Hannah More and Dominican Values

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Though relatively unknown to twentieth-first-century students of literature, Hannah More was one of the most prolific and most read literary and religious figures of her day. Born February 2, 1745, near Bristol, she was educated by her schoolmaster father and began writing poetry and drama at an early age. On a visit to London in the 1770's, she came to the attention of David Garrick, who introduced her to many of the leading personalities of the day, including Dr. Samuel Johnson. She continued her seasonal visits to London but became increasingly dissatisfied with its worldliness and frivolity. In 1789, at the urging of William Wilberforce, she began a school in Cheddar, one of twelve that eventually dotted the Mendip Hills in the west of England. The primary object of study was the Bible; her primary purpose, to improve the moral conduct of both the children and the adults, most of whom could not even read. She spent the rest of her life writing tracts, pamphlets, and, at least one novel — all of them moral, if not religious, in nature. She died in 1833 in Clifton, then a suburb of Bristol.

In her 2002 book on More, *In Praise of Poverty*, Mona Scheuerman convincingly argues that More's motives for writing her *Cheap Repository Tracts* were political.[1] More, she says, was attempting to persuade England's poor both that they, not the British government, were responsible to improve their living conditions and that hard work and better domestic economy were the means to accomplish this goal. Thus, they were to do what they could to ameliorate their lot and refrain from attempting to change the political *status quo*. In other words, they were not to imitate the violent revolutionary behaviour of their French counterparts. To prove her point, Scheuerman quotes extensively from More's letters, both published and unpublished. While More's correspondence leaves no doubt that her political views prompted her to write the *Tracts*, a further study of her letters shows that an equally strong incentive, not only for these publications but for all her actions, was religious. Indeed for More, as for most women in her society, particularly unmarried ones, 'beliefs and religious practices were central.'[2] Thus, whether or not the reader agrees with More's religious beliefs and practices relative to the poor and poverty or any other issue, they must be taken into account if one is to understand and appreciate

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2003.tb06318.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

this complex, long-lived literary and religious figure.

Hannah More was a lifelong Anglican, and, as she grew older, she embraced the ideals of Evangelicalism — indeed, she numbered among her many correspondents most of the Clapham Sect.[3] Surprisingly, however, when one studies her journals and the letters she wrote and received, one is struck by similarities between her religious beliefs and practices and some of the essential characteristics of Dominican life. References and allusions to several elements of Dominicanism — preaching and teaching the Word, study, and prayer — abound in More's correspondence. Furthermore, the letters testify to her struggle to balance contemplation with action, solitude with society. Finally, they reveal her and her correspondents' profound sense that she has been chosen to be an instrument in God's hands. In another time and place, she might have had a Catholic, Dominican vocation.

That the Scriptures, particularly the Gospels, were the foundation upon which More structured her life and work is everywhere apparent in her life and correspondence. Letters to and from her are peppered with Scriptural references, many of which identify her with Biblical characters and episodes. For example, her friend, Sir William Weller Pepys, in a letter dated 1809, affirms that her writings reflect the good 'use to which you have put your Ten Talents.'[4] Her friend and spiritual companion, Rev. John Newton, a converted slaveship captain and writer of the hymn 'Amazing Grace,' in three letters associates More with Christ, the Good Shepherd. In a 1794 letter, he first addresses her and her four sisters as 'shepherdesses,' to whose care the 'Great Shepherd' entrusted 'the sheep and lambs in [their] pasture.'[5] He concludes another letter, dated September 8, 1796, with the prayer: 'May the great Shepherd bless all your sheep and lambs [her students], and feed you that you may feed them! and while he makes you as a spring of water for the benefit of others, may your own soul be a watered garden, in which every plant of his grace may grow and flourish abundantly. Amen.' Again, six months later, he commends her 'to the guidance of our great Shepherd. May his presence comfort your heart, and his blessing crown all your labours of love for his sake' (Roberts 3:10). In a similar fashion, More's friend, William Wilberforce, comforting her in one of her many illnesses, commends her to the 'Mercy of our great Shepherd.'[6]

But More and her correspondents also identify her with the *suffering* Christ, as well as with other Biblical victims in several letters written between 1800 and 1802, when she was involved in the 'Blagdon Controversy.' This much-publicized war of words began when Rev. William Bere, curate of Blagdon, accused More of hiring a Methodist

