

“Revisioning Christian Ministry: Women and Ministry in *Agnes Grey*, *Ruth*, *Janet’s Repentance*, and *Adam Bede*”

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CHAPTER III

THE LITERARY CONTEXT: FICTIONAL IMAGES OF
WOMEN ACTIVE IN CHRISTIANITY

It is not difficult to find clergymen in a Victorian novel. The seemingly omnipresent clergyman, however briefly he is mentioned, establishes the presence of religion in the Victorian society which is depicted. The treatment of a particular clergyman by a novelist may reflect a critique of a specific denomination, the Church’s hierarchy, or an interesting clerical vice. There are similarly high numbers of references in Victorian novels to women working in the name of Christianity. Like clerical characters, these women are at times satirized, idealized, or praised by the novelists. The treatment these female characters receive from authors and other characters confirms the variety of opinions regarding women’s Christian ministry that can be found in Victorian novels.

The importance of studying these other novels, which provide the literary climate within which Brontë, Gaskell, and Eliot wrote, becomes more apparent when one recognizes the sense

of community each felt in terms of their work as writers. Pauline Nestor focuses in *Female Friendships and Communities: Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell* on how those three authors frequently indicate their sense of being a part of a community of writers—especially women writers—writing in response to and being influenced by others’ fictional works. Anne Brontë’s family community of writers provided her with the same sense as well. Although I am not arguing that Brontë, Gaskell, or Eliot read any one particular novel and were influenced by it in their own writing, the variety of these images attests to the interest many novelists felt in the historical discussions on sisterhoods, district visiting, deaconess institutes, and lay involvement in Christian ministry.¹

Discussion of such opportunities was not restricted to religious novelists of a particular denomination, nor to what may now be considered “second-tier” novelists in terms of ability. A variety of novelists with varying Christian affiliations, a number of novelists who are still studied today (Anthony Trollope, Thomas Hardy), and a number of novelists who were popular in their time but garner less critical attention today (Felicia Skene, Margaret Oliphant) engage the subject of women and Christian ministry.

A survey of women’s religious roles in Victorian fiction

Victorian novelists depict women as clergymen’s wives or daughters, as missionary’s wives, as closely-directed clerical helpers, in semi-official positions as district visitors or bible women, as sisters, as substitute clergy, and as lay ministers. Within this variety, each novel

raises questions about the suitability of women for various roles, about the possible expansion of these roles, and about the connections between the work of the clergy and women's ministerial work. Some images endorse the dominant Christian gender ideology while others subvert it. Because these discussions are often presented through minor characters or subplots, the subtle ways in which their authors comment on concurrent discussions about women's ministry are easily lost.

Despite the variety of different ministries undertaken, the core issues remain the same in each novel: should women's ministry be carried out independently or carefully directed by the clergy? Is women's proper role in Christianity as passive example or as active minister? Does the nature of the self-sacrifice a male or female minister is called to differ from that ascribed to ideal womanhood? Many of the female characters in Victorian novels about women's ministry are not angelic, passive influences or examples for men. Rather, they are active, confrontational, and vocal ministers who preach, counsel, and commune with the parishioners of the world that they encounter. Authorial responses to these women demonstrate an attitude toward women's role in Christian ministry. Together, the works show the volatile debate surrounding the issue of women's proper role in the Victorian church.

The most widely accepted "ministerial" role for women, which is perhaps today the most well-known image of Christian womanhood from the Victorian period, is the passive image of women as moral influence on men. As seen in Coventry Patmore's famed poem *The Angel in the House* (1854-62), Honoria exemplifies a woman who can play a role in

Christianity by leading a man (here, her future husband) toward grace and eventually salvation: “And, when we knelt, she seem’d to be / An angel teaching me to pray” (1.10; 160-61). This rather limited role for women, as exemplar, is consonant with the dominant Christian gender ideology, but far from the only image of women and Christian ministry found in novels of the period.

Clergymen’s wives, widows, and daughters are sometimes depicted as entering into the clerical work of their husband or father. Mrs. Humphry (Mary) Ward’s *Robert Elsmere* (1888), one of the century’s most popular “faith and doubt” novels, depicts a clergyman’s wife who joins in her husband’s pastoral ministry by aiding him in visiting the sick and the poor. Mrs. Bute Crawley in Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1848) is a humorous portrait of a clergyman’s wife who writes sermons for her husband; he reads them “in his best voice and without understanding one syllable” (390). In Thomas Hardy’s *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), both Elfride Swancourt and her father, the vicar of Endelstow, tell the newcomer Stephen Smith that she writes sermons for her father quite often; her father proclaims that “a very good job she makes of them!” (31). Early in the novel Elfride stands in the pulpit and imagines “for the hundredth time how it would seem to be a preacher” (30). However, Hardy’s concern with her vocational abilities, her knowledge of the “very trick of the trade” (31), is soon subsumed in the romantic plot entanglements of the novel.²

Like the character of the clergyman’s wife, some Victorian novelists considered the role of the Christian missionary’s wife. In *Jane Eyre* (1847), St. John Rivers presents this option to

Jane. In the first half of the nineteenth century, single women were not encouraged to attempt missionary work, yet women were needed—as St. John notes—to interact with the Indian women to whom male clergy could not gain access because of cultural restraints. Charlotte Brontë’s depiction of Jane’s battle with St. John over this proposal includes both her rejection of a loveless marriage and her attempts to be accepted as “his curate, his comrade” (412), as “a man and a clergyman, like yourself” (413), or as a “deacon” (420). Brontë differentiates between life as a missionary’s wife, which would involve complete submission to St. John, and life as a fellow missionary, which would require submission to St. John only because he is a Christian clergyman with further training and experience in pastoral work.³

Another common representation is that of women philanthropists acting in the name of Christianity. Such characters are both cruelly and kindly treated in Victorian novels. Mrs. Jellyby in *Bleak House* (1853) is a wife and mother whose writing in support of the natives of Borrioboola-Gha is satirized by Dickens for its Evangelical fervor and for her ignorance of the suffering present in England. Mrs. Jellyby is depicted as the kind of woman who, under the auspices of doing religious good, neglects her home and family for public philanthropy.

Unlike Dickens’ Mrs. Jellyby, Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* (1849) presents a more positive image of women’s ability to enter into and even direct charitable activities. When Shirley originally decides to “enter on a series of good works” using her fortune to help the poor cottagers and residents of her land, she and Caroline Helstone turn not to the clergy, but to Miss Ainley. This woman’s knowledge of the poor in the community and expertise in distributing

materials to them is respected by both Shirley and Caroline (*Shirley* 264-68). Although Miss Ainley insists on consulting the clergy and deferring to their decisions unquestioningly (*Shirley* 269), the discussion among Shirley, the clergymen, Miss Ainley, and Miss Hall depicts a struggle for control over women's philanthropic work. Caroline's father, one of the three clergymen present, is most suspicious of the women's intentions. He observes them closely, "as if he apprehended that female craft was at work, and that something in petticoats was somehow trying underhand to acquire too much influence, and make itself of too much importance" (*Shirley* 272). Miss Ainley and Miss Hall seem to prove his fears unfounded as they do not speak unless asked a direct question and are happy to be seen as "useful" subordinate helpers to the clergy. However, Shirley insists that the clergy regard her as "Captain Keeldar to-day" so that she may be equally involved in the creation of the plans to distribute the money (*Shirley* 272-73). Brontë demonstrates that the minor role that Miss Ainley and Miss Hall play in organizing the charity is by choice, in deference to the official Church authorities, and is not to be seen as an example of women's innate lack of ability to direct charitable endeavors.

Just as the increased work of women in philanthropy during the century resulted in more literary depictions of such activities, the reinstatement of Anglican sisterhoods spurred many novelists to depict Roman Catholic and Anglican nuns surrounded by the controversies of cloister, celibacy, and authority. Women are depicted as entering a convent either because they feel a true calling or to escape from failed love affairs. Geraldine Jewsbury's *Zoe: The History of Two Lives* (1845) describes a female character, Clotilde, whose sense that she has loved

wrongly is in part her impetus for joining a Roman Catholic convent.⁴ Jewsbury's portrait of Clotilde's new life, however, is strong and positive. Although Clotilde "took refuge in her religion" (2: 308), she is later described as entering wholly into the serenity and love of her vocation (3: 242).

Jewsbury's positive portrait of this vocational opportunity for Roman Catholic women is countered by more complicated presentations such as Charles Kingsley's drama *The Saint's Tragedy* (1848).⁵ Kingsley presents his central character, (Saint) Elizabeth, as torn between her role as a mother and her desire for a vocation in a Roman Catholic convent. Her plea for a "middle path" between the one extreme of cloister, celibacy, and denial of her children and the other extreme of worldly life with its struggles to keep her children alive is Kingsley's clearest statement within the text regarding the propriety of convents (*Saint's* 4.1; 266).⁶

Later, Kingsley also criticizes the new Anglican sisterhoods in his novel *Yeast* (1851). In contrast, Christina Rossetti's short novel *Maude* (1850) positively figures the character Magdalen Ellis who enters the active Protestant ministry of the Sisterhood of Mercy.⁷ Anthony Trollope's *The Warden* (1855) makes a passing reference to the courage that "enables a sister of mercy to give up the pleasure of the world for the wards of a hospital" (55). The presence of this brief reference indicates the saturation of such images in the minds of Victorian writers even by as early as the mid-1850s.

A novel by Rhoda Broughton (1840-1920), herself the daughter of a clergyman, demonstrates the continuing interest in the image of the Anglican sister later in the century and its

presence in the work of one of the best-selling sensation novelists of the late Victorian period. In *Not Wisely but Too Well* (1867), Broughton's heroine, Kate, considers work as a district visitor (134-35) but decides to become a Protestant Sister of Mercy (327). Kate's friends and relatives object to her wish for active service in a lifelong vocation. They believe she should stay within her "right functions of marrying and being happy" (330). Broughton's resolution to the novel does not deny that Kate's choice is controversial, for "evangelical clergymen condemn" the sisters (356), who represent High Church ideals. However, Broughton's positive presentation of Kate's successful service endorses her choice.

