

The Effects of the Evangelical Reformation Movement on Jane Austen and Charlotte
Brontë as Observed in *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to clarify how the authors incorporated their theological beliefs in their writing to more clearly discover, although modern audiences often enjoy both authors, why Charlotte Brontë was unimpressed with Jane Austen. The thesis is an examination of the ways in which Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë interact with the Evangelical Reformation within the Anglican Church in their novels *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre*, respectively. Both authors, as daughters of Anglican clergymen, were aware of and influenced by the movement, but at varying degrees. This project begins with a brief explanation of the state of the Anglian Church and beginnings of the Evangelical Reformation. The thesis then examines George Austen's influence on his daughter and the characters and text of *Mansfield Park* to observe the ways in which traditional Anglicanism and tenets of Evangelicalism are discussed in the novel, revealing more clearly where Austen's personal beliefs aligned. Similarly, the project then analyzes Patrick Brontë's influence on Charlotte Brontë and evaluates the characters and text of *Jane Eyre* to mark the significance of the Evangelical movement on Charlotte Brontë. After studying these works and religious components of their lives, the thesis argues that Austen's traditionally Anglican subtlety with the subject of religion did not appeal to Brontë's passion for the subject, clearly inspired by the Evangelical Reformation.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Charlotte Brontë was unimpressed with the writing of Jane Austen, which is surprising as the audience for one author usually also enjoys the other author as well. Although the specific reason for Brontë's distaste for Austen is unknown, this thesis proposes that Brontë disagreed with how Austen portrayed Evangelicalism. Both Brontë and Austen were Anglican clergymen's daughters, and they both grew up with an awareness of the Evangelical Reformation occurring in the Anglican Church. Brontë was influenced by the movement more, which this thesis shows after first outlining the Evangelical Reformation, exploring Austen's relationship with it and how it appears in *Mansfield Park*, and then examining Brontë's relationship with the Reformation and how it appears in *Jane Eyre* as well. This thesis contains brief historical and biographical sketches of the authors and their families, literary examinations of the novels *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre* to study how the authors interacted with the Evangelical ideals, and an analysis that looks at faith in these two novels in a comparative way to explain why Brontë might have disagreed with and therefore disliked Austen's writing.

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Introduction:

Not often can you read an author's body of work and confidently identify that author's religious belief or political view; in more cases, you find critiques of culture within those works. By finding these critiques through close textual analysis and by applying any historical knowledge of the author, it is possible to begin understanding what the author believed in. It is important to do this particular detective work because modern audiences often miss important themes within novels written during a different time period because they are unsure of the religious or political climate of the time – by missing out on that context, many carefully crafted themes and critiques are lost on these audiences. Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë are just two authors whose bodies of works were shaped by a specific cultural climate, and modern scholars often disagree or study their works through different lenses, leading to a variety of ways for one to read the texts.

Charlotte Brontë was known to be unimpressed by the world which Jane Austen created in *Pride and Prejudice*; in a letter to W.S. Williams in 1850, Brontë critiqued Austen because “She no more, with her mind's eye, beholds the heart of her race than each man, with bodily vision, sees the heart in his heaving breast,” and finally remarked that “Jane Austen was a complete and most sensible lady, but a very incomplete and rather insensible (not senseless) woman” (Brontë qtd.

Kinkead-Weekes 399). I wonder, however, had she read *Mansfield Park* instead she might have felt differently, especially as the novel deals with a more serious topic of ordination. Contemporary audiences enjoy both authors, but I am curious to know why Charlotte Brontë did not like Jane Austen and whether the latter would have the same issues with the former. Both authors weave into their novels different religious themes

and critiques as well as classical values and Christian principles, and by examining these components, the differences between the authors' beliefs may lead to the reason Brontë disliked Austen.

My thesis will examine how textual analysis of *Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë can offer a small window of understanding into the state of their personal belief systems and political views. By examining these, we can be surer of the social critiques their works offer, thus coming closer to understanding their religious views and avoiding missing critical meaning within the texts.

One of the major cultural phenomena of the decades when Austen and then Brontë were writing was the Evangelical Reformation Movement. While the country of England itself was going through this particular moment in the Church of England's ever-changing theology, both Austen and Brontë grew up as clergymen's daughters. They would have both been aware of the spiritual reformation as it would have influenced George Austen's and Patrick Brontë's jobs, sermons, and day-to-day lives. Both clergymen's daughters weave specific spiritual components and characters into their novels, so I believe one could determine where they fell spiritually as a result of this Evangelical Reformation. As they lived and wrote at different moments on the timeline of this movement, its impact on them reflected that difference.

Within my thesis, I will attempt to discover the effects of this religious movement on Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë to better understand the world in which they were writing. Following this introduction to my topic and methods of examination, my thesis will include a literature review, a chapter on information about Anglicanism and the Evangelical movement, an Austen chapter studying her life as well as a textual analysis

of *Mansfield Park*, a Brontë chapter looking at her life and *Jane Eyre*, and finally, a conclusion. My literature review will familiarize my audience on the types of scholarly conversations and disputes regarding this specific topic. The chapter on the Evangelical movement will act as a timeline and jumping off point in determining the theology and doctrines of George Austen and Patrick Brontë. The Austen chapter will focus on close textual analysis of *Mansfield Park* and those primary sources, such as Austen's letters, that will offer evidence in support of a specific ideology. Likewise, the Brontë chapter will include textual analysis of *Jane Eyre* and primary documents supporting her ideology. Finally, my conclusion will tie the work together and hopefully answer whether it's possible that Charlotte Brontë's dislike of Jane Austen was due to theological differences regarding Evangelicalism as represented in their novels and the manner of which those differences come across in their work.

I will use a variety of methods to conduct my study and answer the questions that my research has prompted. One of the specific critical lenses I will use is that of New Historicism. By examining and understanding the cultural background of the time in which the authors were writing, I can understand the cultural significance of the two plots and their characters. I will also use close readings of textual examples from the novels, letters from Austen and Brontë, and a literature review to explain the current status of this question and supply background information. These methods will allow me to examine the authors' lives and specific works in as detailed and focused a manner as possible.

Chapter 1 – Literature Review

While the topic of religion is often referenced within Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë's works, *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre* have supplied audiences with different readings on the topic from the moments of their respective publications. Although scholars often acknowledge the topic of religion, many disagree on the level and understanding of faith in each of the authors and therefore its influence in their works as well. By studying the scholarship on the Evangelical and Anglican movements at the time and examining Austen and Brontë's religious lives and legacies in their novels, readers can familiarize themselves on the topic of religion in their works and see the need for additional exploration and commentary.

Anglican Beliefs:

Within the Anglican Church (of which both Austen and Brontë were a part as their fathers were Anglian clergymen), an Evangelical movement arose that divided the Church into several sects. Whether or not Austen and Brontë were affected by that Evangelical reformation is heavily discussed within scholarship on the two authors, but it is equally important to understand the Anglican Church to track the differences the Evangelical movement made to the religion throughout the time both authors were writing.

In his article "*Mansfield Park* and the End of Natural Theology," Colin Jager outlines several common beliefs within the Anglican Church, focusing mainly on the concept of natural theology. This theology, rather than using observation as a materialist way to discredit faith in a divine creator, uses nature and observation to do the opposite – to point to a creator. Jager credits natural theology as "the shared theological paradigm of

the formally educated of Austen's day" which provided "the most stable and effective way for organized religion to accommodate the social and intellectual events that occupied the period from Isaac Newton to Charles Darwin" (Jager 31-32).

In addition to natural theology, acceptance of the Great Chain of Being, a medieval belief that the classes were organized in a chain or structure by God, was common. Alistair Mutch comments on this fact in his article "'Shared Protestantism' and British Identity: Contrasting Church Governance Practices in Eighteenth-Century Scotland and England." He attributes the general acceptance of concepts such as these to "the widespread use of the Book of Common Prayer," which Austen was known to travel around with and use to practice her faith (Mutch 456).

Sara Bowen also comments on both natural theology and the Great Chain of Being within her article "Fanny's Future, Mary's Nightmare: Jane Austen and the Clergyman's Wife," commenting on religious upheaval as the nation had switched back and forth between Catholicism and Protestantism and political parties. One effect of this upheaval, Bowen claims, was on clergymen as they often lost their positions; job security was not commonly associated with positions in the clergy until "about one hundred years before Austen began writing" (Bowen 101). Linking together the history of the Anglican clergy, she tracks the social status of the clergy throughout England's history. Bowen also found in her studies that acceptance of the Great Chain of Being was "a crucial tenet of the eighteenth century Church of England," and that "rhapsodies on the stars and the evergreens, which many modern readers treat as eccentric interpolations into the plot, are actually crucial scenes that put *Fanny* squarely in the center of the religious system she and Edmund Bertram share" (Bowen 103). Additionally, the use of reason within the

Anglican Church, much like natural theology, was a link between the Enlightenment and religion. Bowen found that “the use of reason supported religious doctrines” (104).