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2003.tb06318.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

schoolmaster to teach in his village school. Bere subsequently accused her of attempting to have him removed from his curacy. Because of her fame as a literary figure and religious educator, this controversy gave rise to numerous publications either attacking or defending her. So distraught was she over these attacks that she eventually closed her school in the village.[7] In an 1801 letter to William Wilberforce, she laments over Blagdon as Jesus had over Jerusalem: 'How shall I give thee up Ephraim,' is my frequent exclamation, as I walk in my garden, and look at the steeple and village of Blagdon. ... . 'I cannot help mourning for our Jerusalem' (Roberts, 3:148-149). Her friend Newton alludes to the crucified Christ when he advises her to 'pray for and pity her accusers 'who know not what they do' (Roberts, 3:153). He opens that same letter applying one of the Beatitudes to her plight: 'Blessed are ye when men revile and persecute you, and speak all manner of evil against you *falsely* and for *my name's sake*,' suggesting that she should be congratulated rather than consoled on her 'unjust treatment' (Roberts, 3:152). That she felt wounded by the accusations of Rev. Bere and his supporters is apparent in a letter she writes to Wilberforce in the heat of the controversy. She begins this 1801 letter comparing herself to Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted. In her case, however, her 'lamentation and mourning' result not from the children's death but from her separation from them and the ban forbidding her to instruct them (Roberts, 3:144). Later in the same letter, alluding to the victim in the parable of the Good Samaritan, she assures Wilberforce that his letter consoles her like the 'wine and oil' poured into 'fresh and raw' wounds (Roberts, 3:145).

Preaching and teaching

While More's correspondence, creating her in the image and likeness of both Old and New Testament figures, bears witness to her grounding in Scripture, it also portrays her as a preacher. Not a pulpit preacher, she nevertheless proclaims the Word. As early as 1786, Dr. George Horne, the Bishop of Norwich, writes that while he 'can tell people their duty from the pulpit . . . . you have the art to make them desirous of performing it' (Roberts, 2: 38). Another of her episcopal friends, Beilby Porteus, Bishop of London, twice writes of her preaching skill, particularly to the rich and famous: in a 1793 letter, he affirms that she 'cannot only read, but also write, and even preach to the great world more eloquently than most clergywomen' (Roberts, 2: 364). And two years later, referring to her *Cheap Repository Tracts*, he praises her evangelizing efforts in behalf of the poor and affirms that her 'poetic sermons will do more good to your simple cottagers than all our dull

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2003.tb06318.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

prosaic compositions put together'(Roberts, 2: 364). That these compliments helped convince More that she was a preacher, however unworthy, is apparent from a letter she wrote in 1800 to an unnamed curate serving the village of Axbridge, where she had opened a school. Evidently the young man had asked More for her opinions about faith and religious conversion. In her answer, she outlines the steps a preacher should take in his spiritual journey, beginning with the advice that he 'trust in Christ and [...] preach him, not as our *Redemption* only [...] but as our *Sanctification* also'(Roberts, 3:119). Her concluding remarks indicate that her letter is, in fact, a sermon, one that she is self-conscious about and unworthy of delivering: 'I am so very conscious of numberless defects in my own practice, and of feebleness in my own faith, that I feel deeply how little it becomes me to be a preacher' (Roberts, 3:120).

If More questioned her efficacy as preacher, she was also critical of the sermons of others. In a 1797 letter to the Duchess of Gloucester, which itself takes on the tone of a sermon, she avers that many preachers lack the insight and perspicuity of the One whose message they proclaim. 'I think,' she writes, 'one grand defect in many of our preachers, and one reason [...] why they do so little good, is, that they do not attentively and accurately study human nature. One very distinguishing attribute of the great and Divine Preacher was [...] that 'he knew what was in man' (Roberts, 2:480).

Later in the letter, she figuratively ascends the pulpit, to deliver her interpretation of the Gospel:

> [T]here is no real goodness where there is no religion, and [...] there is no true religion but that religion which the gospel exhibits. I do not mean that any human being (with all those frailties and imperfections which still impede the best) can act up to the perfect pattern exhibited there. [...] But I must contend that every real Christian will endeavour to act on the *principle*, and in the *spirit* of the religion of Christ. (Roberts, 2:480-481)

She goes on to describe what a 'man' is to strive after in order to become a 'real Christian':

> He must labour after genuine piety and goodness, not for the praise of men, but for the glory of God. He must keep before his eyes, and labour after, a degree of perfection, which, however, he knows he shall never be able to attain. A continual sense of his many failings will serve to maintain him in humility, — the basis of all true religion. (Roberts, 2:481)

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This admonitory description, which could easily be applied to the writer herself, stretches the limits of a familiar letter, particularly one to a titled correspondent, More confesses. Her letter draws to a close with her apology for '[venturing] to touch so seriously and so largely on subjects which are generally [...] thought too solemn for letters' (Roberts, 2:482). But before More concludes, she cannot resist complimenting the Duchess for her belief in the 'power of intercessory prayer,' which, More assures her, 'is clearly a scriptural injunction' (Roberts, 2: 482–483).

In an earlier letter, written in 1795 to one of her sisters, More describes a visit she had paid to this same Duchess, during which she assumed the role of evangelist. Whether she was preaching to an audience of one or merely instructing, she was certainly exercising her powers of evangelization, for she engaged in 'two hours of solid, rational religious conversation,' during which she said 'stronger things of a religious kind than perhaps [the Duchess] had ever heard' (Roberts, 2: 432). Indeed, More writes, she emphasized to her hostess the 'strictness of the gospel.'