In addition to depictions as Roman Catholic or Anglican sisters, women are portrayed as Sunday school teachers or even, as in Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* (1856), as individuals who start a school for religious education. There are increased references in the second half of the century to work for women in "official" ministries of the Church, as lay associates to a sisterhood or as bible women. Margaret Oliphant's *The Doctor's Family* (1863) describes the lay association of two women to a new Sisterhood of Mercy begun by a High Church clergyman as an attempt to further organize the district visiting undertaken by ladies in the parish. By the time Eliza Lynn Linton published *The True History of Joshua Davidson* (1872) she could refer to a new "official" role women could occupy.⁸ Linton, whose father was a clergyman, writes of the absence of the parish priest in many city areas whose "place is supplied by all sorts of lieutenants, both authorised [sic] and irregular; by Bible women" and various other missionaries (Linton 62).

A large group of highly religious novels written in the last quarter of the nineteenth century move past these “official” ministerial roles for women within the church and toward a sense of lay ministry outside of the institutional church that allows both men and women to participate fully. The necessity for these lay ministers often lies in the corruption of the church and its clergy. *All Men Are Liars* (1895), by the popular religious novelist Joseph Hocking, spends a great deal of time criticizing Christian institutions and their clergy.⁹ In his brother Silas Hocking’s *For Light and Liberty* (1892), one woman’s efforts to save and convert a man to belief in Christ’s example fail, not because she is a woman, but because she relies on denominational doctrine and not on the “true” meaning of Christ’s message and ministry. Clerical figures are often simply not present in these novels or are presented as negative examples of the distortions of Christianity that are found in religious institutions. Only a few Christian denominations were free from criticism. For example, W. J. Dawson’s *The Redemption of Edward Strahan* (1891) praises the Salvation Army’s inclusion of women and the lower classes in their ministry. Dawson’s heroine, Mary, is able to enter into service with her husband because “the Salvation Army alone among modern organizations has taken a full account” and found ministers among women (Dawson 250).

As with all these examples, women who are lay ministers in these novels actively work to lead both men and women back toward a sense of faith or belief either in a power greater than themselves or in the ministry of following Christ’s example. For example, Beatrice Harraden’s *Ships That Pass in the Night* (1883) centers on a character named Bernardine

who, while in Switzerland to recover from an illness, meets, counsels, and aids two men. One chooses life over suicide and another to be reconciled with his wife and his impending death.

Mr. Reffold, the dying man, says that she “could tell me more than all the parsons put together” (Harraden 77) and indeed, there are no clergymen in the novel to minister to the sick and dying.

In a chapter entitled “Bernardine Preaches,” Harraden illustrates how Bernardine’s lay ministry is effective where no official ministry had been. As in other religious novels of the last quarter century of the Victorian period, the most successful ministry comes from laymen and laywomen, not the clergy.

Upon close examination, an almost overwhelming number of references to women functioning in various ministerial roles exists within Victorian fiction. Within this large group of novels which depict, sometimes quite briefly, women’s Christian ministry there are those which more closely compare clerical and female characters. Novelists present this comparison in certain ways and, as a result, argue for a particular distribution of ministerial activities among clergymen and laywomen.¹⁰

The range of responses extends from Charles Kingsley’s insistence that women have no role in the official work of Church and social reform to Felicia Skene’s argument that, working independently, women can accomplish social reforms that men have failed to achieve. Charlotte Yonge and Elizabeth Sewell argue for the close supervision of women by clergymen while Frances Trollope, Dinah Mulock Craik, and Margaret Oliphant suggest that women may

acceptably take over clerical duties for a time if a clergyman is unfit for his duties. Along the way, different novelists respond to the historical reality surrounding them in different ways, arguing for or against expanded ministerial opportunities for women. Within the larger group of novels focused on women and Christian ministry, it will become clear that *Agnes Grey*, *Ruth*, *Janet's Repentance*, and *Adam Bede* offer a distinct response to the debate.

The politics of power in the Church: Charles Kingsley and Anthony Trollope

Novels by Charles Kingsley and Anthony Trollope often emphasize religious institutions, hierarchy, power struggles, and denominational differences of doctrine. Kingsley's *Yeast* (1851) focuses on the Christian institution's debates regarding power and authority and on a hierarchy that excludes women. While comparisons of clerical and female characters are not sustained throughout the novel, it does provide an example of how a focus on the Church as institution can automatically prevent any discussion supporting women's ministry.

The questions raised by the main character, Lancelot Smith, treat many of the major issues that Churchmen like Kingsley were grappling with in the 1840s and into the second half of the century. The novel follows Lancelot from one discussion to another: with the heroine Argemone; with the working-class Paul Tregarva; with the upper-class gentlemen staying at Lavington's estate; through letters to his cousin Luke, who is considering and eventually decides to convert to Roman Catholicism; and with "the stranger" who eventually persuades Lancelot to leave England and seek out "the country of Prester John, that mysterious Christian empire,

rarely visited by European eye” (*Yeast* 319). Each of these discussions ultimately centers on major issues such as the Christian responsibility of the wealthy to the poor, Roman Catholicism as a threat to England and to the Church, Young Englandism as a solution to such problems, and the Church’s schismatic structure.

A central focus of Kingsley is how each of these major issues has an impact on Lancelot’s life as an individual, yet Lancelot’s final fate is less important to the novel than the reader’s understanding that true Christianity demands a closer inspection of these issues and may call for drastic changes in the way that the wealthy think and live. Since his focus is on issues rather than individuals, Kingsley’s treatment of individual female characters and Christian vocation can be seen as a message regarding the larger issue as well. In the novel, the local vicar is briefly paralleled with several female characters: Argemone, Kingsley’s heroine; Honoria, her younger sister; and the image of the nun whose curse generations ago appears to drive much of the plot. The vicar has slowly tried to convince Argemone that district visiting as a plan for women to work actively in the Church is too “Protestant” and not “Catholic” enough. He strongly supports a local “quasi-Protestant nunnery” in which young women are “bound by no vows, except, of course such as they might choose to make for themselves in private.” These sisters labored among the sick and the poor, “the lowest haunts of misery and sin” (*Yeast* 164), and so are depicted as an active and not a cloistered group.

Consistently, Kingsley depicts the sisterhood not as a vocational opportunity for women, but as a tool of manipulative clergy to lead young women away from their proper roles

as wives and daughters, toward an unnatural independence and inflated sense of self-importance. The women at the Protestant convent believe they are bound for a higher place in heaven because of their work. Some of the young girls are led to believe that “unshackled by the interference of parents, and other such merely fleshly relationships” they can now see those worldly relationships in their true light—as the work of the devil. Argemone’s initial romantic fascination with the idea of entering the sisterhood is squelched by her mother’s insistence that she not think of such a thing because of her domestic responsibilities. Her mother prohibits further intercourse with the vicar, but he and Argemone communicate secretly by letters. Kingsley portrays the vicar as fiendishly scheming how he can get Argemone into the sisterhood, lying, not delivering a letter to Lancelot as he said he would, and despicably abusing his power. Kingsley further disparages the sisterhoods by saying that in his letters to Argemone, the vicar is “pampering the poor girl’s lust for singularity and self-glorification” (165-66). The convent is later offered as an alternative to marriage when Argemone despairs of Lancelot returning her feelings.

Compared with the vicar’s abuse of power in relation to the sisterhoods, the nun’s curse in the novel shows the potentially horrific effects of women’s religious power. Tregarva tells Lancelot about the curse placed on the Lavington family during “the old Popish times” (240) because of the ill treatment of the nuns by the first Squire Lavington. The abbess cursed him and all his descendants and then drowned in the pool on the Lavington property. In that same pool, other Lavington men had drowned in their youth (240-41). The nun’s curse is later

blamed for Argemone's death and the mysterious illness that confines Honoria to a couch (345).

Kingsley's depiction of the nun's use of spiritual power for evil may in part reflect an anti-Roman Catholic sentiment.¹¹ However, in light of Kingsley's negative portrait of the Protestant sisterhood, it may also signal his belief that the idea of convents is a mistake, regardless of the denomination.

Throughout *Yeast*, Kingsley presents the need for reform of the institutional Church. The task of reforming the situation (and moving toward Kingsley's Christian Socialist ideals) lies not with women but with men. It is the men who make laws, rule estates, run the institution of the Church, and must enact these changes. Lancelot eventually comes to argue that gentlemen should not leave much of the work of God to women (239). In this way, Kingsley's novel and his theories about social change exclude women from a more complete participation in the Christian mission.

If women are not to assume independence and authority as sisters, nor are they needed to help with social reform, what role for women in Christianity does the novel endorse? Women are presented in the novel as potentially important because of their positive influence on men. This passive image counters the more active role for women made possible through Anglican sisterhoods. Kingsley writes that a woman's heart is her most important asset and with this she can lead men to understand the gravity of a situation so that they may act (*Yeast* 61, 156). Lancelot says that Argemone has been an influence on him toward a return to faith and an investigation of good Christian activity. While Lancelot credits Argemone for his change (299),

she has had few conversations with him and has quickly recognized her inability to cope with Lancelot's logical arguments (56-60). His love for Argemone may have been an influence on him, but it is his conversations with Tregarva and the stranger at the end of the novel that significantly cause him to change.

Kingsley affirms that "woman will have guidance. It is her delight and glory to be led" by her parents, her husband, or her clergyman (*Yeast* 163-64). This statement summarizes his perception of women's appropriate role in the Church. It is not a role of leadership in terms of reform. It is not a role of potential power or authority as a sister. It is not a role of much actual influence on men. It is not even the commonly-accepted role of district visitor, for Honoria's visiting within the novel is largely ineffective and portrayed as misguided (45-49). It is instead a role of passive obedience to clergymen, husbands, fathers, brothers, and to the dogma of the Church. The focus in the novel on the politics of power within the institution of Christianity forces this exclusion of women from any position of authority. The comparisons of clerical and female characters in the novel serve only to reinforce the propriety of male leadership.