Austen’s Life and Work:

In terms of scholarship on Jane Austen’s personal faith and on religion in *Mansfield Park*, many authors have opinions, but few have similar arguments. Many scholars focus on the term “ordination” and what Austen could have possibly meant by that when she called *Mansfield Park* her novel of ordination in a letter to her sister Cassandra. Other scholars assign plot points, scenes, and characters to the religious figures in Austen’s own life, while still others care mostly about her theological understanding based on her father and brothers and their clerical stations in the Anglican Church. Scholarship on Austen and her possible beliefs dates back to when her novels were being published, and the theme is still written about today. While this scholarship on the topic contains convincing arguments, Austen’s own subtlety within *Mansfield Park* ensures the perpetual mystery of her faith.

Focusing on Austen’s personal religion, Rowland Grey wrote an article for a journal called *The Bookman* in September of 1930 called “The Religion of Jane Austen.” In this article, Grey uses an analysis of Austen’s Anglican family to hypothesize Austen’s religious beliefs. He credits George Austen with the religious and classical education of his children, proving through an examination of their Christian reputations “that religion was the basis of the education of the Austens” (332). Grey draws conclusions from the family and a close reading of her works but also her own words. He quotes Austen from letters to Miss Sharp and to her niece Fanny Knight, highlighting and dissecting her phrases to conclude that “Her religion was unobtrusive; subtlety was her genius” (334).

From Grey's article and study on her family, there seems to be no doubt as to Austen's faith and reason for writing *Mansfield Park*.

Like Grey, Felicia Bonaparte sees Austen's commentary on the world, especially the religious climate, in *Mansfield Park*. Rather than seeing this commentary as a religious argument, Bonaparte argues in her article "'Let Other Pens Dwell on Guilt and Misery': The Ordination of the Text and the Subversion of 'Religion' in Jane Austen's 'Mansfield Park'" that, rather than its being a novel leading up to Edmund's ordination, "ordination" in this context means a careful reordering of Mansfield Park after disorganization and chaos abound. Bonaparte maintains that instead of taking the novel's 'ordination' theme literally, readers should recognize "fictional invention" in Austen's own mind rather than analyzing her views "as a mirror of the world" (46). She argues that by following the structure of the typical nineteenth century novel, Austen had to incorporate "symbolic realism" which critiques the negative effects of the Enlightenment, especially in terms of religious thought (48).

Similar to Bonaparte, Michael Karounos also focuses on the definition of ordination within *Mansfield Park* in his article "Ordination and Revolution in 'Mansfield Park,'" though rather than using the term to remark on fiction and culture, he uses the breakdown of ordination to prove another point. According to Karounos, in referring to *Mansfield Park* as Austen's novel of "ordination" in a letter to her sister Cassandra, she "applies the concept and mechanism of ordination foremost to the estate of Mansfield Park and to the person of Fanny Price" rather than the ordination of Edmund into the Anglican church (716). To Karounos, "Ordination... is a process of both ordering and ordaining... The concepts of ordination, improvement, and restoration have their

antithetical counterparts in subordination, innovation, and revolution... [and] For there to be an ordering, there must first be a disordering” (716). Within this article, Karounos assigns plot points and characters to their corresponding parts within this concept of ordination. By doing so, *Mansfield Park* becomes less of a religious text and more of a political and secular piece. While this article seems to take the opposite approach of the scholarship with religion as the focus, the idea of Fanny’s ordination lends itself to concepts other scholars have delved into – that Fanny’s faith must become personal, and the novel is about her own metaphorical ordination after going through the phases outlined within Karounos’ article.

In contrast to Karounos, from the beginning of his article “Jane Austen and the Economy of Salvation: Renewing the Drifting Church in *Mansfield Park*,” Michael Giffin staunchly defends the idea that Austen, as a complex author, meant for there to be a commentary on religion in her work. He sees that complexity as “due as much to her theology as it is to our coy sense of her intuition, irony, or small canvas” (18). This article not only mentions the Evangelical Reform Movement of the early-nineteenth century but also suggests that it influenced not only Austen, but her novels as well, citing that influence as the reason why *Mansfield Park* is so different from her earlier works. He suggests that she wrote this particular novel of “ordination” in response to disorder in the church and a “need of spiritual renewal” (18). He also suggests that scholars “suspicious of and resistant to theological texts and subtexts,” therefore skeptical of studying novels through a religious lens, are those more “likely to be dissatisfied with *Mansfield Park*” and of Fanny Price in general (19).

Giffin's article refers to *Mansfield Park* as an allegorical "novel that is essentially about social reform and spiritual renewal," beginning with the fall and disorder into which Mansfield Park descends at the beginning of the novel (19). He analyzes the first few chapters of the novel and ties them into this Christian allegory. His next section comprises an examination of Sir Thomas as an allegorical representation of God the Father "and a critique of enlightenment deism" (21). Following those examples, he moves on to Fanny as a representation of Christ, and finally ends with Edmund as a representation of God the Holy Spirit by highlighting "a worldly church in need of spiritual renewal" (28). Giffin substantiates these claims using examples from the novel.

Appearing to be an interesting combination of Karounos' skepticism of Austen's Evangelicalism and Giffin's acceptance of it, David Monaghan's article "Mansfield Park and Evangelicalism: A Reassessment" argues that while Austen was aware of and influenced by the Evangelical Reform Movement, she used *Mansfield Park* as a vehicle through which to critique a specific sect of that very movement. While he argues that Austen was criticizing "a group of Anglican Evangelicals called the Clapham Sect" by using examples from the text and what the Clapham sect believed, Monaghan also revisits previous conversations about religion within *Mansfield Park* and the Evangelical revival, naming and laying out arguments from scholars as early as the early 1900s. Rather than disagreeing with them or proving their arguments wrong, he focuses more on the "lack of certainty [resulting] more from the failings of the critics than from the intractability of the topic" (216). He cautions against extreme stances on either side of the debate and rather, like Giffin, remarks on the complexity of her writing and plausibility of other readings.

Brontë's Life and Work:

While scholarship appraising the role Austen's faith played on her writing does not reach a consensus, the topic has clearly been of interest for decades and many scholars have interesting readings of the novel *Mansfield Park* when they specifically look at religion. The same can be said for scholarship of Charlotte Brontë. Many scholars read *Jane Eyre* with the intent of determining Brontë's own religious and political stance, and the arguments they put forth in their articles and books offer close textual readings and relevant historical background information to support their claims.

David Jasper introduces the religion surrounding all three of the Brontë sisters in both Haworth and more broadly in Victorian England in his chapter on religion in Marianne Thormahlen's book *The Brontës in Context*. Jasper touches on previous scholars' work, noting a "natural supernaturalism" in *Jane Eyre*, "with its emphasis on life in this world rather than the next, the link between nature and the truly religious and the alleged capacity of religion to repress natural feelings." He also points out the several influences of the Bible and *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as well as the back and forth between religion and Romanticism at the end of the novel most specifically. Jasper argues that all three of the Brontë sisters, though daughters of a clergyman, and in Charlotte's case, a wife of one, had different and unique understandings of the Church and its purpose, as evident in their writing. Jasper uses *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Agnes Grey* to depict the Brontë family's diverse views of clergymen and piety, thus expressing their emotions and feelings on the topic.

While Jasper examines characters from each of the Brontë sisters' works, Jeffery J. Franklin's article "The Merging of Spiritualities: Jane Eyre as a Missionary of Love"

focuses on *Jane Eyre*'s characters only. Within this article, he ascertains that Charlotte Brontë represented spiritual discourse within the Anglican Church through four characters: Mr. Brocklehurst, Helen Burns, St. John, and Jane herself. Brocklehurst is Franklin's stereotypical Calvinist hypocrite, with several passages and examples showing his connection to the Calvinist movement. Helen Burns represents the Evangelical belief of self-sacrifice and personal contact between God and an individual, again with several examples in the text of her words and how they affect and encourage Jane throughout her journey towards understanding faith. St. John presents both Christian piety and a cold, unsympathetic heart. This, Franklin argues, is why his spirit was attracted to but was a bad match for Jane's spirit. Finally, Jane strikes out on her own, deciphering God's call for her life as a personal missionary to Mr. Rochester, who is like the reverse of St. John – not pious but warmhearted. Franklin argues that Jane comes to this understanding of faith through several supernatural elements, culminating in God's call to her attentive soul.

Like Franklin, Robert Francis George sees evidence of the Evangelical movement as well, depicting the topic of the revival as seen and expressed through *Jane Eyre* in his dissertation titled "The Evangelical Revival and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*." While he focuses on three main plot-based components of the story (religion and love in childhood, Jane and God at Thornfield, and the miracle at Moor-house), the dissertation ultimately argues that *Jane Eyre*'s plot is counter-Evangelical in that the characters lack a personal relationship with God.