Another method More used to instruct was her literary works. While most of her works are obviously didactic, one in particular is noteworthy for its Scriptural base. *Sacred Dramas* (1782), as its name implies, casts several Old Testament stories in dramatic form. Several years after its publication, when More had begun to establish her village schools, a fellow teacher, Sarah Trimmer, wrote to More paying tribute to the effectiveness of this literary effort. Trimmer praised the *Sacred Dramas* as 'so extremely engaging to young minds, and [their] sentiments so agreeable to scripture, that they cannot fail of producing the happiest effects' (Roberts, 2: 60). Likewise, a later publication of More's, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) elicited praise for her teaching abilities. Her London bluestocking friend, Mrs. Chapone, complimented her for practicing 'the art of pleasing and entertaining, whilst you instruct, and even whilst you rebuke' (Roberts, 3: 67). *Strictures* also prompted another bluestocking, Elizabeth Carter, to label More 'an example and an instructor to the world' (Roberts, 3: 67).

More did more than just write instructive texts, however. She began a number of village schools in the west of England. At the urging of her friend Wilberforce, who was appalled by the poverty and ignorance of the inhabitants of Cheddar, a village near More's country cottage, Cowslip Green, More with the help of her youngest sister Patty, became both teacher and administrator. She describes her new challenge at some length to her friend Elizabeth Carter:

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2003.tb06318.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

> [A] friend of mine [Wilberforce] and myself having with great concern discovered a very large village ... .] containing incredible multitudes of poor plunged in an excess of vice, poverty and ignorance beyond what one would suppose possible in a civilized and Christian country have undertaken the task of seeing if we cannot become humble instruments of usefulness to these poor creatures, m the way of schools and a little sort of manufactory. (Roberts, 2:178)

Notwithstanding her somewhat patronizing tone and classist attitude, More set out to teach these villagers sound moral principles and behaviour based on Biblical teaching. A comprehensive explanation of her methodology appears in her long January 1801 letter to Dr. Beadon, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, her 'diocesan.' Primarily a defence of herself in the face of her Blagdon detractors, the letter describes the curriculum of all the schools she had established in the previous thirteen years. She set out to train all the villagers, not just the children, 'in habits of industry and piety,' and 'knew no way of teaching morals but by teaching principles; or of inculcating Christian principles without imparting a good knowledge of scripture' (Roberts, 3:133-134). The texts she used for the children were two: her own 'Questions for the Mendip Schools,' and 'The Church Catechism.' But she also used the 'Psalter, Common Prayer, Testament, and Bible.' Indeed the children learned 'the Sermon on the Mount, with many other chapters and Psalms.' (In another letter written the same year, she specifies those 'other chapters and Psalms' as Luke 15; Genesis 1-3; Isaiah 9 and 53; Psalm 51 (Roberts, 3:150-151).) Surmising that her efforts to teach the children would be in vain because their parents also lacked religious education, More invited 'the latter to come at six on the Sunday evening, for an hour,' during which time a 'plain printed sermon and a printed prayer is read to them, and a psalm is sung' (Roberts, 3:134). So that the villagers might deepen their knowledge of Scripture and its moral principles, More annually gave away 'nearly two hundred Bibles, Common Prayer Books, and Testaments,' for she believed that '[t]o teach the poor to read without providing them with *safe* books, has always appeared to me an improper measure' (Roberts, 3: 134-135). For More's students then, adults and children alike, Scripture was the safest of texts.

While the curate of Blagdon, whose opposition prompted More's apologia to Dr. Beadon, questioned her abilities and orthodoxy, others deemed her educational efforts so successful as to warrant imitation. In 1801 in the midst of the Blagdon Controversy, Wilberforce wrote More requesting her advice on a curriculum for a new school to be established by a friend of his in Yorkshire. Assuring her that 'whatever [she prescribes] will be received as of approved authority,' he wishes her to

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recommend 'any Regulations, & any Tracts &c for Sunday readings.'[8] Affirmation of her schools, where religious instruction was grounded in a 'knowledge of the Bible,' came from several other quarters as well. No less than two bishops, the above mentioned Dr. Beadon and Dr. Barrington, Bishop of Durham, commended More's principles and methods of education in letters written in 1801. These votes of confidence must have relieved the anxiety she had articulated some years earlier in a letter to Elizabeth Carter, to whom she confessed that she considered herself 'so every way unfit to presume to set up for a teacher of others' (Roberts, 2: 252).

Despite More's early self-doubts, she came to see herself as a missionary, not in a foreign land, but in her own country. At the beginning of what we in the twenty-first century would call her 'ministry,' More tellingly introduces her friend Elizabeth Carter to her work in Cheddar with these words: 'While we are sending missionaries to India, our own villages are in Pagan darkness, and upon many of them scarcely a ray of Christianity has shown' (Roberts, 2: 215). India was not the only benighted missionary land More compared to her Somersetshire villages. In a letter to an unnamed friend, she writes that the four villages near Cheddar are 'as dark as Africa,' a condition she feels compelled to change: 'I do not like the thought, that at the day of judgment, any set of people should be found to have perished through ignorance, who were within my possible reach, and only that I might have a little more ease' (Roberts, 2: 306).