Anthony Trollope's Barsetshire series is also focused primarily on issues of power and institutional hierarchy. The plot of *The Warden* (1855) centers on whether the elderly clergyman Harding has the right to hold the living at Hiram's Hospital and receive much of the interest and funds as his private income. In *Barchester Towers* (1857) the focus shifts to who will be appointed warden of the hospital and later who will be the new Dean, thus centering on the political issues of appointment and the influence of ministers. Issues of power arise early in

the novel with the arrival of the new bishop and the reactions of Archdeacon Grantly and Harding. These two novels center on issues related to clergymen and solely to their sphere, issues of patronage and the distribution of livings, that prevent women from being closely connected to the religious dimensions of the text.

However, there are strong female characters who are connected to clergymen, particularly in *Barchester Towers*. The Archdeacon's wife has some influence at times over her husband and the Bishop is often "guided by his wife" in making decisions (A. Trollope, *Barchester* 21). This power, however, is indirect. Anything the women hope to achieve depends ultimately on the clergyman's approval and consent. As Trollope focuses on institutional issues, the female characters are only able to try to exert influence rather than any form of direct authority.

In *Barchester Towers*, while the Bishop's wife hopes to gain influence over her husband rather than official authority within the Church structure, the bishop, intimidated by her, never refuses her demands. Despite this seeming control by Mrs. Proudie, *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867) argues that her usurpation of the bishop's official authority has been misguided and has often led to mistakes. After her attempts to handle an interview between the bishop and another clergyman, Josiah Crawley, the bishop at last stands up to his wife: "'You have disgraced me . . . You have been wrong, very wrong. Why didn't you go away when I asked you? You are always being wrong'" (*Last* 493). A stronger and more general indictment of women's assumption of religious authority occurs as Crawley writes a letter describing the same

events. Crawley, who is a character otherwise respected within the novel, declares that

if there be aught clear to me in ecclesiastical matters, it is this, —that no authority can be delegated to a female. The special laws of this and of some other countries do allow that women shall sit upon the temporal thrones of the earth, but on the lowest step of the throne of the Church no woman has been allowed to sit as bearing authority. (*Last* 680)

This is as it should be, for “a woman may be called on for advice, with most salutary effect, in affairs as to which any show of female authority should be equally false and pernicious” (*Last* 681).¹² Upon hearing of Mrs. Proudie’s death, Crawley proclaims that ““she was a violent woman, certainly, and I think that she misunderstood her duties; but I do not say that she was a bad woman. I am inclined to think that she was earnest in her endeavours to do good”” (*Last* 737).

The suggestion that Mrs. Proudie misunderstood her proper role illustrates the patriarchal Church’s insistence that women, even as clerical wives, were to have a subordinate role to their husbands. Throughout the Barsetshire series, the comparison of the attempts of the clergyman Mr. Slope and Mrs. Proudie to usurp the bishop’s authority are presented comically and the reader is not led to respect the actions of either character. Prevented from attaining official authority in the Church, Mrs. Proudie’s attempts to exert influence are eventually criticized and lamented.

Several of the other intriguing female characters in Trollope’s Barsetshire series in terms of female ministry can be found in *Framley Parsonage* (1861).¹³ The novel presents Lady Lufton’s desire for power over the young pastor Mr. Robarts. Her assumption of Mrs. Robarts’ “influence” over her husband is seen as false (*Framley* 88), showing that clergymen’s

wives do not automatically seek or find the influence that Bishop Proudie and Archdeacon Grantly's wives do in *Barchester Towers*.

The most interesting study of female religious authority in the novel is Miss Dunstable, whose independence of thought and action in *Framley Parsonage*, and in the earlier *Doctor Thorne* (1858), lead her to express a desire to be a clergyman. Miss Dunstable tells Mr. Robarts that she believes the life of a parish clergyman to be the happiest for a man, provided he has sufficient income (*Framley* 60). In part she admires a clergyman's ability to speak without being interrupted: "You clergymen like to keep those long subjects for your sermons, when no one can answer you. Now if I have a longing heart's desire for anything at all in this world, it is to be able to get up into a pulpit, and preach a sermon" (*Framley* 61). Trollope emphasizes the issue of hierarchical power and authority in this description. Miss Dunstable points out the sermon's one-sided nature and consequently the inherent, controlling power of its delivery. However, her spoken desire to enjoy that type of power *over* others is used by Trollope as only one of many passing indications of her independent spirit. She refuses marriage proposals, speaks her mind boldly to all other characters regardless of rank, insists on doing part of her own business, and as an heiress to a large tradesman's fortune represents the "new" upper class literally encroaching on the territory and land holdings of the nobility. Trollope is primarily concerned with painting a portrait of a woman who will say what she thinks and question authority without hesitation. Her desire to preach a sermon is simply one example of this and is not part of a sustained parallel between her character and the clergyman, Mr.

Robarts. In her brief reference to a clergyman's duties, her emphasis on the authority power inherent in delivering sermons from the pulpit emphasizes again a Church hierarchy which excluded women.

In Kingsley's *Yeast* and Trollope's Barsetshire series, female and clerical characters are paralleled, but the focus remains on the authority of the institution and its official ministers, thus excluding women from exercising any significant role in the Church's official ministry. Female characters' assumption of clerical power is limited, criticized, or satirized. No other concept of power or authority exists in the novels and consequently the female characters are left with few vocational options within Christianity.

*With proper direction: Elizabeth Sewell and Charlotte Yonge*¹⁴

Elizabeth Sewell's *Margaret Percival* (1847) and Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* (1856) and *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865) carefully explore women's honest desire to be involved in Christian ministry, and unlike Kingsley and Trollope, they show women's work as potentially effective and treat it seriously and positively. It is, however, central to both novelists' work that women participating in the Church's ministry receive guidance from the clergy. In the introduction I have already discussed briefly the ways in which Elizabeth Sewell presents women's ministry as necessarily restricted and directed by clergy in her novel *Margaret Percival*. In this context I wish only to elaborate on the evidence within the novel that demonstrates how women need direction from the clergy in order to ascertain

what roles are suited to them. Only by staying within the spheres prescribed for them, Sewell maintains, will women find fulfillment in a Christian ministry.

While Sewell's main purpose in the novel is to differentiate between High Church Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism, she also explores the title character's interest in doing good work. Margaret's belief that she is capable, without guidance, of finding and fulfilling the labor that clergymen undertake is countered by the narrator's comments. Sewell writes that women's "very physical weakness makes them willing to be governed, especially in questions of religion" (1: 361) and thus makes them susceptible to those who would lead them to different views of their role in the Church. Mr. Sutherland, a clergyman in the Church of England and Margaret's uncle, later echoes the narrator's comments by telling Margaret that she should not have begun questioning her role in religion and the validity of Roman Catholicism with reading. As a woman and as a young person she is not prepared to understand such arguments. "Clergymen are the appointed teachers." Margaret agrees that she was wrong to not approach him in order for her questions to be answered (2: 261).

Margaret's "education" into the proper way a clergyman in the Church of England ministers and her own proper role in relation occurs once she takes up residence with Mr. Sutherland in his parish. She begins to learn about how the clergy must have sympathy with the poor (2: 437-38). Sutherland teaches her by example how to use the Bible with poor children, how to learn people's names, and how to "stand firm upon the authority of the Church" (2: 440-41). Although Sutherland disclaims desire for total and "unlimited control" over his

parishioners, a type of control which is affiliated with Roman Catholicism in the novel (2: 450), he does see the validity of a clergyman's firm control over women's efforts to aid others. He discusses another parish in which the clergyman is choosing the roles that fit the individual the best: "Miss Debrett, for instance, is not fitted for a district visitor, but she is fitted to read to an old woman; and this [the local clergyman] would perceive and act upon. I have no doubt he will make her by degrees quite useful" (2: 446).

The idea that the female parishioners are tools to be appropriately utilized by the local clergyman is a pleasant one to Margaret who remembers how grateful she would have been if she could have had such guidance earlier "instead of trying to find out her duties for herself; with the risk of attempting more than she could perform, or neglecting those which lay within her sphere" (2: 446). Unable to perceive what work needs to be done, women require the direct guidance of the clergy. Margaret has learned the lessons about her appropriate work well and the novel ends with her visit to a sick parishioner. The visit reinforces her "sense of confidence and security in the Church of her fathers" (2: 456). As long as she remains under its care and direction, she will be safe from doubt and from Roman Catholicism's temptation of a more significant vocation in a convent. Sutherland suggests that perhaps in the future the Church's new Sisters of Charity will provide an opportunity for women in the Church to enter convents, but until such institutions are securely founded (and even afterwards for those who have no interest in them), the clergy will provide women with the necessary direction of their ministry.

In both *The Daisy Chain*¹⁵ and *The Clever Woman of the Family* Charlotte Yonge

also carefully restricts the role that women are to play in the Church's ministry. It is only with appropriate guidance from the clergy that the young heroines' schemes to help others have any hope of success. *The Daisy Chain* tells the story of the May family's thirteen children.

Although they are all distinctly-drawn characters, Ethel May is the primary focus of the novel. Her desire to build a church and school in the poor area of Cooksmoor drives many of her actions and decisions. In the novel, Ethel is stirred to this mission in part because of the presence of a clergyman, Mr. Ramsden, who does not adequately minister to the poor. Yet his official authority in the parish is still seen as important. Richard, one of Ethel's brothers and a stabilizing influence on her plans, is the first to articulate the need to defer to the local clergy in plans for reform in the parish. He tells Ethel, "I don't think it can be wrong to begin this [school], if Mr. Ramsden does not object" (*Daisy* 81).

Despite the propriety of deferring to the vicar's authority, the reality that he does not minister to the poor in the way he should leaves others to fulfill his duties. The Ladies' Committee is one group that steps in to fill this gap. This group of self-directed women is satirized by Yonge, criticized by Ethel's father, and maligned by Ethel. After Ethel and Richard have convinced some of the poor mothers to send their children to Sunday school, several of the women on the Ladies' Committee send the poor children home because they are not appropriately dressed. Dr. May laments "the clergyman leaving his work to a set of conceited women, and they turning their backs on ignorance, when it comes to their door" (*Daisy* 132-33). Ethel does not wish to submit to the Ladies' Committee, but is willing to submit to "the

lawful authority—if a good clergyman would only come, how willingly would I work under him’” (*Daisy* 339).

