following a letter from their guardian, Mr Honeythunder, saying that he is sending them to him for better education. Despite claiming to be a philanthropist, Honeythunder is prejudiced against Neville, referring to him as an "inmate", and is loud, obnoxious, and self-interested. Thus, Dickens shows in this character his disliked characteristics of hypocrisy and judgementalism, contrasting with Crisparkle's goodness. Crisparkle proceeds to treat Neville and Helena with kindness, understanding, and compassion throughout the novel, unlike his mother, who is suspicious,

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<sup>1012</sup> Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, 180.

<sup>1013</sup> Dickens, *Edwin Drood*, 14.

<sup>1014</sup> Dickens, *Edwin Drood*, 52.

especially of Neville. Crisparkle's good qualities of compassion and refraining from judgment are especially evident when Neville is suspected of killing Edwin, a claim encouraged by Jasper, with whom Neville had argued. Despite there being no evidence that Edwin is dead, Neville is accused and nearly sent to jail by a clearly prejudiced Mr Sapsea: "Mr Sapsea expressed his opinion that the case had a dark look; in short (and here his eyes rested full on Neville's countenance), an Un-English complexion".<sup>1015</sup> (Neville and Helena come from Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and while their ethnicity is not stated, they are described as having dark complexions.) Crisparkle, though, refrains from condemning without evidence, and keeps Neville out of prison:

He [Sapsea] wavered whether or no he should at once issue his warrant for the committal of Neville Landless to jail, under circumstances of grave suspicion; and he might have gone so far as to do it but for the indignant protest of the Minor Canon: who undertook for the young man's remaining in his own house, and being produced by his own hands, whenever demanded.<sup>1016</sup>

Finally, Dickens also uses Mr Woodcourt in *Bleak House* to show the importance of charity as an active caring for both the physical and spiritual needs of others. Woodcourt, as a doctor, can additionally be seen as a mediator between life and death in much the same way as women were often seen. As Jo the crossing sweeper becomes very ill with pneumonia, Woodcourt finds him medical care and a safe place to stay, in a manner reminiscent of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (see Section 3.5.4 for more on how Dickens used this parable). However, as Jo lies dying, Woodcourt also uses this time to teach him the Lord's

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<sup>1015</sup> Dickens, *Edwin Drood*, 171-172.

<sup>1016</sup> Dickens, *Edwin Drood*, 172.

Prayer, thus emphasising Christian hope for the afterlife, as well as offering love and care. Woodcourt's concern for Jo's spiritual wellbeing thus emphasises compassion and help, rather than judgement on Jo, who states that he does not know any prayers. This also makes him similar to Esther in *Bleak House*, since both turn to Christian faith to offer hope and comfort to others. Dickens places the blame for Jo's spiritual ignorance on church leaders being more concerned with arguing among themselves than with helping the poor when Jo states:

Different times, there was other genlmen come down Tom-All-Alone's<sup>1017</sup> a prayin, but they all mostly sed as the 'tother wuns prayed wrong, and all mostly sounded to be a talking to theirselves, or a passing blame on t'others, and not a talkin to us. *We* never knowd nothink. *I* never knowd what it wos all about.<sup>1018</sup>

Dickens then emphasises his point about the need to help the poor being a Christian imperative, saying,

Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us, every day.<sup>1019</sup>

As the above discussion has shown, Dickens used his fictional characters to display the virtues important to him as part of real Christianity, and occasionally used his letters and magazines to reinforce his view of women, even if he was not always consistent. While

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<sup>1017</sup> In *Bleak House*, Tom-All-Alone was a slum area in London. Whether it was based on a real location, and if so, where that might be, is a matter of debate.

<sup>1018</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 733.

<sup>1019</sup> Dickens, *Bleak House*, 734.

women were the primary characters used this way in his fiction, men could also be virtuous, even if this was often in a more complex manner. Dickens promoted virtues within the context of an active Christian faith and a Christian hope for Heaven. Thus, as I discuss now, his real Christianity can be seen as fitting in with a Christian approach to goodness, morality, and ethics.