Setting up schools, however, was not More's only missionary endeavour. At least one of her correspondents viewed her only novel, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, as a vehicle for enlightening another variety of pagan. James Stephen, brother-in-law of Wilberforce, asserts that this 1809 publication '*translates* practical religion into polished life, for the poor sons and daughters of fashion, and the lovers of romance and novels [emphasis mine].' He draws out his analogy between Britain's upper classes and the unchurched 'Welch and Hindoos,' who require a translation of scripture in order to be saved: 'The barriers of habit and prejudice are hardly less difficult to pass than the seas and deserts which our missionaries traverse for the conversion of pagans' (Roberts, 3:318-319). Thus, More's missionary activity was not confined to the poor of the Mendip hills.

That More was not only supported in her efforts to preach and teach through her literary works as well as through her schools, but was commissioned to do so, is obvious from at least two letters written by clergymen. As early as 1789, Dr. Home, then the Bishop of Canterbury, authorizes her to continue her literary 'ministry':

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> And for yourself, Madam, go on, by your writings and conversation, to entertain and improve the choicest spirits of a learned age, and show them how glorious it is to reflect on all around us the light that falls on our own minds from that sun, which never goes down, but will burn and shine on for ever, when the luminaries of the firmament shall be extinguished and the created heaven and earth shall be no more. (Roberts, 2: 204)

Seven years later, Rev. Newton affirms and bolsters her sense of vocation when he writes in more familiar terms:

> I cannot wonder that a sense of the love of Jesus to you should constrain you, as it does, to devote all your time, and talents, and influence, to his service. [...] I believe [...] he singled you out, and raised you up, to be eminently useful in your day; and that your example [...] might force conviction on the minds of infidels and gainsayers. (Roberts 2: 464-465)

More herself obviously sensed a call to serve God, for as early as 1789, she writes to her Deist friend, Horace Walpole, that she hopes 'to be made an humble though unworthy instrument of being a *little* useful' to alleviate the 'want, misery, and ignorance' she discovered at Cheddar.[9] Though he did not share her religious beliefs or fervour, his final letters testify to his recognition of her vocation. He knows that 'all [her] moments are [...] dedicated to goodness, and to unwearied acts of benevolence,' (Walpole, 31: 391) and that her 'indefatigable benevolence is incessantly occupied in good works' (Walpole, 31:395) His ultimate testimony to her life's work appears in the words he inscribed in the Bible that he bequeathed her on his death. It reads: 'To his excellent friend MISS HANNAH MORE this Book which he knows to be the dearest object of her study, and by which, to the great comfort and relief of numberless individuals she has profited beyond any person with whom he is acquainted, is offered as a mark of esteem and gratitude' (Walpole, 31: 399).

Study

While the Bible was the 'dearest object' of More's study, it was not the only one. Religious texts of all sorts interested her. Despite occasional apologies for her inability to do her spiritual reading because of her school responsibilities, her own writing, and her many visitors, correspondence with her many Evangelical friends abound with reports of and reflections on the books, tracts, and sermons she has purchased or been sent. In a letter to Wilberforce in 1791, she expresses her

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enthusiastic longing for 'Howe's Treatise *on delighting in God* [sic], the title of which she says 'gets one an appetite [...] to get [a copy].'[10] In her 1801 letter to Bishop Beadon she mentions 'old writers' like Richard Hooker and Bishops Hall and Hopkins, whom she admires 'for their devout spirit, their deep views of Christianity, their practical piety, and their holy vigilance' (Roberts, 3:129-130). In a similar vein, she comments on an unnamed book Rev. Newton has sent her: 'I was so pleased with the candour, good sense, and Christian spirit of it, that I never laid it out of my hands while there was a page unread' (Roberts, 2: 64). Indeed, on one of her first meetings with Newton, she writes to her sister from London, 'I have been into the city to hear good Mr. Newton preach; and afterwards went and sat an hour with him, and came home with two pockets full of sermons,' which she presumably read (Roberts, 2: 54). She even recommends to her non-religious correspondents books that have influenced her spirituality, for in another letter to her sister, she reports that she suggested that Walpole read William Law's *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (Roberts, 2:435). So conversant was she with devotional reading that her friend, Pepys, in his old age, asks her to recommend other texts besides Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying* that she has found 'most convincing on that subject' (Gaussen, 2: 309). And while her religious reading focused on Protestant texts, she was open-minded enough to accept from Thomas Clifford, a Roman Catholic, a 'work by Mr. Nightingale [giving...] the fairest & fullest account of the religious tenets of the Roman Catholics,' a work she assured him she would read 'with Christian candour.'[11]

Although religious texts constituted the bulk of More's thoughtful study, she also indulged in less devotional reading. Walpole sent her volumes from his Strawberry Hill Press for her library at Cowslip Green, one of which, his *Castle of Otranto*, she had requested.[12] In addition, from his extensive collection, he lent her French books, like Christine de Pisan's *La Cité des dames* and several volumes of *Collection universelle des mémoires particuliers relatifs à l'histoire de France*. In turn, she recommended that he read Anna Laetitia Barbauld's 'fine verses,' *Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq., on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade*, an invitation he declined (Walpole, 31: 357-361). Because he knew that abolition was a cause dear to More's heart, he had previously sent her *The Botanic Garden*, by Erasmus Darwin, 'a bard espousing [her] poor Africans' (Walpole, 31: 293). But she disliked the verses and wished that instead of describing the 'weal or woe of plants [...] they [would have] related the history, or analysed the passions or manners of men and women, the only people in whom, after all, with their faults, I take any interest' (Walpole, 31: 295).