Conversely, in order to prove that *Jane Eyre* actually did have a personal relationship with God, Emily Griesinger argues in her article "Charlotte Brontë's

Religion: Faith, Feminism, and ‘Jane Eyre’” that by reading *Jane Eyre* through a feminist lens, it becomes apparent that Jane’s individualization in the bildungsroman moves her toward a personal relationship with God. Griesinger briefly goes through the Evangelical Movement that affected the time period in which Charlotte Brontë wrote, how Christianity informed her feminism and why she would have written about Christianity as she did, asking if her own spirituality can be inferred, and whether her feminist impulses to write were at war with her faith. Griesinger argues that these questions can be answered through studying the heroine Jane Eyre. Griesinger begins with an overview on the different Protestant beliefs and examines Patrick Brontë’s own views on Evangelicalism. She then moves on to the next two sections: “The Religion of Charlotte Brontë” and “Faith and Feminism in *Jane Eyre*.” Dividing the research into these categories, she manages to narrow an argument with a larger scope down to specific moments in *Jane Eyre* that support her claim. Griesinger asserts that *Jane Eyre* does not shy away from negative aspects of the church but instead points to the liberation of the gospel by juxtaposing the legalistic with personal relationships with God. She argues that *Jane Eyre* addresses women’s needs, spiritually as well as socially, and finally, that Brontë’s writing contains a complex understanding of God as opposed to the stand against Christianity that many critics see it as.

Maria Lamonaca also sees evidence of evangelicalism in *Jane Eyre* and displays such evidence by presenting the idea that Charlotte Brontë used Christian discourse specifically to push back against traditional feminine ideas in Victorian England. She supports this theory by examining Jane’s reactions to men, both religious and secular, who try to influence her by using Christian vernacular. Lamonaca isolates Jane’s specific

area of temptation, idolatry, and points out the way in which Jane's relationship with God moves her past this sin. Lamonaca argues that Jane can be at peace in her faith only by finding it for herself – a “religion of the heart” – as opposed to being led to God's will by the men in her life. Lamonaca also argues that the female characters, namely Helen Burns and St. John's sisters Diana and Mary, are the people who influence Jane the most positively in regards to faith. Like Griesinger, Lamonaca sees both feminist and Evangelical influences in the novel.

What now:

As each of these scholars present different readings and arguments based on the same two works, *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre* continue to fascinate and inspire critics. Scholarship has up to this point been inconclusive on the possible support and critiques Austen and Brontë offered on Evangelicalism in these novels, but it can be argued that there is a very real need for an examination of the Evangelist Revival as it shaped both Austen and Brontë themselves or at least the world around them. With England's history of spiritual dissension and literature's history of being a means of argument and critique, in order to fully understand the genius of Austen and Brontë, examining the effects of the revival movement on each of them might highlight or clarify differing readings of the texts *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre*.

Chapter 2 – Anglicanism and Evangelicalism

England experienced several upheavals and fractures in the centuries and decades leading up to the times of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë. By then, of course, the Anglican Church was the state church, but even within the Anglican Church there were dissents and denominational differences, especially as time went on. This chapter will outline the multiple views and a brief timeline of the Evangelical reformation within the Anglican Church that impacted both Austen and Brontë on varying levels. Though it would take a thesis in itself to outline all of the movements of the Evangelical Reformation in England, this chapter will address the important factors and people who would affect Austen and Brontë specifically.

Part I: Anglicanism, Division, and Dissent

The Anglican Church was started by Henry VIII after distancing himself from the Catholic Church in Rome in order to divorce Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn. This Church of England retained its Catholic tradition and sacrament but embraced some tenets of Protestantism, appealing to the Early Church and its primitive values. Anglicanism “created a tradition of orthodox, sacramental, sober and learned, biblical, patristic and historical” approach to Christianity (St. John 185). In this way, the Anglican Church was less strict than the Catholic faith but not so ambiguous as to lose its traditional values.

Several issues complicated and fractured the English faith, including the upheaval of switching from Protestantism to Catholicism and back after Henry VIII. Additionally, a growing skepticism and secularization within the people of England, the rise of many churches and doctrines, and the subsequent freedom of choice contributed to fissures

within the Church of England, all of which are topics this chapter will explore. These issues within the Anglian Church led to a decrease in church attendance and, as time went on, the need for a serious church revival grew in response.

The schism between Catholicism and Protestantism put strains on religion from the Early Modern period into well beyond the nineteenth century. Religion went from a unifying, nationalist factor to one of a divisive nature, leading to persecution on both sides, depending on the monarchs in power. According to Penelope J Corfield, “some scholars see the intellectual seeds of secularization in the 16th century following the great schism between Catholicism and Protestantism” (230). As the different monarchs chose the state religion and people had to abandon their beliefs and switch back and forth as well, naturally the hypocrisy and division drove skepticism to new heights.

While this religious upheaval obviously affected the Church of England, or Anglican Church, negatively, as the age of enlightenment and scientific discovery arose, skepticism of the Divine grew with it. Skepticism transitioned into secularism as philosophers, scientists, and intellectuals became disenchanted with a faith-filled outlook and “a rationalist approach to religion became publicly expressed” (Corfield 234). Skeptics instead began to depend on scientific fact and secular ethics; the term ‘secular’ was “coined for a humanist ethics, not dependent on divine sanction” and it became more common for the English public to be dissatisfied with the state of religion, although outright skepticism “was initially shocking and controversial” (230, 235).

Although some were disenchanted with the state religion for these reasons, the church itself was changing as well. Clergymen became not just ministers, but also businessmen. A position in the church was a means for education and future job security,

and the practice of fathers passing their parishes on to their sons was common, as was the case in Jane Austen's family as her brother took over Steventon from their father.

Becoming a clergyman, then, was similar to a prudent business decision to some. Not only were they spiritually responsible for their parish, but "English clergymen, especially towards the end of the eighteenth century, played an increasingly prominent place as justices of peace. This can in turn be linked to enhanced social standing underlined in many cases by generous settlements in enclosure awards" (Mutch 466). Rectors and vicars especially enjoyed generally a high public standing, and a sense of social power, and for those who held more than one church living, to divide their attention between multiple parishes became challenging.

Multiple churches falling under the responsibility of one clergyman was common within the eighteenth century as more and more parishes arose with a growing population and in opposition to a growing sense of secularism. As those within the church attempted to fight the dissent, a desire to make churches more accessible came to be, and "during the Georgian era, many new-built churches and chapels joined the townscapes as visible signs of religious renewal" (Corfield 231). Clergymen often ministered to multiple parishes for two or more incomes and hired a curate to do the extra work for part of the salary; this was one way of making the occupation financially viable for pluralists. This practical arrangement called pluralism became a problem if the clergymen were not a resident where they ministered. George Austen and several of Jane Austen's fictional clergymen, such as Edmund in *Mansfield Park*, benefited from this financial agreement of holding multiple parishes. For the church body, however, this freedom of choice in churches actually led to the choice not to attend, and secularism continued to grow.

In addition to a decrease in church attendance, England also experienced “a decreasing adherence to strict religious precepts in daily behavior; a waning centrality of religion within systems of knowledge; a dwindling socio-cultural authority exercised by the clergy; [and the] changing role of churches” (Corfield 231). These challenges that faced the Anglican Church were disheartening; while the future of the Anglican Church was uncertain, a resolve grew within the Church to re-shape the culture to point back toward faith in the Divine.

Part II: Evangelicalism

The Evangelical reformation grew in response to these factors of skepticism, secularism, and dissent, and as Corfield asserts, the “growing secularization and keen campaigns of religious revivalism are by no means polar opposites” (229). One of the leaders of the Evangelical movement was William Wilberforce, who wrote in his *Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians* in 1797 “that Christians would sanctify existing society by their influence rather than escape from it” (Wolffe 29). The secularization in England continued to sharpen the exigence for “true” Christianity, into which the Evangelical movement stepped. Indeed, “So varied were the efforts at religious revival that references are sometimes made to a second reformation in England, in parallel with campaigns for a spiritual ‘Great Awakening’ in the American colonies” (Corfield 245).

This direction is visible in 1801’s *Reflections on the State of Religion* as the author “exclaimed tartly: ‘There is by little genuine Christianity, even among those who profess to be *Christians* – they have the name indeed, but not the reality’” (Jervis 19 qtd. Corfield 231). While the Protestant church attempted to introduce this “real” religion,

there were still many fissures between Protestants. John Calvin's teaching of only the elect gaining access to Heaven was a factor that divided the Protestant church, and Evangelicalism grew separate from this ideology. On the topic of salvation, Evangelicals developed a belief that the elect "were an invisible communion" which was available to everyone; their missionary efforts in the 1800s convey this mindset (Atkins 2). This theology was based on the desire to read and understand scripture personally and a dissociation from the language of the elect.