#### 4.7 Virtue and real Christianity

Colledge claims that the best place to discover Dickens' real Christianity is in his novels,<sup>1020</sup> and his fictional works do contain many characters displaying theological and other virtues and qualities consistent with Dickens' real Christianity. As Dickens explained in a letter, the characters he uses to display his virtues are meant as examples of Christian followers, and thus their virtues are meant as Christian ones, even if he does not explicitly label them as such:

All my strongest illustrations are derived from the New Testament: all my social abuses are shown as departures from its spirit; all my good people are humble, charitable, faithful, and forgiving. Over and over again, I claim them in express words as disciples of the Founder of our religion; but I must admit that to a man (or woman) they all arise and wash their faces, and do not appear unto men to fast.<sup>1021</sup>

In his reference to fasting, Dickens alludes to Matthew 6.16-18, where Jesus tells his followers not to show off their fasting for human approval but to keep it secret between them

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<sup>1020</sup> Colledge, *God and Charles Dickens*, 108.

<sup>1021</sup> Storey, *Letters: Nine*, 556.

and God in order to receive a divine reward. Dickens is thus explaining that while he may not show off his characters' Christian faith, they still possess it.

However, contrary to Colledge, I have shown that giving equal place to Dickens' non-fiction writing, his letters, and his editorial work alongside the fiction is important for a better understanding of Dickens' faith. For example, we can look to *The Life of Our Lord* and Dickens' assertion that,

It is christianity [*sic*] TO DO GOOD always – even to those who do evil to us. It is christianity to love our neighbour as ourself, and to do to all men as we would have them Do to us. It is christianity to be gentle, merciful, and forgiving, and to keep those qualities quiet in our own hearts, and never make a boast of them, or of our prayers or of our love of God, but always to shew that we love Him by humbly trying to do right in everything.<sup>1022</sup>

Dickens also uses his letters to promote Christian qualities, for example writing in February 1850 to encourage a woman to live a more active Christian life and become more cheerful by engaging in service to others and following the example of Jesus:

The state of mind which you describe to me is not a wholesome one, I am afraid, and not a natural one. The remedy for it, however, is easy, and we have it at hand – action, usefulness – and the determination to be of service... It is through such means I humbly believe that God must be approached, and hope and peace of mind be won...

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<sup>1022</sup> Dickens, *Life of Our Lord*, 124,127;

Our Saviour did not sit down in this world and muse, but labored [*sic*] and did good.<sup>1023</sup>

Additionally, mercy is mentioned in the letters as an important Christian virtue. For example, in 1847 Dickens commented, “Is it not extraordinary that with Christianity nearly two thousand years old, we, who profess and call ourselves Christians, should be so far from the very beginning of justice and mercy?”<sup>1024</sup> Another quality, tolerance, was mentioned in a letter of the same year to Mrs Sydney Smith about her late husband’s book of sermons. Dickens wrote:

When I took the book out of the parcel this morning, I opened at the Sermon on Toleration. I could not lay it down. The wisdom, truth and beauty, of it – the manly denunciation of the wicked social misdoing that is always active among us – and the true Christian spirit shining through every sentence, and illuminating the whole piece as with a celestial light – perfectly enchanted me.<sup>1025</sup>

Colledge particularly mentions humility, charity, forgiveness, and faithfulness<sup>1026</sup> as the main characteristics of real Christianity, to which I would add compassion, kindness, patience, mercy, generosity, self-control, gentleness, hope, sincerity (especially in faith), and cheerfulness, as seen throughout this thesis. Dickens often approached Christianity as both a set of virtues and as having at its heart the living out of faith in loving action. He portrayed these in his writing and thinking, both by pointing out when he believed people were not living up to the teachings of Christian faith, and by portraying his version of good Christian

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<sup>1023</sup> Storey, Tillotson and Burgis, *Letters: Six*, 25-26.

<sup>1024</sup> Storey and Fielding, *Letters: Five*, 158.

<sup>1025</sup> Storey and Fielding, *Letters: Five*, 194.

<sup>1026</sup> Colledge, *God and Charles Dickens*, 108-113.

living. In this way he revealed his real Christianity. For some this may seem lacking as it makes no mention of doctrine or theology, but his approach was rooted in the importance of the New Testament and following the example of Jesus by acting in such a way as to promote the good of others, and thus in a Christian worldview. Dickens also promoted the theological Christian virtues of hope, faith, and love/charity, as well as many of the qualities praised in the Bible, for example as in the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.22. Combined with this, Dickens' focus on active faith can be seen as relating to the call for faith to result in loving action as represented particularly by the Letter of James. In Dickens' stress on virtue his approach also shows elements of a pre-Reformation Christian approach to goodness via virtue ethics that conflicts with both Evangelicalism and post-Reformation Catholicism, as explained next.