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This last remark suggests that human nature and literature that revealed its workings were, in addition to the Bible and other religious texts, objects of More's study. It is not surprising, then, that biographies, published letters, and histories interested her. In 1796 she writes to her sister that she is 'reading the life of Gibbon,' even though she had read 'with disgust' some years earlier his 'pompous' *History of the Roman Empire* (Roberts, 2: 473, 137). She also dislikes, she writes to Alexander Knox, a biography of her deceased friend, Elizabeth Carter, because its author has omitted references to her friend's 'piety and learning' (Roberts, 3: 314). In contrast, William Cowper's letters, sent to her by their mutual friend, Rev. Newton, 'shew a bright and shining intellect ... .] and let one more intimately into the mind of a man whose writings I have always greatly admired' (Roberts, 2: 471). She also read Mrs. Hester Thrale Piozzi's edition of Samuel Johnson's letters, to which she gave a mixed review, appreciating the 'true letters of friendship' that showed his kindness and goodness, but criticizing those that revealed private details, such as 'every dose of physic he took' (Roberts, 2:100).

While non-fiction constituted much of More's reading, she also appreciated fictional poetry and prose. Her letters are strewn with paraphrases of and inexact quotations from Shakespeare's plays. She writes to Pepys that she has been reading an edition of Don Quixote left to her by Elizabeth Carter (Roberts, 3: 267). She also read the poetry of Sir Walter Scott, of whose *Lady of the Lake*, she was particularly fond because of its beautiful descriptive passages and its delineation of character and incident. Its only drawback, in her opinion, is that it lacks 'religious reference.' For this reason, Scott is inferior to Cowper, Oliver Goldsmith, James Beattie, and John Milton (Roberts, 3: 329). She also seems to have approved of Spenser, for, as she reports to his mother, she allows her godchild, Thomas Babington Macaulay, to read that author's work while he stays with her.[13] Besides poetry, More seems to have approved of novels, at least those that contained 'accurate histories' and 'striking delineations.' Her position can be inferred from a letter written to her in 1799 by Rev. Newton, who chides her for *not* censuring 'the whole race' of novels 'without mercy and without exception,' presumably in her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*. Indeed, she herself wrote one novel, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* in 1809, two years after Newton's death. One wonders whether he would have endorsed her novel, very popular in its own day, but so didactic as to be almost unreadable today.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2003.tb06318.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

Prayer

Just as More's letters are filled with references to her reading, so too do they contain countless requests for prayer. Rev. Newton, who has been called her 'father confessor,' is the recipient of many of these requests, as she seeks to advance in holiness.[14] In 1787, she asks for prayers that she 'may be enabled to obtain more firmness of mind, a more submissive spirit, and more preparedness, not only for death itself, but for the common evils of life. (Roberts, 2: 65).[15] Three years later, she recommends herself to his prayers because she fears that she does not love God 'cordially, effectually, entirely' (Roberts, 2: 232). 15 Her quest for a deeper spiritual life is apparent again in 1796 when she writes: 'Pray for me, my dear Sir, that I may have a more lively faith, a deeper humility, a spirit of more complete self-renunciation; that I may be more dead to the world, and more alive to God' (Roberts 2: 470); and again, a few weeks later, she concludes another letter with, 'when you offer your supplications at the throne of grace for those who most need light, strength, and direction, you will not, I trust, forget Your [sic] faithful and sincere friend' (Roberts, 2: 472).

More's requests for prayers are not confined to her spiritual director, however. She and Wilberforce, who becomes not only a friend but a spiritual companion, exchange requests for prayer. In 1792, he concludes a letter concerning the death of his cousin, with 'I beg to be constantly remeberd [sic] in your prayers.'[16] In his later life, married and with grown children, he begs prayers not only for himself but for his whole family.[17] For her part, in a letter (1794) to him outlining her shortcomings, she asks him to pray that she 'may begin to set my heart on that one thing [God's mercy in Christ Jesus] that will never disappoint' (Roberts, 2: 406-407). She is most in need of his prayers at times of crisis. During the Blagdon Controversy, she asks him to pray that she will receive 'higher and better' consolation than even his letters can administer (Roberts, 3:146). When her youngest and favourite sister, Patty, dies in 1819, she writes that she prays 'to obtain a more simple and entire dependence on [God].'[18] And in 1828, when she thinks she is on the 'verge of eternity' she rather desperately and almost illegibly writes: 'ora pro nobis! [...] oh! the mercies of my God [...] Pray, pray for Your unwell Hannah More.'[19]