Although Ramsden’s failure to carry out his duties leaves a vacancy in the Church’s official ministry, this is not the case for long in Yonge’s novel. Mr. Wilmot, a local curate, and Richard May, once he is ordained, represent positive models of clergymen with whom Ethel is compared and to whom she may submit. Yonge makes it clear that while some clergymen may be faulty, the Church is filled with enough good leaders that women need not take on the self-directed role played by the Ladies’ Committee.

Not only is it inappropriate for women to take on the authoritative duty of the clergy, Yonge argues that women naturally *need* direction in ministerial duties. While Mr. Wilmot, Richard, and Dr. May all agree that Ethel should be allowed to follow her plans to build the school and church in Cooksmoor, her efforts are carefully controlled from beginning to end by the positively-drawn clerical characters. While Ethel’s decision to remain single at the end of the novel has been cited by some as a sign of Yonge’s mixed attitude toward women and independence, she remains in a domestic setting where she will take care of her father and her younger sisters and brothers. In relation to Christianity, any early ideas about following a call from God have been mitigated by a growing awareness that such work should be directed by the clergy. With her zeal, ideas, and sense of call from God, Ethel is potentially a rival to ordained ministers in the novel, but Yonge carefully directs Ethel and the reader to an awareness that zeal must be directed and a call from God mediated by official authorities of the Church.

In her later novel, *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865), Charlotte Yonge is even more direct in her portrayal of a young woman who must learn that her place within the Church's ministry is as a subordinate to the clergy.¹⁶ Rachel Curtis is a young woman who, like Ethel, has a strong desire to do good work for the world's suffering poor. Unlike Ethel, she does not have a specific plan to carry out. Yonge describes Rachel's dissatisfaction with the "acceptable" roles for women in the Church. "I have pottered about cottages and taught at schools in the *dilettante* way of the young lady who thinks it her duty to be charitable; and I am told that it is my duty, and that I may be satisfied." While she is willing and ready to work, she is "tethered down to the merest mockery of usefulness by conventionalities" (*Clever* 3). Yonge compares Rachel with the local clergyman, Mr. Touchett, under whose direction a number of local women work. Yonge suggests that Rachel envies not only his sense of mission but his authority as well. She openly debates with him about his decisions on scheduling, and later exhibits her rejection of clerical authority in an essay she writes about "curatolatry" which she defines as "that sickly mixture of flirtation and hero worship, with a religious daub as a salve to the conscience" (*Clever* 50).

Yonge's presentation of Rachel's frustrations raises the question: should there be a greater, perhaps more independent, ministerial role for women? By the end of the novel it is clear, as it was in *The Daisy Chain*, that the answer is an emphatic "no." Rachel searches for a mission in life and believes she has found it in reforming the conditions suffered by those in the lace-making industry. Rachel is led in her endeavors by Mr. Mauleverer who, although she

thinks he is a clergyman at first, admits he is “unhappily not in orders” (*Clever* 139). Rachel sets to work without the assistance of Mr. Touchett. Touchett openly disapproves of Mauleverer and her work, but Rachel refuses to recognize any authority he might have used to dissuade her. Rachel begins a philanthropic organization she names F.U.E.E. —the Female Union for Englishwoman’s Employment—and provides Mauleverer with money to start what is supposed to be a humanely operated lace-making shop for women and children. It is a terrible failure. Mauleverer and others pocket the money and force the workers to live under horrible conditions. The death of one of the young workers exposes the truth and Rachel feels the death is her responsibility.

The remaining question appears to be whether Rachel was too young or too trusting. It is suggested in the last section of the novel that while both may be plausible explanations, the failure is in large part a direct result of Rachel’s attempt to overstep her ministerial bounds. As a woman she needs the direction of the clergy to undertake philanthropic endeavors. Yonge shows this by comparing Rachel with a second clergyman, Mr. Clare. After her marriage to his nephew, Rachel begins to spend time with Mr. Clare. Observing his work, Rachel begins to learn humility regarding her own, lesser abilities, and learns the joy of being “useful to him” and “more and more helpful” to him in his duties (*Clever* 300-301).

Yonge’s insistence in this novel on clerical direction for women can be complicated in several ways. Kim Wheatley, in her essay “Death and Domestication in Charlotte M. Yonge’s *The Clever Woman of the Family*,” points to the masculine (non-clerical) guidance of

Rachel's husband in the latter part of the novel (895). Jane Sturrock notes Yonge's interest in Rachel's faltering faith in God and the Church as a cause of the philanthropic failure as well (A Something" 39). Additionally, Yonge complicates the idea that *all* women need direction. In a visit to London with Mr. Clare, Rachel meets an old friend of his, "a lady who had devoted herself to the care of poor girls to be trained as servants" (Yonge, *Clever* 345). Rachel sees "one of the many great and good works set on foot by personal and direct labour" and while she regrets that if she had been more "sensible" her own work might have led to this, she accepts that she is not capable of such things (*Clever* 345). While the novel has led the reader to believe that in her attempts to set herself up as a rival clergyman in authority and self-direction Rachel has acted inappropriately, Yonge suggests that for some women independent charitable activities may be appropriate. The reference to the woman in London, however, is brief and lacks the potency of the arguments surrounding Rachel's lesson. As a whole, *The Clever Woman of the Family* and *The Daisy Chain* follow a hierarchical structure of male, clerical authority and female submission to that authority.¹⁷

Sewell and Yonge parallel clerical and female characters in order to demonstrate their proper roles in Christian ministry. Unlike Kingsley and Trollope, who emphasize the distinction between the institution's authority and women's influence, Sewell and Yonge suggest that women do have an integral and important role in the Christian institution's ministry. With the proper clerical direction, women can be effective ministers and still remain true to their position within a patriarchal Church and society.

*A temporary replacement: Frances Trollope, Dinah Mulock Craik,
and Margaret Oliphant*

In presenting female characters whose ministerial efforts parallel the duties of the clergy, Frances Trollope, Dinah Mulock Craik, and Margaret Oliphant take one more step toward endorsing an established ministry for women. Trollope's *The Vicar of Wrexhill* (1837), Craik's *Olive* (1850), and Oliphant's *The Rector* (1863) and *Curate in Charge* (1875) all allow women to enter fully, albeit briefly, into a clergyman's duties. However, each author carefully demonstrates that such a situation occurs only because sometimes a clergyman is unfit or unprepared for his duties. Not all clergymen are faulty, and Trollope, Craik, and Oliphant are careful to point that out. For those few instances when the need arises, however, women can step in and, unlike in Sewell and Yonge's fictional worlds, effectively carry out the minister's duties without guidance.¹⁸

Frances Trollope (1779-1863) wrote *The Vicar of Wrexhill* primarily as a vituperative attack on the excesses of Evangelicalism. Hymn and tract writing are depicted as acceptable work for women to undertake. However, Trollope also positively presents a female character who temporarily takes over a clergyman's duties. The young Rosalind's attempts to convert a dying woman, Henrietta, are seen as acceptable only because Mr. Cartwright, who is the clergyman who should be counseling this woman—his own daughter—is incapable of exercising his ministerial duties.

The Vicar of Wrexhill tells the story of a widow who is seduced, along with her youngest daughter and many of the women of the town, by an unscrupulous Evangelical minister whose main purpose is to marry the widow so he can have her fortune. Trollope presents Reverend Cartwright as completely despicable; he lies, burns letters and conceals the truth, convinces the widow to change her will disinheriting her three children and leaving all to him, and is imputed to have had a sexual affair with another parishioner while married to the widow. Cartwright's immorality is the primary cause of his daughter's professed atheism. Her death-bed conversion to Christianity is achieved not by the counsel of her father and clergyman but by the simple, plain, and faith-filled speech of a young woman who lives with the widow's family as a ward.

As Henrietta lies dying, Rosalind urges her to turn from her atheism and believe in God. She urges Henrietta to let a clergyman come and speak to her, someone who could speak "with the authority of age and wisdom" (F. Trollope, *Vicar* 334). Henrietta refuses, saying that her father's own life has defiled the name of "clergyman" for her forever. Rosalind continues to wish for "some one who had made its laws the study of a holy life" who could speak to Henrietta, but Cartwright denies his daughter access to any other clergyman (336). In the absence of an official minister, Rosalind does not preach to Henrietta, but does read to her from the Bible. It is through her slow, distinct, and simple proclamation of its message that Henrietta finds belief. Henrietta tells her "It has reached my soul—from your lips only" (339).

Trollope carefully emphasizes that Rosalind did not wish to assume the clergyman's

duties, nor did she do so hastily. She reluctantly presumes to try and convert Henrietta to belief only because the appropriate authority cannot be summoned and the only clergyman present is wholly unfit (as both an Evangelical, the problem for Trollope, and as a despicable man, the problem for the reader and for Henrietta). With a good minister in place, Rosalind would not have been called to do the work she does. She is successful in these extraordinary circumstances because she is a morally upright young woman. She is, however, only a temporary replacement for a true clergyman.

Dinah Mulock Craik's (1826-1887) *Olive* also explores a woman's brief ministry as a replacement for a clergyman.¹⁹ Craik's interest in religious issues can be traced in part to her father's brief occupation as the pastor of a Nonconformist chapel; his strong opinions led to his removal from that position, and because he was not dependable in financial matters, Craik was forced to take on financial responsibility for her family (Mitchell 1-3). Perhaps because of her personal experience with this clerical figure who did not fulfill his duties, and because Craik does not have any desire to state views against a particular Christian denomination as Trollope does, *Olive* contrasts with Trollope's melodrama and provides a more realistic situation in which a clergyman might not be able to fulfill his duties: Craik's clergyman is faced with religious doubt.

Craik's novel *Olive* describes the title character's life from her birth to her marriage. The first volume of the novel deals primarily with Olive's early rejection by her parents because she has a deformity in her spine, her subsequent reconciliation with her father, and her growing bond with her mother. In the second volume, Craik explores Olive's great potential and early

success as an artist, a career she takes up to support her mother and to indulge herself in something she enjoys. The third volume describes Olive's love for a widowed clergyman, Harold Gwynne, Olive's feelings of unworthiness, and their eventual marriage. It is in the second volume that Craik describes the grave doubts that Harold Gwynne experiences: doubt in God, in Christianity, and in the institution of the Church. Harold expresses his doubts only to Olive who is shaken by this news because he has continued to act as a minister, something she believes he should not have done. In the middle of the second volume, Craik explores how Olive, rather unwillingly, takes Harold's ministerial place on several occasions. Her exploration of a woman's short-lived ministry, like Frances Trollope's in *The Vicar of Wrexhill*, emphasizes that it is only necessary and appropriate for a woman to undertake ministerial duties if for some reason the clergyman is unfit, either physically or spiritually, to fulfill them.