As Robin Lovin notes, virtue ethics stresses the attributes needed for one to be a good person,<sup>1027</sup> in contrast to ethical theories that focus on rules, duties, or consequences. Dickens' stress on displaying virtuous characteristics and living a good Christian life clearly aligns with virtue ethics. I acknowledge that, in itself, a focus on virtue is not automatically Christian, and some have seen Dickens as simply humanitarian. As Lovin points out, "Everybody wants to live a good life, and nearly everybody thinks about how to do it. In that sense, we all participate in the same moral discussion...".<sup>1028</sup> Additionally, in classical approaches to ethics, virtues can be pursued and developed by all, so they are not specific to any particular group. However, Lovin also points out that people think about ethics "from a particular point of view. Their ideas about what it means to live a good life are shaped by their ideas about human nature, whether life has a purpose, and what they expect from the

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<sup>1027</sup> Robert W. Lovin, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics: Goals, Duties, and Virtues* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011), 74.

<sup>1028</sup> Lovin, *Christian Ethics*, vii.

future”.<sup>1029</sup> Similarly, Dickens’ thinking about ethics did not exist in a vacuum. He was shaped by and incorporated into a Christian understanding of the world, God, and relationships with others, surrounded as he was by a faith that he also shared. This is shown in the abovementioned stress on virtues important to Christianity as seen throughout his magazines, letters, and fiction, and the ways in which he used characters in his novels as examples of Christian followers.

Further, various significant Christian thinkers have incorporated virtue ethics into the faith, including Thomas Aquinas, and Dickens can be seen as aligning with this. As Joseph Kotva notes, Aquinas understood that Aristotelian ethics could fit well within a Christian moral framework, and “ingeniously merged Christian theology and Scripture with Aristotle’s ethics”.<sup>1030</sup> Briefly, as Lovin explains, Aquinas recognised the existence of both natural and theological virtues. Natural virtues were seen as working to “equip us for the right use of human capacities that everyone shares”, while theological virtues (the New Testament virtues of faith, hope, and love/charity) “transform natural inclinations in ways that prepare human beings for eternal life with God”. Aquinas further asserted, continues Lovin, that the former can be developed through practice, while the latter are gifts from God. These theological virtues help to develop natural virtues further, and so the natural virtues are fully realised in relationship with God.<sup>1031</sup> Dickens’ frequent references to hope, faith, and love/charity show that he saw the importance of theological virtues and saw them as central to his faith.

However, the abovementioned approach to virtue was disrupted by the Reformation. With the Reformation focus on God’s grace being extended towards a helpless humanity unable to do

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<sup>1029</sup> Lovin, *Christian Ethics*, vii.

<sup>1030</sup> Joseph J. Kotva, Jr., *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996), 1.

<sup>1031</sup> Lovin, *Christian Ethics*, 199-205.

good, “Virtues... began to seem too much like possessions that people could hold on to in order to convince themselves of their own righteousness. The moral life had to begin with convincing people of their sinfulness, then restraining their evil”.<sup>1032</sup> This ultimately led to a more deontological<sup>1033</sup> approach to Christian faith, since without a strong belief in people’s capacity to develop and display virtues and goodness, stressing rules and duties became necessary to ensure people acted as they should. Lovin also points out that this was not confined to Protestants, either, since:

...when Catholic religious leaders formulated their own response to the Protestant Reformation, they kept the theology of virtue, but they put more emphasis on rules in determining the details of the Christian life... the result was a shift in emphasis from virtue to duty that shaped both Catholic and Protestant ethics from the sixteenth century onwards.<sup>1034</sup>

Thus, in his stress on the Christian life as one of developing virtues and displaying faith through loving actions, Dickens can be seen as returning to an older Christian tradition that focused more on the human capacity to grow in goodness than on the human capacity to do wrong. Thus, he makes virtues constituent of Christianity. As this conflicted with the contemporary dominant approaches of many Evangelicals and Catholics it led him into conflict with these groups. He rejected the Evangelical insistence on duty, the Calvinistic idea of human depravity, and the parallel determination to impose rules and duties because of a belief that this was necessary to ensure people remained faithfully Christian and within God’s grace. While Dickens did not use theological and doctrinal arguments to reject them, he did

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<sup>1032</sup> Lovin, *Christian Ethics*, 199-205.