The Evangelical response to the divisive issues within and facing the Anglican Church was spurred by several ministers, among them Charles Simeon, William Wilberforce, and Robert Hall. Charles Simeon, "who influenced the ideas of generations of Cambridge undergraduates, disliked theological systems and was increasingly explicit in rejecting Calvinism" (Wolffe 29). In 1800, Hall argued that the "imminent end of the world" and subsequent need for salvation "indicated that the real religion" was on the rise (Corfield 241). Cambridge became a place of Evangelical revival as Simeon, Hall, and others began preaching this ideology.

Evangelical faith is defined as a popular form of Protestantism, [which] crossed denominational lines...Its distinctive features included some or all of the following: 1) insistence on conversion, the experience of being "born again"; 2) emphasis on the cross, where Christ died for our sins; 3) belief in the Bible as the inspired Word of God; and 4) practical piety, meaning social activism at home and missionary zeal abroad. (Griesinger 34)

Several Anglican sects, such as Calvinists and Arminians, disagreed on the point of salvation: Calvinists argued the case of the elect vs. the reprobate, believing that only the elect (those selected by God) could reach heaven while the reprobate (those not selected by God) would be doomed to Hell. Arminians, meanwhile, argued that “Christ comes to all homes and all hearts, not just to the elect” (35). Differences in Christian theology fractured the Church, dividing England and offering several viewpoints for young adults like Brontë to choose from.

While Austen had been more familiar with traditional Anglicanism, Evangelical ideology had grown and become more widespread from Austen’s time to Brontë’s time due to the success of the Evangelical reformation begun in the late 1700s. Unlike traditional Anglicanism that shied away from religious emotion and enthusiasm, “Evangelical Christianity in the nineteenth-century Church of England was a profoundly emotional faith” (Thormahlen 53). While Evangelicals differed from Anglicans in that sense, they still placed emphasis on the Common Book of Prayer and “reassured themselves that their cherished beliefs had an Anglican pedigree” (Atkins 3). Evangelicals now focused on a faith that involved a personal commitment following an act of conversion as well as a continuous self-examination and admittance of personal sin. Additionally, Evangelicals kept the day of Judgement in mind “to ensure that a life once dedicated to God remained positively and actively employed in His service” (Barker 5). A personal choice to serve God now became the focus and responsibility of the individual rather than a reliance on clergy, who mainly served to instruct and interpret for their congregations.

Part III: Evangelicalism and Women

Understanding the role of women within the Church is particularly difficult given that different sects believed different beliefs. Griesinger notes that Christian women participated in services in the Evangelical revivals because Evangelicalism challenged the view of women as second class citizens “by opening a space for spirit-filled women to serve first their true master, Jesus Christ” (36). A “‘religion of the heart’ appealed to women because it validated intense emotion and passionate feeling as ways to know God. Evangelical worship ‘evoked strong physical and emotional response... [getting] beyond gender stereotypes’” (36). Women participated in church services, outreach, and caring for the poor as partners in this movement.

Unfortunately, however, though women were valued, they were not yet equal partners to men. Maria Lamonaca’s article “Jane’s Crown of Thorns: Feminism and Christianity in *Jane Eyre*” notes that John Milton’s book *Paradise Lost* affected religion negatively in terms of gender. “The model of Milton’s Eve enchanted male clergymen across religious denominations,” states Lamonaca, citing Eve as a representation of women being unable to know God’s will on their own (247). In terms of marriage, Anglican preacher John Clowes said “For contemplation he and valour form’d,” quoting Milton’s description of Adam; “For softness she, and sweet attractive grace; / He for God only, she for God in him,” arguing women’s inability to gain direct access to God personally (Lamonaca 248). Christian women at the time had a role more simplified than men in the church through writing and maintaining religious tracts and conduct manuals and teaching school for girls. Ellis taught that cultivating the heart and learning family-building traits such as cheerfulness and doing one’s moral duty were more important than receiving an intellectual education learning math or foreign languages (Griesinger 39).

While this was true in some sects, Griesinger maintains that in its truest form, Evangelicalism gave women “the assurance of being saved and the experience of being intimately in touch with God,” allowing nineteenth century women to experience an independence and authority over their personal, religious lives (37).

Knowing that Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë were both aware of and affected by not only Anglican beliefs but also the sweeping Evangelical movements, scholars can observe the teaching of their fathers and family members to determine where their families fell on the Evangelical spectrum. After understanding their knowledge of the Evangelical theology, it is possible to read their works, specifically *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre*, through a new lens, seeing evidence of and commentary on this particular theological movement. The women responded in different ways, suggesting the movement affected them to varying degrees. Within the next two chapters, I’ll address the ways in which Austen and Brontë handled the Evangelical reformation, perhaps leading to an understanding of Charlotte Brontë’s dislike of Jane Austen.

Chapter 3 – Austen and *Mansfield Park*

It would be helpful to begin with an understanding of the beliefs and theologies that would have surrounded Jane Austen in her lifetime. Laura Mooneyham White states in “Jane Austen’s Anglicanism” that “Austen’s own particular religious experiences follow from her Anglican upbringing and her Anglian presuppositions, and they in turn provide important guidance in our understanding of how she thought and the words she used” (White 37). Through a recognition of the religious influences including the views of her father, contemporary theology, and her brothers, an examination of *Mansfield Park* shows where Austen aligned herself with and where she distanced herself from traditional Anglicanism.

Part I: The Religious Influence of Anglicanism and Austen’s Family

Though tremors of Evangelicalism had been felt since the Wesley brothers’ influence in the 1730s, George Austen subscribed more to traditional Anglicanism rather than embracing the Evangelical individualism in his own role of a clergyman and businessman. A pluralist, George Austen was both business man and clergyman as seen “within a list of Church of England livings printed in the *Hampshire Pocket Companion* of 1787, the rectories for the deanery of Basingstoke included ‘Dean—George Austen; Steventon—ditto’,” displaying that George Austen was rector of both the parishes of Deane and Steventon (Adkins 147). He passed the two livings on to his son James, who carried on the pluralist arrangement, and no evidence shows that either of the two diverged from traditional Anglicanism.

Though only one sermon from George Austen survives, his theology is evident in his family practices and actions. The pluralist arrangement was not the only Anglican

tradition to which Austen held strongly. Michael Wheeler points out that “The moderate eighteenth century Anglicanism that Jane Austen imbibed at Steventon from her father... emphasized divine wisdom and atonement in theology, order and patriotism in politics and common sense and morality in private life” (Wheeler 406). Observing his legacy through his children, one can see that not only Jane and Cassandra but Francis as well were known for their devotion to prayer. Instead of teaching an oppositional stance toward Enlightenment rationalism and Evangelical “enthusiasm,” Wheeler maintains that generally, the clergy within the Church of England “steered a safe middle course between” the two, “characterized by intense personal piety” (406). This display of moderation within Austen’s traditional Anglicanism shows “a pragmatic approach to moral issues and theological truths” (406). Rather than becoming swayed by Enlightenment reason or Evangelical enthusiasm, George Austen held to the moderate values of the Anglican Church and focused on daily, personal piety.

While George Austen did not preach from an Evangelical, relational stance, the Church of England’s general practices and beliefs would have been more than familiar to Jane. Natural theology and reason, Enlightenment ideals, design, Deism, and Evangelicalism were all beliefs she also would have been familiar with. While we see evidence of each of these concepts woven throughout her works, Anglican themes appear and give more conclusive evidence as to Austen’s personal beliefs.

While Austen grew up in an Anglican rectory, her age was “of strong theological opinions” (Giffin 18). Her letters and writing suggest that she held tightly to her Anglican belief throughout her life. Most of the country were Anglicans, as it was the state religion, and Alistair Mutch credits the use of the Book of Common Prayer in his article

“‘Shared Protestantism’ and British Identity: Contrasting Church Governance Practices in Eighteenth-Century Scotland and England” with a commonly traditional practice (Mutch 456). One major Anglican belief that Austen held to was acceptance of the Great Chain of Being, a medieval belief that the classes were organized in a chain or structure by God. This acceptance of the Great Chain of Being was “a crucial tenet of the eighteenth century Church of England” (Bowen 103). Within *Mansfield Park*, there is a clear, distinct hierarchal order to the estate, and Fanny is reminded consistently of her low place within that order. Additionally, the eighteenth-century Church of England also believed that reason actually supported religious doctrines rather than refuted it. That this was important to Austen is also observed in *Mansfield Park* through Fanny’s logic and reason throughout the novel (Bowen 103).