If More frequently asks her correspondents for prayers, she also assures them of hers. On the occasion of Wilberforce's wedding, she invites him to bring his bride to Cowslip Green for their honeymoon and closes the letter 'heartily recommending' them to 'the especial favour of God.'[20] When he is taking the waters at Bath in 1798, she writes that she asks God to grant him strength 'to go thro [sic] your important labours

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and to give you in abundance the comforts of the Spirit.'[21] And on the occasion of his re-election to Parliament in 1807, she prays that 'divine grace' will 'carry' him peacefully and safely through the rest of his earthly 'pilgrimage.'[22] Another family man, who is the recipient of More's prayers, particularly in his later years, is William Pepys. Receiving news of his children in 1817, she writes: 'God has indeed crowned you with blessings. [...] May He multiply upon you his spiritual blessings, which will remain with us when all earthly comfort fail' (Roberts, 4: 9). Besides her regular correspondents, she also prays for less intimate acquaintances. Writing to a Rev. Mr. Collinson, who has sent her an analysis of Richard Hooker's writings, she utters the 'best prayer' she can offer: 'May it please God to give you his grace, that you may fill your important station with zeal and faithfulness to the souls of those committed to your trust' (Roberts, 3: 401). She also concludes several of her letters to Charles Ogilvie, an Oxford student who was ordained in 1817, with prayers for his success.[23]

More numerous than the prayers found in More's letters are those written in her journals. These more private prayers provide deeper insights into her spiritual development. Reading excerpts from her 1794 journal, one is struck by her sense of her sinfulness and her desire to grow in virtue. In her one-sided dialogue with her God, she laments her vanity and folly and prays for increased 'deadness to reputation' (Roberts, 2:413-414). Seeking escape from the world's vexations, she regrets that she experiences sloth, self-love, and 'languor' instead of a prayerful retirement, devoted to self-improvement (Roberts, 2: 414). She confesses that she neglects regular self-examination and is distracted by 'vain, trifling, and worldly thoughts' (Roberts 2: 420). She prays to be 'purified' — that she might turn her thoughts away from 'business [...] though it is all of a charitable and religious nature,' toward God instead (Roberts, 2: 415). She finds herself 'lamentably defective' in her '*family prayer*,' failing to be impressed by what others read. She also prays to persevere in her ministry. She asks the Lord to bless her every 'attempt to spread the knowledge of thyself' (Roberts 2: 417). In the course of a lengthy prayer of thanksgiving for her success in setting up and running her schools, she prays that 'when I visit the poor, I am enabled to mitigate some of their miseries' (Roberts, 2: 419).

By 1803, her journal prayers reflect not only her continued sense of her sinfulness and of her vocation, but also her resignation to her opponents' slander and to her aging and increasingly infirm condition. On New Year's Day, she prays:

> O Lord, grant that I may be more fixed in my thoughts, more frequent in self-examination, more heedful of the emotions of my own mind,

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more mindful of death. ... .] O Lord, I resolve to begin this year with a solemn dedication of myself to thee. (Roberts, 3:188)

Receiving a letter from her old friend, Mrs. Boscawen, who requests her prayers, More reflects that little does her correspondent know how much she herself, a 'poor, erring, sinful creature' needs them (Roberts, 3:192). On the occasion of her birthday, she reviews God's blessings and prays for a renewed sense of repentance and 'holy obedience' (Roberts, 3:194). Having visited her schools after a bout of illness, she asks God to 'sanctify' her work. When she is accused of 'disaffection' toward those to whom she ministers, she responds: 'O how thankful am I, that I can now hear [these] charges with patience! May I more and more learn of Him who was meek and lowly — may I with humble reverence, reflect that even that divine and perfect Being was accused of sedition, and of stirring up the people' (Roberts, 3: 203). In one of her last entries, she asks that she might 'prepare for that period of pain, and weariness, and imbecility, which must be the attendants of that old age which is approaching' (Roberts, 3: 211). These and many other uncited selections from her journal, though they sometimes smack of scrupulosity, testify to the centrality of prayer — public and private, meditative and intercessory — in the life of Hannah More.

Action and Contemplation; Solitude and Society

Another recurrent theme in More's correspondence and journals is her struggle to balance action — teaching, writing, and providing hospitality for friends and admirers — with contemplation, or as she calls it, meditation. She is torn between withdrawing from the world and acting as an instrument for its moral betterment. Having lived in Bristol most of her life, with yearly sojourns in London during the season beginning in 1774, More decided in 1785 to have built 'a little cottage [Cowslip Green] devoted to simplicity, and from which aspiring thoughts and luxurious desires are to be entirely excluded' (Roberts, 1: 386). The next year she writes to her friend Pepys, confessing that though she had 'talked of living *quietly*,' she has so many kind and friendly neighbours 'that I am very far from enjoying that perfect retreat which I had figured to myself' (Roberts, 2: 41). During the summers of 1787 and 1788, however, she seems to have experienced the retreat that she desired. In letters to her sister, Elizabeth Carter, Horace Walpole, and Rev. Newton, she expresses her contentment with her 'thatched hermitage,' where she reads, gardens, and sometimes merely looks out the window. She even refuses several invitations to travel to Kent, because the 'attractions of [her] thatched cottage are more irresistible than all [its] splendour'