<sup>1033</sup> That is, an approach to ethics in which actions are judged right or wrong according to whether they comply with certain rules.

<sup>1034</sup> Lovin, *Christian Ethics*, 207-208.

criticise the practical outworkings of this kind of faith, as I have shown with my examples of Sabbatarianism, temperance, and the theatre. Catholicism also met with similar criticisms due to its use of authority to encourage conformity, and its similar focus on rules and duties.

Dickens further saw an insistence on imposing rules and duties as hypocritical, not just when people did not follow them themselves, but also when rules and duties were seen as more important than developing virtues and actively doing good, since living in accordance with the virtues I have discussed was central to his conception of Christian faith, and without it faith was, in his view, not sincere.

Thus, Dickens' real Christianity is revealed to be an approach to Christian faith which favours virtue, the New Testament, a positive hope in the afterlife, and following the example of Jesus. Dickens does not reject Christianity, but rather dogmatism, theological squabbling, moral superiority, and placing rules and duty over living goodness.

## Section 5: Conclusion

In this research I set out to uncover the nature of Charles Dickens' religious faith. This was done by examining what his reactions to both Evangelicalism and Catholicism reveal regarding what he believed. I also widened the sources of information used to study Dickens by looking at his magazine work, letters, and novels on an equal basis, rather than the more customary approach of prioritising his novels. Additionally, to set Dickens' approach and reactions in context, I considered the characteristics of both Evangelicalism and Catholicism in the nineteenth century. Through this, I showed how the expressions of these faiths affected Dickens and shaped his responses, and why Evangelicalism and Catholicism were important to him. In the case of Evangelicalism, this was because of its importance and ubiquity in Victorian society, even outside the bounds of the Evangelical tradition. In the case of Catholicism, this was because the lessening of restrictions on Catholic life and worship revived longstanding Protestant fears and consequently had an impact out of all proportion to the numbers of Catholics in the country.

I used some specific examples of what Dickens especially objected to in each of these expressions of Christianity and noted some exceptions to his criticisms. Many of his criticisms were based on his view of what Christianity should really be like. Thus, he denounced hypocrisy, authoritarianism, judgement and condemnation, using religion as a method of social control, using power to deceive, imposing beliefs on others, violence, and failing to help people in a spirit of Christian charity. This revealed a nuance in Dickens' approach that is not always fully appreciated by those who see Dickens as merely a critic of religion, since his criticisms were based on his idea of real Christianity and how he saw others departing from it. Finally, I drew on the information gathered from examining both

Dickens' objections and his partial agreements with his opponents to help reveal his own beliefs in a more positive manner.

In this thesis I have argued that Dickens had an explicitly Christian faith, summed up in his phrase "real Christianity". I have shown that he had a faith based on theological and other virtues expressed in a Christian context and faith in action, as well stressing the importance of following Jesus and the New Testament, alongside a Christian hope in life after death – even if his views of the angelic nature of the afterlife were somewhat unorthodox. His objections to and criticisms of both Evangelicalism and Catholicism thus arose from his belief that faith in action and displaying virtues in a Christian manner were of prime importance to the Christian life. He contrasted this with those who he saw as distorting Christianity by focusing entirely on theological and doctrinal correctness while neglecting to practise virtues, especially those related to Christian charity. This approach underpinned his criticisms of both Evangelicalism and Catholicism. Dickens' criticisms are thus not indicative of a lack of faith, confusion about what he believed, or of a critical attitude towards Christianity itself, as has been previously argued. Rather, he targeted those he saw as distorting Christianity because he wished to defend its true nature as he saw it.

Therefore, Dickens did have a specifically Christian faith, but it was not one based on doctrinal or theological correctness. He looked to the New Testament, and especially the example of Jesus, for guidance on living in a virtuous manner within the framework of Christian faith, rather than basing his beliefs on theological understanding. Thus, his faith was built on applying virtue and right living in a Christian context. This can be criticised for lacking doctrinal vigour, and Dickens did indeed tend to avoid theological and doctrinal arguments, preferring to concentrate on a more practical understanding of Christianity.

However, Dickens' approach does align with elements of both pre-Reformation Christianity and a Christianised version of the classical approach to living a good life, in which growing in virtue was possible for all. More specifically, Dickens has applied the classical understanding of virtue as vital to living a good life in his Christian context, using virtues important to Christianity, in a similar way to expressions of the faith from before the advent of the Reformation's emphasis on duty and rules. Thus, he is, intentionally or not, expressing his version of an older approach to Christian living, despite his own avowed hatred of "the good old days".