Anglicanism, as she would have understood it from her father’s practices, was pragmatic. White claims that Anglicanism “was (and is) a liturgical denomination, which means worship follows strictly laid out scripts of prayers and scripture” (White 5). Through Jane’s letters, written prayers, and scribbles in her *Book of Common Prayer*, multiple sources have confirmed that she relied on these practices as well. While the Anglicans did acknowledge the “truth claims of Christianity,” they were skeptical of the manner in which they were meant to reconcile their doctrine with “social and cultural” influences (7). They were careful to hold to their reason and avoid Evangelical enthusiasm. Austen would have been taught that “Enthusiasm privileged emotion over reason, individual urgings of the spirit over orthodoxy, and an intensely figurative rhetoric over commonplace speech,” as the general verdict from the eighteenth-century Church of England criticized spiritual enthusiasm and zeal (10). To favor enthusiasm

over reason would have been wrong, but placing all understanding in reason and turning away from faith as the skeptics did was still just as distasteful.

Natural theology seemed to bridge Anglican ideals with Enlightenment ideals. It became “the shared theological paradigm of the formally educated of Austen’s day,” said Colin Jager in “Mansfield Park and the End of Natural Theology” (32). Natural theology allowed reason and observation to point toward a belief in God rather than away from his existence, but there was still a movement away from faith and toward science and innovation. Austen, relying on her understanding of natural theology, uses it in her novels to balance observation and reason to credit God rather than reject him. Within her books, and in *Mansfield Park* specifically, “[natural theology] frequently operated less than explicitly, an assumed background to any theological discussion rather than a proposition that needed continued demonstration: one need simply refer to the beautiful complexity of the natural world, and one’s listeners could link it to its divine source” (Jager 32). As I’ll explain in Part II: *Mansfield Park*, Fanny exhibits this appreciation for nature as God’s creation.

In her article “‘Let Other Pens Dwell on Guilt and Misery’: The Ordination of the Text and Subversion of ‘Religion’ in Jane Austen’s ‘Mansfield Park,’” Felecia Bonaparte sees Austen working with natural theology, though rather than calling it such, she goes a step further and develops this form of belief as evidence of Austen’s Evangelical faith.

Bonaparte asserts that

As though moving above and below the rational space of the Enlightenment, Austen sees the need for something more compelling than mere principle, something transcendent, a new religion, a religion not of

creeds, but rather of an inner condition that defines not what we believe but what we are in our very essence. (52)

While there is more evidence to suggest that Austen maintained distance from the enthusiastic Evangelicals, it does seem plausible that what Bonaparte suggests is accurate. Austen shows this inner condition in *Mansfield Park* through Fanny's morals that do seem to go beyond the personal piety associated with Anglican values.

What Bonaparte may be describing here is a religion of the heart, a concept David Monaghan depicts in his article "Mansfield Park and Evangelicalism: A Reassessment." He reminds readers that Evangelicals were still a part of the Anglican Church, still aware of the necessity of religious establishment. Instead of turning to tradition or liturgy, however, Evangelicals "tended to give primacy to the invisible Church of God" (220). Whether Austen herself subscribed to Bonaparte's religion of the heart or Monaghan's "invisible Church" of "born again" believers, she would have been aware that traditionalism and Evangelicalism both existed within Anglicanism: the older, more traditional "religion as the formulary of an established society, its statement of faith in itself" and "the other as a catastrophic conversion of the individual... One was fixed on this world, the other on the next" (Kiernan 46-47 qtd. Monaghan 220). While Austen might have seen value in the focus of the "inner condition," her spiritual upbringing and actions suggest that she ultimately chose to remain moderate and traditional in her Anglican beliefs.

While Austen did not specifically adhere to Evangelicalism, this "religion of the heart" showed that she was aware of the concept. Wheeler also addresses this, stating that while the Evangelical "emphasis upon conversion and a new life in Christ, sanctification

and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, mission and acts of love (or charity) and a personal life set apart from worldly immorality” clearly influenced Jane Austen,” he argues that it did not persuade her to join the Evangelical movement (Wheeler 407). Austen herself admitted in a letter in 1809 that “[she did] not like the Evangelicals,” and one finds much more evidence of traditional Anglicanism within her works instead (407). By 1814, however, Austen’s mindset toward Evangelicals had undergone a change. In a letter to her niece, Fanny Knight, Austen stated that she was “by no means convinced that we ought not all to be Evangelicals” and was “at least persuaded that they who are so from Reason & Feeling, must be happiest & safest” (Austen qtd. Wheeler 407). While the severity of her judgement changed, she still remained a moderate Anglican “in her representation of her characters’ fallen state and future hope: most are ‘not greatly in fault’ and deserve ‘tolerable comfort’ (MP 3:17 in 413)”. It is true that on matters “of religion, Austen avoided extremes” (409).

As Austen’s father, brothers James and Henry, and several nephews served as clergymen, we can be sure that Austen was aware of the Evangelical movement. These ideas were sweeping through Anglicanism, frustrating traditionalists and causing tension and disagreement within the Church of England. Whatever Austen believed on the topic, Michael Karounos sees that *Mansfield Park* should “be read as a Condition-of-England novel that debates topical issues,” and as such, it is worth searching for these issues with in the pages of this novel (717). Knowing what was important to George Austen gives clues as to what was important to Jane. In addition to their father, it is also important to note that her clergyman-brothers James and Henry were also influential.

James Austen studied at Oxford for 11 years, according to Maggie Lane, and was ordained as an Anglican minister (14). While the Evangelical reformation was largely influential at Cambridge rather than Oxford, James still would have been aware of the new outlook on the faith he studied. He remained traditional and his occupation seemed more like a job than a vocational calling, so “[James] had no scruples about pluralism or absenteeism” (Lane 15). While pluralism was common, absenteeism was the problematic solution to pluralism without another appointed clergymen, essentially abandoning the congregation. Letters to and from Jane Austen (as well as her letters referencing him) indicate tension between the two. Perhaps he struggled “in every area of life to be overtaken by a younger sibling; in social status by Edward, in romantic pursuit by Henry (they had both courted their sophisticated cousin Eliza, who chose to marry Henry), and in literary success by his sister Jane” (Lane 23). Regardless, his mother wrote a letter after his death in which she spoke of him as a scholar and writer but does not speak to his clerical performance at all (Lane 14). Lane theorizes that James’s coldness as a sibling and detachment as a clergyman led Austen to depict him within *Mansfield Park* as partially both Edmund and Dr. Grant: “Edmund Bertram is like the youthful James, a kind mentor to Fanny in her reading as James’s son tells us he had been to Jane” in their childhood (Lane 22). The older they grew and the more tension grew between them, perhaps she saw a side of him that displayed undesirable aspects in a clergyman. Lane continues this theory, stating that “Dr. Grant, irritable and careless of how much he makes others in his household suffer, though a scholar and a gentleman and a good writer of sermons, is all too like this infamous glimpse of James” (Lane 22). Dr. Grant’s

attention is not focused on the well-being of his parish, and one could see the plausibility of Lane's reading of clergymen like James in Dr. Grant.

Unlike James, Henry was Austen's favorite brother, filled with charisma and Evangelical enthusiasm when he arrived at his vocation far later in life at age 45. After declaring bankruptcy in 1816, he returned to his theological training (as he had studied at Oxford and originally decided not to work in the church) as the curate of Chawton, Hampshire. Whether this choice was pragmatic so he might have a career or because at his lowest he experienced an emotional conversion moment, after he began preaching, Henry was labeled as "a zealous Evangelical parson in the Church of England" (Bowen 06). Jane, having spent time with each of her brothers at their homes for a large portion of her career, was familiar with their sermons and their beliefs. Not only would she have heard and understood Henry's new zeal, but "in 1816, shortly after Henry's ordination, Jane wrote fondly of his 'superior sermons'" (Austen qtd. Lane 30). That she and her favorite brother saw religion in a similar light is not an impossible stretch considering the manner in which Henry read *Mansfield Park*.

In a letter to Cassandra, Austen wrote that Henry "says it is very different from the other two [novels], but does not appear to think it at all inferior... [Henry] gives great praise to the drawing of the Characters. He understands them all, likes Fanny & I think foresees how it all will be" (Le Faye 2 March 14). Fanny has been established as the central religious figure in the novel, and Henry's support of her as a character was clearly very important to Austen.

Part II: *Mansfield Park*

Mansfield Park was written with a few ideals and goals in mind, one of which was to criticize the views of religion that were dividing the Church of England. Bonaparte states that “[Austen] is profoundly concerned with ideas... drawing our attention... in subtle but highly visible ways” (47). Within *Mansfield Park* specifically, she brings up heavier topics than other works including Christian and classic morals, views of religion, and slavery, though religion is the focus of the novel. In a letter to Cassandra, she said that she would “write something else, and it shall be a complete change of subject – ordination” (Le Faye January 1813). As George, James, and Henry Austen were ordained, Jane Austen was familiar with the concept. The standards for ordination could be found in the *Book of Common Prayer*, and required that the clergyman had “completed the normal course at Oxford, found a bishop who would ordain him, and showed adequate learning in scripture and Latin at the bishop’s interview before his diaconate ordination” (Bowen 36). In other words, thorough education, support from a higher official, and testing of the faith were required before one could be ordained into the Church of England. Although the literal process of ordination applies only to Edmund in *Mansfield Park*, the concept has larger figurative meaning in the book.