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2003.tb06318.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

(Roberts, 2: 58). But by 1789, she is experiencing frustration. In a letter to Walpole in the autumn of that year, confessing that she has been hostess to Mrs. Montagu (a fellow bluestocking), Mrs. Garrick (David's widow) and Wilberforce, she wittily reports that, despite all my fantastic dreams of hermitage and retreat [...], anything less like a hermit, or more like a dissipated fine lady, you cannot easily conceive' (Walpole, 31: 321). After her visitors leave, however, she returns to life as a 'perfect hermit, enjoying complete solitude, with such casual interruptions as make a grateful vicissitude' and remembering 'a few wise, and good, and pleasant friends' (Roberts, 2:176).

Even when More submits to her friends' entreaties to visit them, she eschews their local entertainments. In a 1789 letter to Mrs. Boscawen, written from Salisbury Palace, the bishop's residence, she expresses her desire to 'explore, in many a sauntering reverie, the gothic elegance of this beautiful church, and to smooth the ruffled wing of contemplation in its sober cloisters' instead of joining her friends' 'evening amusements' (Roberts, 2:197). When she goes to London in the spring of 1790, she expresses her dissatisfaction with the city and its diversions, where 'everything is great, and vast, and late, and magnificent, and dull' (Roberts, 2: 220-221). She quickly retreats to the 'absolute retirement and total sequestration' of Cowslip Green, where 'I live [...] in so much quiet and ignorance, that I know no more of what is passing among mankind, than of what is going on in the planet Saturn (Walpole, 31: 340).

More retired to Cowslip Green not because she valued solitude for its own sake, but because she hoped her retreat would provide her with the opportunity to grow closer to God. Her journal of 1794 provides insights into her spiritual struggles. Caring for her schools now, she records on July 13, 'Prayed with some comfort; but my mind was too much in other concerns. Have much business on my hands [...] and though it is all of a charitable and religious nature, [...] yet still the detail of it draws away my soul and thoughts from God' (Roberts, 2: 415). A month later, she laments: 'this week I have not made the most of my time; vain thoughts and old besetting sins begin to resume their power. Lord! enable me to pray more, to struggle more, to live in closer communion with thee' (Roberts, 2: 416). In September, during a bout with illness, she writes that her thoughts wander and she experiences 'little communion with God' (Roberts, 2: 416). Later that month, however, she experiences some consolation of spirit: 'Read and prayed with some degree of comfort, which was invaded by the reflection that we might have been doing good at the schools. For some days have found more comfort in prayer, more warmth and spirit' (Roberts, 2:

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417). A few days later, she continues in the same vein:

> When will my heart be a fit tabernacle for the Spirit of purity? Have lately had much communion with God in the night. I grow, I hope, more disposed to convert silence and solitude into seasons of prayer. [...] I endeavour to convert my retirements to holy purposes at this time.
>
> (Roberts, 2: 418)

As the years passed, More's spiritual struggles continued. In 1802 she moved to a new home, Barley Green, which she had built for herself and her four sisters, who had retired from teaching school in Bristol. By this time, she had become aware that her religious and charitable activities were as important as her spiritual reading and meditation. In fact, now she worried that she spent too much time on the latter and not enough on the former. In a journal entry dated Jan. 5, 1803, she writes: 'I fear I am become more intent on reading scripture and cultivating retirement, than willing to advance others. I have hitherto erred on the other side' (Roberts, 3:190). Her realization that action was as necessary as contemplation is again apparent in an April entry of the same year. In it she laments the passing of 'one of my oldest friends, Mr. L_____,who 'renounced worldly society and reading' and became 'much given up to secret devotion, devout meditation, and thoughtful intercourse with his Maker,' but who 'left off all public worship' and 'took no active part in society.' She admits to admiring him but does not wish to imitate him because 'he brought little glory to God, and was less useful to mankind than his talents, his virtues, and his fortune ought to have made him' (Roberts, 3:199-200).

Even in her later years, More experienced the tension between society and solitude. At the age of 70, in a letter to Alexander Knox, she looks back on her time at Barley Wood:

> It is now many years since I built and planted this pretty little place, and voluntarily turned my back upon the gay, the great, and the brilliant, in whose society I had spent near thirty years. I had then, I thought, completed my scheme of retirement which I had enjoyed in fancy and anticipated in vision all my life. But the day dream has never been realized; my interruptions from company, many of them strangers, are almost incessant. (Roberts, 3: 462-463).