Harold's doubt has led him to refuse to teach his young daughter anything about God or Christianity. While Olive recognizes "that a father is the best guide of his child's faith" (2: 176) she remonstrates with Harold once their acquaintance is stronger and he eventually grants her the right to teach his daughter what she wants to about God. Olive steps in to replace him not only as a Christian parent, but as a clerical parent who is unable to fulfill the duty of raising a daughter strong in Christian faith.

While Olive admires Harold's preaching for several reasons, including his ability to use language that could be understood by his lower-class audience (2: 196), it is clear to her from the beginning that in the cold, impersonal manner in which he reads the prayers there is a mark

of discontent that she is later able to attribute to his doubt of God's existence. Before he hires a curate to fulfill his clerical duties for him, before even Olive is aware of his doubt, there are several examples of Olive's successful attempts to temporarily work as a substitute minister. Olive teaches at the Sunday school and visits many of the poor cottages in the area, work that was acceptable for a woman by any denomination's standards. However, Craik writes that on many occasions "she had undertaken . . . to fulfil some charitable duty, usually that of the clergyman or the clergyman's family" (2: 247). While Craik suggests that Olive may be acting as a sort of sister or wife to the clergyman, she acknowledges that Olive is carrying out duties that in part should devolve on the clergyman, if he were able to carry out all of those duties.

One of the clearest examples of Olive's brief ministry replacing Harold is in one of these cottages where a father has just brought home his son, found dead from the cold after he was lost in the forest. Olive happens to be visiting the home as the events unfold and she immediately sends for Harold. "Oh, thank Heaven that you are come," is her immediate response. When he asks her, "What did you wish me to do?" she replies "What a minister of God is able—nay, bound to do—to speak comfort in this house of misery" (2: 261). The first indication that all is not well is Harold's uncertainty as to what he should do. Olive directs his efforts by telling him to read and pray with the grieving father, to talk about God and immortality (2: 262). She apologizes to Harold for telling him what to do, "as if she would fain teach the clergyman his duty" (2: 263). This serves to absolve her of the sin of presumption and highlight again Harold's inadequacy to the situation.

Finally Harold addresses the father, but with words that do little to bring the man peace.

Harold talks of patience, submission, and the will of God in all things. The man's response—that the clergyman never taught him about God so talking of God now does not help him—is a stinging indictment of the way Harold has been conducting his ministry (2: 263-64). Olive is approached by the boy's father and, once confirming that Harold is unable to do any more, she talks to the father about God and mercy. "Her words fell like balm" and her simple, meek, and earnest speech helps to bring comfort (2: 265-66).

After leaving the house, Harold questions whether he has "left any duty unfulfilled; said any word unbecoming a clergyman" (2: 271). While Olive reassures him that he has not, the previous scene leaves the reader aware that in this instance, a woman has been more capable of carrying out the duties of Christian ministry than an ordained clergyman. As the novel progresses, Olive and Harold gradually acknowledge his inability to adequately complete his duties. The romantic plot of the third volume moves away from Harold's ministry, and the image of women as potentially equal to men in ministerial ability does not continue in the novel.

Instead, Olive is more and more frequently depicted as an angel, and her angelic goodness and passivity eventually lead Harold back to a faith in God. Olive is able to lead Harold back to a faith in God not through reasoned arguments, but through influence and example. She recognizes that his doubts could most easily be met by "that clear demonstration of reason which forces conviction" (2: 286). Although she despairs of being able to use reason adequately and wishes there were someone other than her "feeble" self to help him return to

faith, she studies the Bible in an attempt to gain arguments she could use in conversation with him (2: 287). Olive does not use those arguments, however, because the sickness of her mother intervenes, keeping her at home, and Olive recognizes that “an erring soul is oftentimes reclaimed less by the zeal of a Christian’s preaching, than by the silent voice of a Christian’s life” (2: 291). Craik’s decision to focus on Olive’s ability to influence through her example rather than to directly engage in discussion fits with a growing vision within the novel of woman as perhaps more holy, but always weaker than man, more emotional and less capable of reason. Craik restores the ideal of a good woman, or as she calls it at the end of the novel a “true woman” (3: 375), who gently uses her piety and holiness to lead husband and children to God.

In addition to the parallel of Harold and Olive’s ministry, Craik also explores women’s religious vocations in her brief portrait of a Roman Catholic convent. Her negative response to these institutions may demonstrate her reluctance for women to enter into a religious vocation, or may simply represent a negative response to a removal from active life into a cloistered world of prayer. Olive first goes to a convent in Scotland while visiting her aunt. The convent’s description emphasizes how removed from an active ministry these women are: “The whole atmosphere was filled with a soft calmCa silence like death . . . When the heavy door closed it seemed to shut out the world” (3: 117). While the “passing soul” feels no regret at leaving the world behind, Olive cannot imagine a life where prayer and making “pincushions, and artificial flowers” are your sole contributions to the world (3: 118-19). Olive envies the nuns because they have escaped the world’s pain, but she likens this to the happiness of a child who is simply

ignorant of (or in this case of adults, chooses to be ignorant of) the world's real problems (3: 120). While in their way Olive thinks they do some good, she openly states that she would rather have "a solitary maiden life" outside of such an institution, that in fact "there is something far greater and holier in a woman who goes about the world, keeping ever her pure nun's heart sacred to Heaven . . . [but] not shrinking from her appointed work'" (3: 122).

When later in the novel Olive's recently-discovered half-sister, Crystal, desires to escape the world, Harold cautions that there are no "convents or monasteries open to us Protestants'" (3: 275). Craik does not provide a time setting for the novel, but it appears to have been set during the early years of the reign of George IV, before the idea of Anglican sisterhoods became popular. Crystal conveniently declares that she was actually raised as a Roman Catholic and is thus able to enter the convent Olive earlier visited. Olive believes Crystal is using the convent as an escape from a painful love affair and maintains hope in the end that she may be able to convince her to leave before she takes her final vows. Although writing in 1850, after the opening of Anglican sisterhoods, Craik defers her argument about conventual life into the Roman Catholic church. This may indicate her anti-Catholicism, a differentiation between their cloistered convents and active sisterhoods, or a questioning of the Anglican sisterhoods themselves.

Regardless, the novel questions the validity of a lifelong vocation for women.²⁰ While Craik's novel also portrays a woman whose abilities for a time allow her to fill in temporarily for a clergyman, this is not an appropriate lifelong vocation. The final paragraphs of the novel

emphasize Harold's activity and Olive's passivity. Harold enjoys the wind on the top of a hill: "I love to meet it, to wrestle with it; to feel myself in spirit and in frame, stern to resist, daring to achieve, as a man should feel!" While he anticipates a full life ahead that he will "go forth" into, Olive places her hands on his arm and Craik says she will meet the future in this way, with her "clinging sweetness" (3: 375-76).

Margaret Oliphant (1828-1897) wrote most of her significant work involving women and Christianity in her series of novels, *The Chronicles of Carlingford* (1863-76). Like Anthony Trollope's Barsetshire series, the novels follow a group of clergymen and their parishioners. Within these novels and in others such as *The Curate in Charge*, Oliphant portrays a number of female characters who do parish work. However, like Frances Trollope and Craik, Oliphant's primary focus is on women who engage in pastoral ministry because the clergymen who are supposed to do such work are incapable.

A brief examination of the parallels between clerical figures in Oliphant's *The Rector* (1863), which was an early part of the *Chronicles of Carlingford*, and *Curate in Charge* (1875) demonstrates this focus. In the short text of *The Rector* Oliphant parallels the young Lucy Wodehouse with the High Church curate Frank Wentworth, and the elder Miss Wodehouse with the scholarly Mr. Proctor, the new rector of the parish. In her treatment of these parallels, there is a questioning of women's "nature," but a firm distinction between the role of the clergy and that of women. Both Lucy and Wentworth are able to help a dying woman find physical and spiritual comfort while Lucy's sister and Mr. Proctor are awkward

and incompetent at their attempted tasks. Mr. Proctor does not know what to do because his training and background have been in scholarship and not in pastoral ministry or interaction with parishioners. Also, Lucy's sister does not have any natural aptitude for nurturing as women were often thought to have. Oliphant suggests that skills in dealing with the sick need to be taught, that neither women nor Christian clergymen *naturally* exhibit caring attitudes or know how to exercise a pastoral ministry to others. Yet Oliphant does distinguish between the clerical and female roles. Lucy's role is to hold "the poor creature in her arms" while it falls to the curate Wentworth to discuss with her "those mysteries" of forgiveness and salvation (*Rector* 24-25).

While there is a distinction between the two roles, the idea that clergy (and women) need to be taught how to minister to others is central to the story. The question of who can provide that education raises the issue of recognizing some women's ministerial aptitude. Mr. Proctor's mother suggests that her son needs to marry, preferably a woman like Lucy "who would enter into all the parish work, and give you useful hints" (*Rector* 33). Proctor rejects this suggestion that he marry Lucy essentially so that she could teach him the way to perform his duties. This suggestion indicates a role of greater significance that could potentially be played by a woman, that of a teacher or trainer to an ordained clergyman. While in *The Rector* the gap created by Proctor can be filled adequately by another clergyman, Wentworth, it is possible for women to help to ultimately fill that gap by temporarily undertaking a clergyman's training.

Oliphant's later work, *The Curate in Charge*, parallels the heroine Cecily with two

clergymen: her father, the curate of the title, and the new rector of the parish, Mr. Mildmay. To his daughters, the curate is a “feeble divinity” (*Curate* 14) whose wonderful work among the poor in his parish is worthy of praise, but whose financial mismanagement causes the family’s ruin. Cicely is forced to fill the parental role for him when he needs to look for a new situation. She writes an advertisement for him, arranges their finances, and pays the creditors as much as possible. His death near the end of the novel leaves an emotional hole in Cicely and her sister’s lives, but they have long had to manage their lives for themselves.