Michael Karounos argues that the meaning of ordination “was not restricted in 1814 to the meaning of assuming a religious office,” but instead that Austen meant it as “a process of both ordering and ordaining” (715-16). Fanny’s Christian values ‘order’ *Mansfield Park* after it has fallen into disorder. With this consideration in mind, after readers examine the chaos and disorder within the inhabitants of *Mansfield Park*, it is clear that Fanny also goes through a form of education, receives eventually the support of

both Sir Thomas and Edmund, and ultimately several tests of her faith before she evolves into the wife of a clergyman with agency over Mansfield Park and its inhabitants.

Therefore, while ordination's literal meaning should be kept in mind, and although Edmund becomes ordained toward the end of the novel, Austen had another ordination in mind: that of Fanny Price.

Fanny and the other characters in *Mansfield Park* are used within the novel to represent the different ideological and philosophical traditions that Austen's modern world was divided among, as well as to show where she saw England heading post-Enlightenment. "It is this allegorical dimension that sets *Mansfield Park* apart and makes it starkly different (and highly unsatisfactory) to many secularized twentieth-century readers," especially to audiences who are unfamiliar with or resistant to reading with a religious lens (Giffin 18). Because of this hesitance to embrace *Mansfield Park's* religious nature, many critics dislike *Mansfield Park* and do not understand the cultural significance of ordination, losing that important layer. For those willing to look for and observe religious allegory, the characters, specifically Fanny, Mary, Edmund, and Sir Thomas, offer several opportunities to see criticism and commentary on the Anglican faith.

Fanny Price is, as the novel's heroine, central to the novel and key to understanding its Christian spirit. She is "the embodiment of the essential ideals of religion. But she embodies those ideals in an age that has abandoned them" (Bonaparte 50). She is uninterested in the lifestyle and culture which every other character, other than herself and Edmund, prioritizes. Instead, "the world is of little interest to her and material possessions less. She is timid in society...she is at home in the realm of the spirit"

(Bonaparte 59). Additionally, while the other characters are preoccupied with movement and activity, Fanny is more interested in stability as she “stands from the start just where she ought to... As the modern world is threatened by the chaos of dissolution, it is Fanny who makes possible that ordination of the soul that constitutes the inner religion appropriate for the modern era” (Bonaparte 60). It is through this inner religion and Fanny’s “authentic Christian spirit” that she may “perceive some fundamental psychological and theological truths about what is happening within the Estate and to its inhabitants” (Giffin 20). While she is timid and careful, “Fanny comprehends relations in time and space, natural and social,” thus depicting a spiritual connection to those people and the world around her (Gillis 119). Fanny’s spiritual depth itself is not defined by explicit, clear directions or actions, but instead by her “delight in nature and her belief in reason” (Bowen 103). This depth relies on Austen’s understanding and acceptance on the Great Chain of Being as well as natural theology – Fanny submits to both.

For Fanny to represent Austen’s idea of a traditional Anglican Christian, she had to be confronted with the same arguments for secular reason that Austen’s contemporary Christian encountered. To fully grasp the meaning and importance of her own faith, Fanny’s faith has to be tested and matured. She must rely on her faith as she encounters personal trials which “focus on stripping her of all egoism; on reminding her that everything she has been given is a gift” (Giffin 25). One of the main events through which Fanny matured (into herself and into her own choice of faith) is through her decision to not marry Henry, but rather choosing to marry Edmund with his “other-worldly mission of the Church” (Giffin 26). Fanny, too, as wife to clergyman Edmund, accepts this mission happily, and, having gone through the allegorical process of

ordination through education, temptation, and personal choice, is now prepared for such a life.

In opposition to Fanny's modern Christian in a worldly world stands Mary Crawford. While Fanny remains rooted in her principles and morals, Mary is restless and materialistic. She lives "in the flesh, not in the spirit," and Austen emphasizes that idea by making her a foil to Fanny in that she is "healthy, robust, vigorous, fond of physical activity and extremely skillful at it" (Bonaparte 56). Although she is lively, she lacks a personal piety to ensure spiritual health as well. Rather than remaining rooted in values and principles like Fanny, Mary "appears governed by her own instinctive desires," mostly led by her ambition to make herself happy (Bowen 104). Her indifference toward her own morality as well as the morality of others is concerning and reveals the nature of her heart – not evil, but not pious. We see this in her apathy to Henry wanting to break Fanny's heart, that similar apathy toward Henry and Maria's elopement, and her desire for her lifestyle to remain unchanged, especially by religion.

Mary's actions reveal a secular disinterest in becoming spiritually renewed and transformed by the shaping of religion; many people were walking away from the Church due to similar disinterest. Mary is skeptical of how a sermon might truly affect a congregation, and she does not care at all about the morals that Fanny and Edmund stand upon, nor about the sermons that Edmund would one day preach. Mary's "agreeable fantasies" toward improving the living which Edmund would later hold involves "[shutting] out the church, sink[ing] the clergyman, and see[ing] only the respectable, elegant, modernized, and occasional residence of a man of independent fortune" (Austen 195). To Mary, improving Thornton Lacey and encouraging absenteeism would "benefit

the clergy rather than pastorally benefit the parish,” thus revealing the selfishness of her nature and aversion to the vocation as a whole (Giffin 30). This rejection of religious tradition displays Mary as the representation of the secular way of thought as she lives not with a focus on good and evil. Neither moral nor immoral, “Mary appears amoral, [but] Austen is not prepared to abandon the moral boundaries of civilization” and ultimately Edmund rejects her for this reason (Bonaparte 58).

Edmund, one representative of the Anglican Church to which Austen herself belonged, was a character through whom Austen might carry her hopes for a reconciliation of the Church to the heart of religion. Edmund “acts and speaks consistently in a manner befitting a serious, traditional Church of England clergyman,” and through him Austen reveals her wishes for the direction of the same church (Monaghan 220). The choices Edmund is faced with represent the choices the Church was faced with – a dedication to the self and abandonment of improving the spirit as seen in Mary Crawford, or the mission of the heart and spirit as seen in Fanny. Edmund struggles with this choice at first as he is drawn to Mary; her activity, her liveliness, her wit and charm draw him in.

Edmund is tempted by Mary, and by making this temptation clear, Austen emphasizes the significance of her character and what aligning himself with her would mean for the Church. His desire for Mary is the testing of his vocation, for choosing her would mean aligning himself with her apathy and resignation from the Church and would mean a lifetime of struggling with one who is “not cruel, but rather is totally ignorant and unsuspecting of there being such moral feelings” (Giffin 31). To choose this woman would obviously hinder his own faith as he would be consistently divided between his

own instincts as a minister and vessel of religion and Mary's apathy toward the subject and vocation. As the allegorical representation of the church, in actual ordination, Edmund also "preserve[s] the moral integrity of the Estate" by choosing to wed Fanny, a representation of morals herself (Giffin 29).

If Fanny represents the principled Christian, Mary the unprincipled pull of the coming secular era, and Edmund the Church of England, Sir Thomas presents Austen's possible solution – education of principles and morals by incorporating a spiritual component to modern education. Sir Thomas, as the "epitome of the best of the Enlightenment," matures throughout the novel as Fanny and Edmund do, learning that "reason is not the same as religion, clarity not the same as faith" (Bonaparte 50). He repents when he realizes that he has taught his children only classical virtues but without grounding them in morality and teaching them the difference good and evil; as a result, his household spins into disarray and his children almost into ruin. When he remarks that something was missing from his children, he states that "he had taught them 'theoretically' and it had not been enough" (Bonaparte 52). Sir Thomas reflects on this lacking education toward the end of the novel, noting that "they had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice... He had meant them to be good, but his cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition" nor the "necessity of self-denial and humility" (Austen 363-364). Based on their upbringing, any negative qualities in their natures (such as vanity or selfishness) were unchecked as they were not corrected, as evident in the actions of adult Tom, Maria, and Julia. Readers can sense Austen's own criticism veiled in Sir Thomas's

reflection: without a spiritual component to their education, the future generations would suffer.

Austen is arguing then that actions and character are built on a foundation of principles, “while manners reflect a superficial mode of civility” that can be molded and shaped into serving any purpose, including as a “mask for immorality” (Karounos 725). While Fanny is, when she first arrives, the least formally educated due to her age and being from a family far less able to provide her with a classical education, she spends much time learning, but her wisdom and moral intelligence is already high. In the judgement of situations that unfold within the novel, such as the production of *Lovers’ Vows* and the walk at Thornton Lacey and consequential Sotherton experience, Fanny becomes the teacher, showing that good education isn’t enough without the education of morals and basis of Christian conscience. Fanny relies on her morals and the world she sees in black and white to not only influence those around her, but as a guide for herself in choosing not to align herself with Henry Crawford.