Six years later, she half jokingly tempers a similar complaint in a letter to Zachary Macaulay: 'I have been lately suffering [not physically but] in another way more than ever — from company. It is a sad life.[...] With so few sands remaining in my glass I ought to have more time to myself.' But she consoles herself with the knowledge that her company

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'are indeed, generally, truly religious persons, or such as desire to become so.'[24] Indeed, bishops and clergymen from all over the world — Ireland, Scotland, Canada, the United States, India — made pilgrimage to the home of Hannah More.

Despite her desire for solitude and a hermitage, More spent most of her life with 'truly religious persons' — her four unmarried sisters. As a young woman, she, her sister, Sally, and her youngest sister, Patty, taught in the school her two eldest sisters, Mary and Betty, had established in Bristol. Though her sisters remained in Bristol while she spent several 'seasons' in London and lived at Cowslip Green, when the time for their retirement came, she had Barley Green built large enough to accommodate them all. Indeed most of her correspondents recognize her sisters' significance in her life because they conclude their letters asking her, with more than the customary politeness, to give 'kind remembrances' to the other four. Wilberforce even refers to them in several of his letters as 'the Sisterhood'. And though More's letters only occasionally describe details of their life together — their family prayer, the illnesses that plague all of them, and eventually accounts of their deaths it is clear that they were her constant support. It would not be exaggerating to call the five More sisters a community of faith.

While Hannah More, a staunch adherent of the Church of England, would rebel at the idea that she was 'Dominican', and Dominicans, in their turn, would be disturbed by her classist attitudes to the poor, whom she taught to read but not write, nevertheless, her correspondence and journals reveal that her life exemplified several Dominican values. The Scriptures were the centre of her life, a life dedicated to spreading its Truth, in her schools, in her published works, and even m her letters. Bishops and clergymen considered her a preacher, though she never ascended a pulpit. While the Bible was the central object of her study, she read voraciously and critically, not only religious texts but also those that provided her with insights into human nature. Prayer, too, was a mainstay of her life. She and the teachers she appointed conducted communal prayer in her schools; family prayer was a daily occurrence at Barley Wood. In private, she sought deeper communion with her God. She prayed for others and asked for their prayers in return — prayers for strength, for perseverance, for worthiness to be an instrument in the hand of God. As she prayed to be useful in spreading the Word and in reforming herself and her society, she strove to balance action with contemplation, solitude with society. With her four sisters, she formed a religious community of sorts. Preaching and teaching the Word, studying, praying, living community, balancing contemplation and action — all are hallmarks of a Dominican way of life.

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1 Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2002.
2 Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England 1660-1850* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2001),143.
3 This term refers to a group of Evangelical Anglicans who resided near Clapham Common beginning in the 1790's. The group included William Wilberforce, Henry Thornton, Edward Eliot, Charles Grant, Thomas Babington, Zachary Macaulay, James Stephen, brother-in-law of Wilberforce, and Lord Teignmouth. Of this group, Wilberforce was More's closest friend and confidant.
4 Alice C. C. Gaussen, ed., *A Later Pepys: The Correspondence of William Weller Pepys*, (London: John Lane, 1904), 2: 301. (All subsequent references to this text will be to this edition.)
5 William Roberts, ed., *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, 3rd ed. (London, 1835), 2: 407–408.
6 Bodleian Library, MS. Wilberforce c. 48, fo.3.
7 For a more comprehensive account of the Blagdon Controversy, see Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 232-257.
8 Bodleian Library, MS. Wilberforce d. 15/2, fo. 239.
9 *W. S. Lewis, ed., Horace Walpole's Correspondence with Hannah More* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1961), 31: 334. (All subsequent references to this text will be to this edition.)
10 Bodleian Library, MS. Wilberforce c.3, fo. 244. I have not been able to trace this text.
11 British Library, MS. Leff. Add. 63090, fos. 164, 165.
12 See his letter of July 19, 1785 in his *Correspondence*, 31: 233.
13 British Library, MS. Leff. Add 63094, fo. 8.
14 Charles Howard Ford, *Hannah More: A Critical Biography* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 53.
15 As her spiritual adviser, he reassures her: 'They who think they love him enough, certainly do not love him aright; and a jealousy lest our love should not be cordial, effectual, and entire, is rather a favourable sign than otherwise; and is not peculiar to you, but is experienced at times by all who have spiritual life' (Roberts, 2: 239).
16 Bodleian Library, MS. Wilberforce d. 15/2, fo. 172.
17 See Bodleian Library, MS. Wilberforce c. 48, fo. 41.
18 Bodleian Library, MS. Wilberforce c. 48, fo. 22.
19 Bodleian Library, MS. Wilberforce d. 14, fos. 48-49.
20 Bodleian Library. MS. Wilberforce c. 3, fo. 32.
21 Bodleian Library, MS. Wilberforce c. 3, fo. 46.
22 Bodleian Library, MS. Wilberforce c. 3, fo. 90.
23 See Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. Lett. d. 124, passim.
24 Arthur Roberts, ed., *Letters of Hannah More to Zachary Macaulay* (London, 1860), 180-181.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2003.tb06318.x Published online by Cambridge University Press