The second parallel is, for this study, the more interesting one. Mr. Mildmay is a scholarly clergyman whose knowledge of Latin and Greek has left him cold; he desires a country parish where he can “live” and do things instead of only reading. Unfortunately, Mildmay has no idea as to how this is done. Repeatedly throughout the novel, Cecily speaks to him about what a clergyman’s duties are, takes over those duties for him, or answers direct questions from him about the proper way to minister to others. Cecily questions his intended system of dealing with the cottagers: ““You don’t know the village people. If you spoke to them of high ideals, they would only open their mouths and stare”” (*Curate* 106-107). She vehemently advocates instead her father’s system of telling them to ““try and do their best”” (*Curate* 107). Although Cecily feels later she may have stepped outside her proper sphere in talking to him in this way, Mildmay appears to appreciate the advice.

At the end of the novel, Cecily has chosen to take a position as local schoolmistress in order to survive financially, despite her resultant loss of social position. Her busy daily work

with the “homely children in their forms, at their desks, or working in the afternoon at their homely needlework” (*Curate* 198) is contrasted with Mildmay’s continuing uncertainty about how to talk to the sick and the poor. In one of the last scenes of the novel, Mildmay tells Cecily of a poor man who is dying and will leave four children and a wife. ““What am I to say to them?”” he asks. While Cecily says “it is not for me to preach to you”” she does give him advice on what to say in comfort to the family (*Curate* 203). Oliphant’s message appears to be that because some among the clergy are not receiving the proper training, others who are capable of performing their tasks are forced to either fulfill those duties or teach them to do so.²¹ The emphasis on training the clergy shows that the eventual goal is to restore the clergy to the role of primary authority and minister. Women’s participation in that ministry and training will be only temporary.

The female ministers in Oliphant’s fiction are not representatives of the potential for women’s permanent involvement in the Christian church. They are instead a statement about the inadequacies of many clergymen because their training is in scholarship and not in practical ministry. However, while at the end of *Margaret Percival* and *The Daisy Chain* Church authority has been safely restored to a clergyman, in the novels by Frances Trollope, Craik, and Oliphant, the question is often left only partially answered, leaving the reader to wonder what would happen if no fit clergyman appeared. Felicia Skene’s novels attempt to answer that question.

The possibility of a greater role: Felicia Skene

Felicia Skene (1821-1899) was attracted early in her life to the High Church Oxford Movement and she moved to Oxford to become a parishioner in a poor parish run by the Reverend Thomas Chamberlain. Chamberlain's Tractarian sympathies led him to establish a sisterhood during the time Skene knew him, but she resisted his attempts to have her join (Maison 50-51). One of Skene's first novels, *St. Albans; or The Prisoners of Hope* (1853), idealizes Chamberlain in the character of Mr. Chesterfield, a clergyman who leads a young woman to devotion and good works (Maison 51).²² This young woman learns during the novel that she should not trust her own judgement but instead rely on the advice of Chesterfield who has received "none other than GOD the HOLY GHOST in sacramental gift" (qtd. in Maison 52). In this way, the novel maintains a distinct role for the clergy who guide the ministerial efforts of the laity. Margaret Maison notes that Skene broke with Chamberlain after writing *St. Albans* and later regretted "having surrendered too much of her religious liberty and independence" in her ties to him (qtd. in Maison 52). Skene later worked more independently for reforms in nursing, teaching, prison visiting, and the care given to prostitutes (Maison 52-53). Since this is similar to work that she would have engaged in had she joined Chamberlain's sisterhood, Skene appears to have desired a greater degree of independence and choice with respect to her religious work.

Maison notes a change in Skene's fiction after her decision to direct her own reform work, roughly in the mid-1850s. However, Skene's earlier novel *Use and Abuse* (1849),

which may have been written before her relationship with Chamberlain, questions whether the clergy are the sole ministers of Christianity.²³ *Use and Abuse* is Skene's first novel and it centers on three main characters: Raymond, Ruth Vincent, and Philip Araby. Araby denounces Christianity and belief in God and declares his intention to enjoy the life of this world even if it is at the expense of others. Raymond's devotion to Christianity prompts him to follow Araby as he travels from the deserts of Africa to England and finally to Turkey; as Araby disrupts the faith and emotional well-being of individuals in his path in order to take advantage of them financially, Raymond follows behind, attempting to restore their faith.

Ruth Vincent is one of Araby's proposed victims once he arrives in England. He plots to marry the young heiress who is, like Raymond, an active Christian, by pretending to be a devout Christian himself. Raymond arrives on the scene barely in time to stop the wedding by informing Ruth of Araby's true nature. Araby, now fully insane, dies while Ruth unsuccessfully urges him to repent.

Skene's text is intriguing in light of women, Christianity, and the authority of the Church in several ways. First, Skene makes it clear in the early part of the novel that the Christianity followed by many people, including many of the clergy, is simply an outward form with no substance and that many Christians, clergy included, are simply hypocrites. Raymond's initial retreat into the desert was an attempt to get away from this "false Christianity" that forces obedience to clergy who "ministering at the altar with stern rebuke and holy exhortation, [had] souls the while [which] were slaving to the lowest and meanest of human passions." Skene

argues that the Christianity practiced in England is not true to “the faith of the Crucified” (*Use* 17). Desirous of returning to a truer form of Christianity, Skene’s characters enact a lay ministry that is sanctioned by the narrator and author.

Second, Skene compares a clergyman with Ruth, who appears to be doing similar work in an unofficial capacity. Skene writes that in Mr. Grey villagers were “fortunate in their clergyman” because, in part, of his pastoral ministry to the poor. Ruth is also described as “a minister of peace and joy” to the poor people in the community (145-46). Her holiness, apparent in her face, leads her to treat tenderly the poor aged beggar beside her in church and the poor children who work long days at the factory in the area (145-49). The idea of self-sacrifice for the good of others is central to the novel, but it appears as a Christian and not a female virtue. Mr. Grey is described as “self-denying” (208) and Ruth frequently alludes to the necessity of denying her own desires in order to help others.

In addition to the comparisons of their pastoral ministry, Skene also connects their public preaching. Skene praises Mr. Grey because he conducts the service with “fervour of devotion.” He takes his time with the service, not rushing over the prayers, but carefully and meaningfully relating them to the parishioners. He does not regulate the ceremony by the wishes of wealthy parishioners and speaks “with his face eagerly turned to the people” (*Use* 147). Mr. Grey is concerned that both the wealthy and working classes receive God’s message. In comparison, Ruth habitually leaves this service to share food and learning with the young children of the village. She wisely refrains from topics of discussion for which the young

children's minds are not yet ready. Consequently, in juxtaposed passages, Ruth and Mr. Grey both evince a strong concern with audience for their Christian lessons. While we do read her brief "sermon" on Divine Love, we do not hear any of Mr. Grey's words inside the church. In this way, Ruth's preaching is more effective in terms of the readers of Skene's novel. However, Skene suggests that both Ruth and Mr. Grey are equally successful in bringing peace and insight into the lives of their fictional audiences.

Despite Skene's positive depiction of this clergyman, the novel is relatively free of Churchmen, authorities, and Church services. Mr. Grey soon disappears from the novel and the only other Church authority figures who appear in the novel are dead. In one of the more Gothic passages of the novel, Arabyn takes Ruth into a tomb in Western Greece where he presents a number of Bishops' decaying bodies as evidence of the materiality of life and the myth of God and Christianity. Ruth's subsequent speech in defense of Christianity is delivered in the midst of these silenced authorities of the Church. They are mute witnesses to what she says, and in that moment Ruth replaces the authority of the Church.

Throughout the novel, Skene emphasizes a ministry open to all, not just the clergy as Ruth and Raymond emerge as ministers to the Christians and non-Christians they meet. Both Raymond and Ruth enjoy some success in restoring faith to others. Ruth's guardian will not allow any clergymen in his house and so it falls on Ruth to lead him to a renewed faith in God. She is ultimately successful (*Use* 159). However, the novel diminishes Ruth's work in comparison by paying greater attention to Raymond's ministry. Ruth's weakness and passivity

are contrasted with Raymond's strength and activity after Arabyn's death. Raymond is also granted a "vision" of Arabyn's eternal life without God, an endorsement of his spiritual abilities. It becomes increasingly unclear whether the reader is to see Ruth and Raymond as equals.

After a life of helping others, Raymond returns to the desert to die and be buried. Ruth is described at the end of the novel as a single woman devoting "herself entirely to the ministry of the suffering and afflicted" (*Use* 441). Skene emphasizes that although Ruth is single she is not motherless or childless because in God's family she has many mothers and children. Her insistence that Ruth is in a domestic context may be a conciliation to society's ideas about propriety, it may be a sign of Skene's own fears that in leaving the domestic sphere a woman loses her sense of place, or it may be a self-justification for the life Skene herself lived.

Skene's *Hidden Depths* (1866) more directly shows her interest in women's ministry by tracing one character's gradually changing ideas on the subject. *Hidden Depths* describes the heroine Ernestine's gradual realization that she is called to dedicate her life to the redemption of women who have been seduced and dishonored by men of the upper classes, and have turned to prostitution for survival. Ernestine discovers that one of her brothers has caused such a young and innocent woman to fall into the miseries of this life. While this young woman commits suicide, she begs in a note that her sister, who has followed her path, be found and saved. Ernestine resolves to find and bring this woman's sister to redemption at any cost. Skene draws upon discussions about women's role in Christian ministry in two ways: first, she follows Ernestine's own changing sentiments about what is "proper" for a woman to do;

second, she parallels Ernestine's choices with those of two clergymen in the novel, carefully distinguishing between the roles of the clergy and women at times and blurring the boundaries at other times.