As “social transformation must come from a spiritual and moral renewal *within* the Estate, *within* the Church, *within* the hearts of its inhabitants,” Austen argued that spiritual transformation of the church was crucial for the realignment of the country to the natural order, as observed in *Mansfield Park* (Giffin 23). That transformation would only come from a religion following a sensitivity of the spirit rather than the language of rules and through individual faith (and the subsequent testing of it and eventual transformation of the heart). In this, Austen’s acceptance of some of the tenets of the Evangelical “invisible Church” is strengthened as more people embraced this personal acceptance of personal transformation and living with strong principles.

Part III: Austen's Personal Beliefs

Although evidence of Austen's religious beliefs may appear circumstantial, this mystery remains one due to differing subjective readings, not because the topic is not visible. Austen's work is filled with contextual clues and statements, rejections, and concerns about the state of the Anglican Church throughout her lifetime. Rowland Grey's article "The Religion of Jane Austen" relays Signora Emilia Bassi's statement that the "profoundly moral character" of Austen novels is obvious; she does not preach but rather develops a world in which "wholesome piety" and "common sense" are pervasive as Austen "represents the sense of duty as the guiding principle of life and all her heroines are more or less influenced by it" (Bassi qtd. Grey 333). Rather than using her novels as teaching pamphlets or tracts, Austen was careful with her inclusion of Biblical principles. Austen's subtlety was her power because if she had been more explicit in her statements in *Mansfield Park*, she might have alienated her audience even more than it already has been by this quiet, powerful novel. In this way, Austen's "religion was unobtrusive" (Grey 334). In addition to the Biblical morals and principles present within Austen's novels, her characters also go through physical trials "to be redeemed from personal faults," are subject to learning, and demonstrate a personal choice (Karounos 729). It's clear that religion, to Austen, was a personal, individualized relationship, which was strengthened by the Church as a whole.

An inclusion of clergymen in all of her novels displays the importance of such positions to Austen, but she recognized that some individuals were unfit or unprepared for the position of spiritual authority. Austen made her feelings on the behavior of clergymen clear. In some clerical characters in Austen novels, readers sense her

condemnation of using religion merely as an occupation rather than vocation (as seen through Edmund's reaction to the concept of absenteeism at Thornton Lacey). While Austen respected clergymen, she seems to have held them to a high standard, and Mr. Collins and Mr. Elton are, rather than examples of her disrespect for clergymen, examples of ineffective pastoral efforts and the need for a transformation in the heart of the clergy to spiritually guide their congregations well.

That Austen was concerned with the state of the church is clear from her own writing and prayers as well. One such prayer uses plural nouns as she prays for her fellow Church: "Above all blessings oh! God, for ourselves and for our fellow creatures, we implore thee to quicken our sense of thy mercy in the redemption of the world, of the value of that holy religion in which we have been brought up, that we may not, by our own neglect, throw away the salvation thou hast given us, nor be Christians only in name" (Austen qtd. Giffin 33). She believed in a religion not only in name, but in action and heart according to her characters and their actions and priorities.

Finally, after her death, Austen's epitaph "famously omit[s] any mention of her novels in the many lines describing her Christian virtues" (Lane 29). That Henry and Austen's family wanted to focus on her life as a Christian first and foremost is supported by Henry's "biographical notice." Henry placed this notice in the "posthumously-published *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, establishing in smooth and accomplished prose the image of a sweet Christian lady to whom writing came effortlessly, who never said an unkind word, and who cared for neither fame or money" (Lane 29). That he didn't focus on her writing is curious as he was the broker who habitually dealt with publishers

for her; he focused instead on her Christian character, much like the message in her epitaph.

Mansfield Park can be seen as proof that Austen's mind had softened toward the Anglican Evangelicals by the time she wrote the novel. Austen cared about issues such as non-residency, or absenteeism, the abolition of the slave trade that Fanny brings up with Sir Thomas, the importance of family prayer time and personal morality. Austen's emphasis on the transformation of heart, however, is the most easily seen evidence of a sympathy for the Evangelical cause. Through the study of common Anglican beliefs, Austen's own religious upbringing and influences, and examining the characters and their actions in her novels, specifically *Mansfield Park*, readers are witness to a proclamation of faith. Austen's Biblical morals and principles, combined with the spirit commonly attributed to the Evangelical movement, are apparent, and her relationship with her brother Henry leads to an understanding that not only was Austen aware of the Evangelical movement within the Anglican church, but that she understood and supported its main condition: that religion is of the spirit and of the heart, rather than of traditional rules and laws.

Chapter 4 – Brontë and *Jane Eyre*

Like Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë was the daughter of a clergyman; Brontë, however, was raised in and indoctrinated by Evangelical Christianity. Not just Charlotte was affected by this religious upbringing, but the whole Brontë family. While their father preached Evangelical theology, by the time the Brontës were writing, there was also “an entire array of social practices, a myriad of different sects and distinctions, an overwhelming history of commentary and commentary on commentary” (Maynard 193). As a result, Charlotte and her siblings grew to believe different variations of the same faith. Through their own convictions and beliefs and subsequent characters, critiques, and commentary, the Brontës “show ways in which a liberalizing religion could also be reinscribed within a more secular culture,” and they use “inner experience” to replace traditional “institution, ritual, and myth” to locate the Divine (Maynard 193). Charlotte Brontë used religion in her novels in ways which point to the influence of her father’s theology, as explained in Part I of this chapter. This religious evidence is explained in Part II’s textual exploration of *Jane Eyre* and leads to Brontë’s personal beliefs and convictions in Part III. Through these components, this chapter assembles evidence of the strong effects of the Evangelical reformation upon Charlotte Brontë.

Part I: Charlotte Brontë’s Beliefs as Shaped by Patrick Brontë

Patrick Brontë was a clergyman within the Church of England who held to the Evangelical beliefs depicted in Chapter 1, even though he had grown up Presbyterian in Ireland. He became a tutor to Thomas Tighe’s children; his extended time with Tighe, clergyman, “vicar of Drumballyroney and rector of Drumgooland,” and St. John’s College Cambridge graduate, was extremely influential to young Brontë (Barker 4).

Tighe himself “belonged firmly within the Evangelical camp” which was at this time “a reforming movement which sought to revive and reinspire a church whose ministry was corrupt and careless and whose congregations were disaffected” (Barker 5). One of the previously mentioned important figures of religious dissent in the 1700’s, John Wesley, founder of Methodism, “was a personal friend of the [Tighe] family and had stayed with the Tighes” (Barker 5). Brontë was clearly impacted by the Evangelical beliefs he would have been exposed to in this position in the Tighe house. Tighe “pushed him to go to his own college... St. John’s was renowned for its Evangelical connections,” and for Tighe to see in Patrick Brontë a “potential recruit for the ministry of his church,” Brontë must have been special and shown spectacular promise to become an influential Evangelical (Barker 6).

Brontë’s time at St. John’s in Cambridge also impacted his Evangelicalism. Charles Simeon, the Vicar of Holy Trinity Church at Cambridge was an Evangelical whose teaching and preaching impacted “a whole generation of theology students,” one of whom was Patrick Brontë according to Charlotte Brontë (Baumber 28). In addition to being exposed to the theology of Charles Simeon, Brontë also became acquainted with wealthy banker Henry Thornton, leader of the Clapham Sect and instrumental “in forwarding Evangelical ideas in London” (Baumber 28). Thornton and William Wilberforce, the “acknowledge[d] political leader of Evangelicals,” heard that Brontë was struggling financially to remain at Cambridge, so they each subscribed 10 pounds to fund his education (Baumber 27-8). Similar to Tighe’s acknowledgement, that Brontë received the notice and support of such influential Evangelical leaders is proof of the potential the Evangelical leaders saw in his leadership capabilities.

After finishing at Cambridge with the patronage of such Evangelical leaders, Brontë moved his way up through a few clerical positions before being appointed Perpetual Curate of Haworth, where he would remain and raise his family of literary giants. Haworth was “famous for the spiritual legacy” of the “fathers of British Evangelicalism,” many of whom had preached in Brontë’s parish during the eighteenth century (Griesinger 40). John Wesley himself visited and first preached there in 1747, preaching several times after that date as he added Yorkshire to his circuit (Baumber 26). Brontë’s acquisition of the Haworth parsonage spoke to his Evangelical leanings and continued favor within the sect.

At this point in England’s religious history, Evangelicals still focused on conversion and new life, redemption, and missional, intentional living, but between some of the Evangelical sects there was disagreement about how to proceed. One of the ways in which Evangelicals within the Anglican Church differed from sects like the Methodists, was their desire to remain a part of the Church of England. Because Brontë did not leave the Church of England to join the dissenting Methodists forming their own establishment, Brontë remained “a firm supporter of the established church,” but his doctrinal principles still remained similar to the Wesleyan Methodists in that they focused on “God as a father and less on damnation for sinners” (Baumber 30).