This understanding of Dickens' faith as concerned with doing good may be considered similar to those who have seen Dickens as having a social gospel approach or simply a humanitarian concern for others. However, I have shown that Dickens applied his conception of faith beyond the purely social concern for which he was known, for example in his approach to the afterlife. For him, social concern sprang from and was intertwined with his belief in Christianity, as well as the importance of faith in action as a way of displaying virtue. Additionally, as well as focusing on virtues important to Christianity, he stated explicitly that his good people were intended to be Christian. Therefore, my thesis adds to previous research by focusing on virtue as an important element of Dickens' Christian faith and by going beyond solely seeing Dickens as a commentator on the social problems of his time with no particular religious context.

In order to discover more about Dickens' faith, I have extensively used both his magazine work and his personal correspondence, in a way which sets this thesis apart from the general scholarship in this area. There has been a gap in Dickens scholarship on his religious views caused by focusing too heavily on the novels and neglecting the full potential of Dickens'

other writing, and I set out to fill some of this gap. The common approach of focusing on Dickens' novels as the primary, or even only, sources of information on Dickens' faith is complicated by the fact that Dickens did not write explicitly religious texts (other than *The Life of Our Lord*, which was meant for private family use only). This has left scholars trying to read between the lines of novels to determine his approach to religion. In contrast, many of his huge number of magazine articles and letters, from across many decades of his life and aimed at a wide range of people, discuss his religious views, comment on important religious matters of the day, and reveal some of his personal feelings about Christianity. Such an abundance of writing relating to faith should not be overlooked, especially as it reveals that faith was an important element of Dickens' life. Where magazine articles and letters are used in the wider scholarship, however, this is done sparingly and frequently only as an aside.

In contrast, I have gained much insight and a more rounded view of Dickens' faith by treating his magazine work and letters as of equal importance to his novels. Consequently, I have added a new dimension to studies of Dickens' faith and his relationship to Christianity by drawing in these often-neglected sources of information. This has been especially important for Dickens' views on Catholicism, since, with the exception of *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens rarely mentions Catholicism in his novels, and so looking only at his full-length fiction excludes much information on his attitude towards Catholicism and limits our understanding. In this way, I have helped to fill a gap in the scholarship on the nature of Dickens' faith by diving more deeply into resources outside of Dickens' novels in order to draw out important and overlooked information on his attitudes to both Catholicism and Evangelicalism and what these show us about his own understanding of Christian faith.

I have also widened the use of sources by including the non-fiction *Pictures from Italy*, *The Life of Our Lord*, and *A Child's History of England*. While the first of these is fairly well-used in wider research, both *The Life of Our Lord* and *A Child's History of England* are frequently overlooked. This applies especially to *The Life of Our Lord*, even though it is his most sustained and personally important piece of religious writing, and thus greatly significant to understanding Dickens and his faith. I have drawn on this text to show the positive characteristics which Dickens associated with Christian faith and his own response to the question of how to live a good Christian life.

I hope that in presenting this evidence on the nature of Dickens' faith, further avenues of exploration might be opened up which also assign greater importance to his writings outside of the novels as a means of gaining greater understanding of both the author and his work. It would also be interesting to explore parallels and/or connections between Dickens' approach to Christian faith and the development of Liberal Protestantism and Broad Church Anglicanism in the nineteenth century and beyond. Additionally, there is clear scope for in-depth studies focusing more specifically on individual areas of faith relating to Dickens and religion. I have briefly referred to some potential areas for future in-depth examination in this research, including how Dickens used the Bible, his views on the afterlife, and his attitudes towards scientific discoveries and higher criticism.

Many Victorian authors were influenced by and wrote novels and other writings informed by a sincere Christian faith. Whether they were explicitly "Christian writers" or not, their theological context was important, and faith often played a part in their lives that is hard for many in our contemporary secular society to understand. In recent decades, there has been greater understanding of this and more openness to considering the religious views of

Victorian writers, including Dickens. However, if we confine ourselves to just their published novels then we risk missing out on a wealth of pertinent information. Therefore, I hope that a similar approach to the one I have taken with Dickens might also be used with other authors of the time, where possible, to uncover their particular beliefs and worldviews in a more holistic way.

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