Ernestine's own ideas about the proper work for women are stated early in the novel. As she bids farewell to her brother before his journey to India she expresses to him her wish to "be of some use in the world" (*Hidden* 1: 32). When her brother expresses alarm that she will turn into a strong-minded woman and will "raise a regiment of riflewomen, or establish a printing-press for the publication of pamphlets on the rights of women," Ernestine laughs and admits she has nothing but antipathy for women who would like to change their "natural position" (*Hidden* 1: 32). Despite this, she argues that women need to be useful to others and that there must be a way to do so without leaving their proper realm. Twenty-five and engaged to be married, she recognizes only her fiancé's claim to approve or disapprove of any work she chooses (*Hidden* 1: 33).

Once she discovers her brother's behavior has destroyed another woman, Ernestine's attitude toward her natural position begins to change, and throughout the novel she slowly gains strength and confidence in the propriety of her independent work. She recognizes that going "alone into the very haunts of sin to seek one of the fallen and degraded of her own sex, would be considered a very reprehensible departure from the usages of the society in which she had always lived" (*Hidden* 1: 109). However, she resolves to face the censure of society at her improper and unladylike actions and resists both her aunt, Lady Beaufort, and her fiancé, both

of whom oppose her decision. Ernestine justifies her decision in part because she is not choosing to take up a lifelong vocation working among these women, but only seeks to save one (*Hidden* 1: 131).

However, by the end of the novel, Ernestine has seen the failures of the current system in meeting the needs of these women who are rejected by society, founds her own penitentiary, and dedicates her life to a vocation there. Her project does not insist on the discipline found in other penitentiaries and is more successful at bringing women back to Christianity because of this. Skene resolves the issue of Ernestine's decision to remain single by creating a situation that forces her not to marry. Ernestine's fiancé is discovered late in the novel to be the man who had seduced the young woman Ernestine has sought to help throughout the book. Skene writes that "the natural happiness to which a woman looks in the ties of wife and mother could never now be hers. Hugh Lingard had alone possessed her love, and she knew that she could love none other while existence lasted" (*Hidden* 2: 211). Conveniently, Ernestine loves a man but she is unable to marry him because of his previous actions. It is not that she *chooses* to remain single, but rather this choice has been thrust upon her by circumstances beyond her control.

Skene's depiction of a lifelong religious vocation for Ernestine—one that did not involve vows of obedience to institutional authority as in sisterhoods—draws upon contemporary discussions about women and their role in Christian ministry. Skene also connects her novel to these discussions as she parallels Ernestine with two different clergymen: Dr. Granby and Mr. Thorold. Dr. Granby represents the clergy and institutional Christianity that Skene condemns

here and in *Use and Abuse*. Although he is in charge of a poor parish, Granby's residence is far removed from the poor neighborhoods and his family lives in pristine elegance. When Ernestine asks him for assistance in locating the young woman she is searching for, he is offended that she thinks he might know her. "Of course, I have intercourse with none but respectable characters" (*Hidden* 1: 192). He urges Ernestine to give up her efforts because middle- and upper-class women should be, or at least should appear to be, ignorant of things such as prostitution. Granby says he does not want to discourage her desire to engage in philanthropy and says he only wants "to direct your too ardent, too liberal zeal into proper channels" (*Hidden* 1: 194). Skene gives Ernestine the opportunity to work under the close supervision of a clergyman, but Ernestine's complete disagreement with Granby shows again her changing ideas about what is proper for women. Additionally, the contrast of Granby's lack of ministry to those who most need such help with Ernestine's brave attempts to help those individuals not only condemns Granby and others like him, but suggests that women such as Ernestine can, with God's blessing and help, perform the work that the Church's clergy should be doing and are not (*Hidden* 1: 196). Ernestine's vocation at the end of the novel indicates that such work can be a permanent ministry for women.

The second clergyman in the novel is a much more positive figure. Mr. Thorold's presence provides Skene with an opportunity to explore the boundaries between the work of the clergyman and Ernestine's new ministry. In contrast to Granby, Thorold lives and works among the poor and lovingly accepts all parishioners, even the prostitutes by whom Granby is

so repulsed. Several times, Skene differentiates between the work that Thorold and Ernestine can do. At the bedside of her dying younger brother, Ernestine can listen to his story of doubt and sin, but wishes that a clergyman could be there. Thorold's arrival emphasizes that only through the clergy could her brother receive the sacrament of the Eucharist and a fuller sense of the mercy of God. However, as with Ruth's preaching to the children in *Use and Abuse*, it is Ernestine's words the reader hears and Thorold's official clerical voice is silent.

Later in the novel, Skene again explores the work of Ernestine and Thorold in the face of the death of a repentant sinner. The young woman whom Ernestine spends the entire novel trying to save eventually dies, repenting of her sins and forgiving the man who seduced her. As she is dying, Thorold is unavailable and Ernestine is left to comfort the young woman with words about Christ's mercy. Ernestine wishes Thorold could come, particularly when the young woman asks to receive the sacrament of the Eucharist (*Hidden 2*: 197). Thorold does not arrive in time, but the young woman dies in peace and Thorold comforts Ernestine later by saying she had succeeded in her mission to lead the woman back to the Christian faith. While in both death-bed scenes it is clear that the sacramental work is reserved only for the clergy, in the second this is significantly de-emphasized. It is not necessary for the woman to receive the sacrament in order to be redeemed. While both she and Ernestine may wish for Thorold's presence, the presence of a clergyman is not necessary. As a lay minister, Ernestine is able to adequately help the young woman repent and seek forgiveness from God.

When Ernestine founds a penitentiary, there is no mention made of a permanent

chaplain—something she saw great need for earlier in the novel. Thorold provides some help in getting some of the women to emigrate, but it is Ernestine who daily visits the women and individually tries to lead them to repentance, goodness, and ultimately forgiveness. Ernestine is the individual in control of the institution and she deals with each woman “according to her special temperament” (*Hidden 2*: 219). Skene writes that many of the women were physically so weak when they came to Ernestine that they died in her penitentiary, and again at their death she is present “with her arms round them, and her prayers ascending for them” (*Hidden 2*: 221).

Skene’s vision of a reformed penitentiary system at the end of her novel both calls out for a change in the current system of discipline that was failing to help many of the women within such institutions and seriously questions whether women need to be under the supervision of clergymen or under the authority of a Christian institution such as sisterhoods in order to follow a lifelong religious vocation. *Hidden Depths*, written almost twenty years after *Use and Abuse*, is a much stronger statement on these issues. Both these works, however, are evidence of the literary discussion during the middle of the nineteenth century of women’s role in Christianity. Her depiction in *Hidden Depths* of a ministerial vocation for one woman mirrors the lives of those like herself who sought such work and connects to the texts of novelists such as Brontë, Gaskell, and Eliot who also explored such possibilities.²⁴

Skene’s exploration of women’s ministry, along with the depictions of a lay ministry

found in novels written in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, indicates the increasing popularity of a new vision that moved away from insistence on a clerical or priestly caste as somehow superior to other Christians and toward a vision that emphasized the importance of individual lay ministers, male and female. As the century continued to unfold, the question of who were to be the true ministers of Christianity remained an issue. The ideal of lay ministry allowed women an opportunity to enter completely and equally into the ministry of Christianity. Similar to movements in Christian feminism today, this concept suggests that women should not work toward achieving the right to a clerical role in a hierarchical system. Rather, they should work toward a recognized position of authority within a new system of interdependence, integrative authority, and an empowering ministry of service.

This revisioning of ministry is found years before these late-Victorian novels in *Agnes Grey*, *Ruth*, *Janet's Repentance*, and *Adam Bede*. The new vision of ministry that Brontë, Gaskell and Eliot espouse views power and authority as tools to be used *and* given to others, preaching as empowering others to do the work of Christianity, and caretaking and service as embodying the equality of all individuals. In this way, Brontë, Gaskell, and Eliot foreshadow the revisioning of Christian ministry that we see more explicitly in novels of the last quarter of the century and in contemporary Christian feminism.

Unlike novelists such as Charles Kingsley and Anthony Trollope, Brontë, Gaskell, and Eliot focus on nontraditional preaching and pastoral ministry rather than institutional struggles for power, thus moving the female characters from the margins where they could only hope to

influence clergymen into positions where they could exercise a direct authority over individual parishioners. In contrast to Sewell and Yonge's heroines, within *Agnes Grey*, *Ruth*, *Janet's Repentance*, and *Adam Bede*, female characters are figured as much more than closely-controlled clerical assistants. Brontë, Gaskell, and Eliot's heroines repeatedly minister successfully without clerical guidance. The female characters in *Agnes Grey*, *Ruth*, *Janet's Repentance*, and *Adam Bede* are also more than temporary replacements for incompetent or faltering clergymen as in the works by Frances Trollope, Craik and Oliphant which I have discussed. The female characters in the novels by Brontë, Gaskell, and Eliot occupy a ministerial role for a significant amount of time.

The preceding analysis demonstrates the prevalence of issues related to women and religious ministry in literature of the Victorian period. As modern readers it is easy to skip over religious elements in Victorian novels either because our lack of familiarity with the historical context may make these aspects less interesting, or because their background status within the novels suggests that they were unimportant to the author. However, a rather exciting controversy about women's ministerial roles lies under the surface of many of these images. This is a controversy that most Christian denominations still face today in some form. Consequently, how individual Victorian authors reconciled women's work with the Church's claims of authority tells us something about Victorian Christianity and affirms the long history of what we now know as Christian feminism.

Notes

¹ Because my purpose lies not in connecting Brontë, Gaskell, or Eliot's works to those of another novelist, but in drawing attention to the numerous Victorian novels which engage the issue of women's ministry, I have not confined myself to those works published in the 1840s and 1850s. For those novelists who are today less well-known, I have included relevant information as to religious affiliation and life span. In some instances, there is interesting evidence that Brontë, Gaskell, or Eliot read or had access to a specific novel to which I will refer. In those instances, I will note the presence of such evidence. Awareness of certain major male novelists of the time period (Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope) is assumed.

² Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853), certainly in part a novel about female society and power, makes a brief reference to Deborah Jenkyns' wish as a young woman to "marry an archdeacon, and write his charges," or instructions to his clergy (*Cranford* 107). Gaskell thus introduces the idea that by marrying a clergyman, a woman could hope to assume some of his authority. While *Cranford* raises the issue of women and religious authority, like Hardy, Dickens, and Ward's works, it does not engage in a close, sustained comparison of female and clerical characters involved in this ministry.

³ *Jane Eyre* also contains a brief reference to Roman Catholic convents. After Aunt Reed's death, Jane's cousin Eliza decides to move to the continent, study Roman Catholic doctrines, and eventually becomes a nun. Jane as narrator writes that she is "at this day superior of the convent where she passed the period of her novitiate: and which she endowed with her fortune." Jane does not appear surprised when Eliza initially tells her this decision, but she describes the cloistered life as being "walled up alive in a French convent." While she proclaims that the "vocation will fit [Eliza] to a hair" (244), it is clear that for Jane such a passive, contemplative life would be equivalent to a living death.

⁴ Gaskell maintained an intermittent correspondence with Geraldine Jewsbury throughout her life. In a letter to Catherine Winkworth in November of 1848, Gaskell writes that "the Darbishires are coming tonight with 'Zoe'" (Gaskell, *Letters* 64). While she makes no direct reference to having read the novel of this title, her reference to Jewsbury in this way indicates she was, at the very least, familiar with the novel. Jenny Uglow argues in her biography of Gaskell that "although they moved in overlapping circles, the two writers were not

friends”; Jewsbury “was almost shockingly outspoken and flamboyant” in her frustration at the “current plight of intellectual women” (168). According to Uglow, this outspokenness and Jewsbury’s extreme beliefs made Gaskell uncomfortable.

⁵ Gaskell corresponded with Charles Kingsley and in a letter to her daughters Marianne and Margaret in May of 1849, she refers to hearing a sermon by Mr. Maurice “who wrote the preface to the Saint’s tragedy I like so much” (Gaskell, *Letters* 79). J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard make the editorial note that this reference is to Kingsley’s recently published play.

⁶ Kingsley opposed Roman Catholicism’s convents in part because of the imposition of cloister; the new active Anglican orders were not subject to this particular criticism. However, Elizabeth’s opposition to convents because of their enforced celibacy and renunciation of family/maternal responsibilities reflects concurrent debates surrounding Anglican sisterhoods. For a critical exploration of Kingsley’s attitudes toward convents as expressed in his historical religious fiction see Royal W. Rhodes’ *The Lion and the Cross: Early Christianity in Victorian Novels* (1995).

⁷ Although written in 1850, Rossetti’s *Maude* was not published during her lifetime.

⁸ Though Linton’s major works dealing with religion, such as *Joshua Davidson* and *Under Which Lord?* (1879), were published too late to have had any influence on Eliot’s work, Eliot’s letters indicate that she knew the young woman both before and after Linton’s marriage (Eliot, *Letters* 1: 344-46; Haight, *Biography* 260, 339-40). During Linton’s early association with John Chapman she was a member of radical Unitarian circles which fervently questioned the Church’s structure (Gleadle 110). Although not explicitly stated by Eliot, Linton’s interest in a reformed or new form of religion/Christianity would have been one possible connection the two women felt.

⁹ Despite their present obscurity, the novels I discuss here by authors such as Silas and Joseph Hocking, W. J. Dawson, and Beatrice Harraden offer the clearest examples of religious novels at the end of the century that both sold well and presented an image of religion, usually a reformed Christianity, whose ministers were laymen and laywomen. In comparison with some of the mid-century religious novels, although both clearly have as their primary focus the promulgation of certain moral beliefs, Dawson and Harraden in particular do not allow plot and other elements to suffer as a result of that focus. *Robert Elsmere* also provides an image of a “restored” Christianity in “The New Brotherhood” that Elsmere starts before his death (Ward 679), but does not discuss issues of gender in terms of that new ministry; clearly the title of the “Brotherhood” immediately suggests a lack of concern with women as members and ministers.

¹⁰ I propose here a new category of religious novels: those focused on exploring the relationships between the activities of clergy and laywomen. There are other significant categorizations of religious novels, but none include a group of novels focused on the issue of women's Christian ministry. Margaret Maison's critical analysis of religious novels, *The Victorian Vision* (1961), delineates certain groups of Victorian religious novels based on their treatment of issues such as faith and doubt, Roman Catholicism, and High Church/Low Church/Broad Church distinctions. Robert Wolff's *Gains and Losses* (1977) also follows denominational lines to a large degree in categorizing religious novels for study.

¹¹ Kingsley's anti-Catholicism became even more apparent in his later conflict with John Henry Newman, carried out in the early 1860s through essays, letters, and pamphlets. Kingsley's part in the conflict included strong anti-Romanist prose works.

¹² Always complicating every issue, Trollope notes that this final sentence was not included in the draft that Crawley showed to his wife but was inserted only when he made the final copy (*Last* 681).

¹³ Although Trollope's critical acclaim and popularity at the time mean one can safely assume Gaskell and Eliot were familiar with his work, Gaskell particularly admired *Framley Parsonage* (as did many of his readers). In 1859 and 1860, during its serialization, Gaskell wrote several letters expressing her admiration for the novel (Gaskell, *Letters* 596, 602).

¹⁴ In my examination of novels by Yonge, Sewell, and others, my argument that they do not positively portray a greater ministerial role for women, nor explore the issues of power/empowerment, should not be taken as a statement that their treatment of the issues is less complex than that found in the novels by Brontë, Gaskell, and Eliot or that I wish to automatically assign their novels to a category of less worth. Those authors who appear to argue for a woman's "proper" subordination to a clergyman in all her ministerial activities often still raise questions about this subordination. Additionally, the strength and ability that many of the female characters show in filling in for neglectful clergymen, augmenting their activities, or rectifying an apparent spiritual deficiency—even if it is only on a temporary basis—question the status of women's relation to Christian ministry.

¹⁵ Eliot read *The Daisy Chain* aloud to George Henry Lewes when they were in Florence in 1861 (Haight, *Biography* 344; Hayter 1). Gordon Haight laments that "no comment about it has been recorded" (*Biography* 344).

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that Yonge herself did not visit cottages during her lifetime because as a young woman her parents discouraged it. Also, Yonge was an associate (a lay person connected to the sisters' work) with the sisterhood at Wantage, but did not join the

sisterhood completely because she was convinced she could do better work outside of it. She did know firsthand about conventual life, but at times had characters express reservations about the vocation (Sturrock, “*Heaven*” 69-70; Mason 99).

¹⁷ Barbara Dennis’ essay “The Two Voices of Charlotte Yonge” notes the presence of this theme in two other Yonge novels, *The Castle Builders* (1854) and *The Three Brides* (1876).

¹⁸ Julie Melnyk’s essay, “Evangelical Theology and Feminist Polemic: Emma Jane Worboise’s *Overdale*,” discusses Worboise’s 1869 novel as similarly depicting women who, because of the lack of a competent clergyman, take over some of the minister’s duties. Melnyk notes that Worboise is careful to distance herself from the most rebellious of these women (115). Melnyk’s essay can be found in her text *Nineteenth-Century Britain: Transfiguring the Faith of Their Fathers* (1998).

¹⁹ References to Craik’s novels appear in Eliot’s letters, although Eliot is displeased by comparisons of Craik’s work with her own (Eliot, *Letters* 3: 302; 4: 129).

²⁰ In 1883, Craik wrote an essay, “On Sisterhoods,” that indicates her acceptance at that time of the idea, but only under several conditions. She argues that for women who are beyond the age of marriage, who have no family (brothers, parents) to care for, and who are unable to survive without working, Anglican sisterhoods offer a place where they may be directed to help others and in effect earn a place to live. Craik does discuss the authority and influence of the Mother in charge of the Anglican convent she visits (“Sisterhoods” 50), suggesting that those women who can lead others should do so. As in *Olive*, the idea of cloistered convents is criticized, but the idea of an active sisterhood as some form of ministry and livelihood for single women holds interest for her (“Sisterhoods” 55).

²¹ Joseph O’Mealy argues that other novels of the Carlingford series, including *The Perpetual Curate* (1864), depict clergymen who refuse to submit to the authority of laywomen (251). In addition to O’Mealy’s analysis of Oliphant’s presentation of religious power struggles, see Mervyn Williams’ *Margaret Oliphant: A Critical Biography* (1986).

²² Descriptions of *St. Albans* are taken from Margaret Maison’s *The Victorian Vision*; despite attempts to locate a copy of the novel through interlibrary loan, I was, unfortunately, unable to do so. Like many Victorian religious novels which have never been reprinted, few if any copies may still exist.

²³ George Eliot writes in a letter to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bray on September 20, 1849,

that she received a copy of *Use and Abuse* from a fellow traveler on the continent. A cousin of Skene loaned Eliot a “religious novel . . . in which there is a fearful infidel who will not believe and hates all who do etc. etc.” (Eliot, *Letters* 1: 309). Whether Eliot was able to provide this description because she had already read the book or because the cousin informed her of the basic story is unclear. Eliot had in several previous letters lamented the slow passage of a box of her books to the place where she was staying after her father’s death (Eliot, *Letters* 1: 292-93, 300). Starved for reading material it is likely she would have at least begun Skene’s novel. However, no further mention of the novel is made.

²⁴ While Skene appears to have explored her own choices through her fictional characters, and Sewell admitted in her autobiography that some of her fiction allowed her to explore ministerial opportunities she wished she had had (Frerichs 193), I am reluctant to argue that any one of these authors wrote about women’s ministry out of a frustrated desire to be a clergyman. While Elaine Showalter, in *A Literature of Their Own*, claims that “Charlotte Yonge, Felicia Skene, and Elizabeth Sewell were among the many women who wanted to be clergymen” (144), she provides little if any evidence that is not from their fictional works. In contrast, Valerie Sanders claims, in *Eve’s Renegades: Victorian Anti-Feminist Women Novelists*, that women such as Yonge and Oliphant “appear to have felt no frustration at not being directly involved in the ministry of the church” (196). Because of the lack of first-hand, reliable evidence that exists with respect to many of these less well-known novelists, both extreme claims are difficult to support. Instead, I have tried to show in this chapter, and will throughout this text, that there were a large number of women interested in discussing, and at times in expanding the ministerial roles open to all women. This is not automatically the sign of a personal desire to have such a vocation, but it is impossible to say with certainty that many of the women were not motivated to write about women’s ministry because of their own frustrations.