Another main Evangelical belief that Brontë focused on was a belief in conversion. This “mainspring of Evangelical teaching, was also the cornerstone of Patrick’s own life,” (Barker 44). This belief is extremely evident within Brontë’s letters on “On Conversion” published in *The Pastoral Visitor* in 1815. Within these three-part letters, Brontë appeals to his readers with “imaginative empathy” by writing them from

the first person perspective, “thus engaging the reader’s sympathy” by admitting that he, too, as a sinner, “has experienced a heartfelt need of conversion” (Lawson 272). Differing from some Evangelicals who used fear tactics, he maintained an aversion to a typical fire and brimstone vocabulary. Anglican Evangelicals were “less interested in controversy over theological orthodoxy than in bringing Christian conviction into hearts and Christian morality into lives,” and Patrick Brontë lived this mindset himself by “having more concern with reaching the poor, with good works, and with true inner spirit than with ritual or dogma” (Maynard 195).

To assume that the Brontë children were heavily influenced by their father’s Evangelical beliefs is safe, though each sibling interpreted and applied these beliefs in ways different from one another. For the sake of this thesis, Charlotte Brontë will remain the focus. In addition to their father’s gentle manner of Evangelicalism, the Brontës would have been familiar with the harsher religious views depicted in other sects, such as the Calvinist theology of the elect taught to the girls when they were in school at Cowan Bridge. Having spoken against the doctrines of personal Election and Reprobation, which were “decidedly derogatory of the Attributes of God,” the Brontës did not subscribe to Calvinism, though they certainly knew of it (Griesinger 44). Instead, as shown through his words and actions, their father focused on possible conversion for everyone, depicting for his children a belief of choice and personal faith. Brontë “preached personal commitment to Christ and transformation of life as necessary to salvation,” and if Jane Eyre’s journey is a reflection of the author’s faith, one could read there Charlotte’s belief in “Providence, the idea that God has a purpose and plan, [and] that God rewards obedience” (45).

Part II: *Jane Eyre*

The impact of Charlotte Brontë's father's teaching on her religious understanding is apparent within Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*. Covering a wide spectrum of Protestant beliefs, Brontë portrays different versions of Christianity through five characters in her novel: Mr. Brocklehurst, Helen Burns, Mr. Rochester, St. John Rivers, and Jane Eyre. Each of these characters believes something different regarding Christianity, and Jane's faith-filled bildungsroman is heavily influenced by the actions of each of the other characters. Their individual faiths shape hers, setting examples to follow and not follow, as well as awakening her to her own sin of idolatry as she seeks satisfaction from the people around her. The first religious influence introduced to readers is that of Mr. Brocklehurst, the minister and master of Lowood, a school for orphans based on Cowan School, where Brontë herself briefly attended.

Mr. Brocklehurst is a hypocritical Christian who "reinforces the stern and judgmental God Jane is taught to fear at Gateshead" (Griesinger 41). He preaches about the doom awaiting the Lowood girls in Hell. Evidence that Calvinism is his creed is exemplified through "...his reliance on the doctrines of innate human corruption (or original sin) and of strict body/soul duality, particularly, it seems, in the case of young women" (Franklin 263). Though he boasts to Mrs. Reed about his Christian principles, Jane is not convinced. She clearly sees Mr. Brocklehurst as a hypocrite with no qualms about dressing his family in fine clothes while forcing his pupils to comply with a rule of simplicity. He avoids his own advice of austerity while mortifying the girls under his tutelage for "luxuries" as small as having their own natural curls. One also wonders if his austere approach is economic rather than religious, as Brocklehurst "uses religion, in the

spirit of earlier religious conservatives... to maintain the current social order” (Maynard 202).

These are not the judgements of little Jane; our adult narrator looks back with clarity and maturity on Mr. Brocklehurst. Franklin points out that “Brocklehurst represents a stingy God, a repressive sanctimoniousness, entirely at odds with the service of a God of Love” (464). In terms of affecting Jane, Brocklehurst’s creed does not sway her to see the world as he views it through such a strict lens. Maria Lamonaca argues that Mr. Brocklehurst preaches a religion of the Letter, or Law, instead of following Jesus’s call to love (253).

Though Jane receives no love from Mr. Brocklehurst, she receives grace and acceptance from Helen Burns, a classmate at Lowood. Helen endures unfair treatment at school, yet she remains “the emblem in the novel of a Christ-like love and forgiveness” (Franklin 465). She instructs Jane to study the Bible, particularly the New Testament, in order to learn how Jesus acted and spoke, emphasizing love. Helen admits to Jane that she denies Calvinism and believes the hope of Heaven is for all people to enjoy instead of just the elect. It seems that Helen’s rejection of this Calvinistic doctrine “prefigure[s] Jane’s own attitudes toward religious people and creeds alike,” and perhaps Charlotte’s attitude as well (Lamonaca 254).

Another lesson taught by Helen is that of forgiveness, which she exemplifies each time she is humiliated or mortified at Lowood. Helen encourages Jane to forgive her Aunt Reed because “only through God’s grace can she let go of the hurt” inflicted upon her by her aunt’s apathy (Griesinger 47). Perhaps it is this advance that spurs Jane to visit her Aunt Reed later in the story, granting the woman full forgiveness so that she may die

in peace. In addition to being quick to forgive, Helen also warns Jane not to use relationships with human beings to satisfy her, but rather to look to God alone. It is this advice, Lamonaca argues, that “provides [Jane] with a moral framework for later resisting an idolatrous relationship which, in violating ‘the law given by God’ would cut Jane off from her Creator” (253).

Though Jane learns and benefits greatly from Helen’s example and friendship, she disagrees with a few points in Helen’s doctrine. She cannot quite grasp Helen’s resolution to give up happiness as an achievable end. Jane, both child and adult, yearns for happiness through participation in life while Helen puts so little stock in it. Jane struggles with Helen’s passivity, claiming that the wicked will prosper if their actions go unchallenged, while Helen focuses mainly on forgiveness. Regardless of whether Jane always agrees with her friend, Helen “models for Jane an independence of thought” on salvation, morality, and doctrine (Lamonaca 254). Helen’s spiritually accepting creed shows that she is the foil to Mr. Brocklehurst’s selective and demeaning creed. Helen’s philosophy contains elements of “Evangelical belief in self-sacrifice and in individual, personal contact between human subject and God,” while insisting that this contact is possible for all (Franklin 464). In this way, Brontë highlights the Evangelical and Calvinistic debate over salvation through Helen’s creed.

Additionally, within Helen’s faith, Jane “recognizes a spiritual fire” typical of Evangelical enthusiasm as “her soul sat on her lips... the swelling spring of pure, full, fervid eloquence” (Brontë qtd. Maynard 203). One persuasive aspect of Helen’s faith for Jane is Helen’s belief in a loving God who will take care of her after death. This passion for faith in love rather condemnation was attractive to young Jane, who experienced this

for the first time on a walk during her time at Lowood. Rather than becoming indifferent to the world around her and religion in general, young Jane “reflects on the pleasantness of the world and on the undesirability of dying from it... Born of a moment’s childish exultation over the joys and comforts of this world, it thus leads to the most decisive lesson in Jane Eyre’s religious education” (Thormahlen 96). Jane has an invigorated spirit now attuned to the life around her. With a new appreciation for how the beauty of nature shows her about God, Jane Eyre eventually leaves Lowood changed because of the influences, negative and positive respectively, of Mr. Brocklehurst and Helen.

Jane’s interpretation and integration of these Christian influences over her life are crucial to understanding her own religious beliefs later in adulthood. Jane abhors Mr. Brocklehurst and does not look upon him as a spiritual guide in her life. Helen, meanwhile, influences Jane heavily before her untimely death as she points out that Jane “thinks too much of the love of human beings,” something that other characters will continue to point out throughout the novel (Brontë 81). When Jane leaves Lowood after a period of ten years and accepts the job as a governess at Thornfield, her childhood rage and passion seem restrained, but she still displays the vice of idolatry. It is at Thornfield, Griesinger argues, that “everything she believes about God... is put to the test” as she puts her faith before her happiness (48).

Jane develops a friendship and later a romantic relationship with Mr. Rochester, her pupil’s guardian. Once their romance blooms, Jane struggles to maintain some semblance of control over her urge to make an idol out of Mr. Rochester. He “stood between [her] and every thought of religion,” and she “could not, in those days, see God for his creature: of whom [she] had made an idol,” reverting back to the sin her friend

Helen had pointed out to her (Brontë 346). Rochester similarly makes an idol out of her, calling her his angel; Jane rejects this and “warns him not to trust such imitations; that, in effect, she herself is not a true angel (Franklin 462). Before Jane’s faith causes her to pause and discontinue her relationship with Mr. Rochester, they encounter two obstacles which prompt her conviction and ultimate rejection of him: their unequal spiritual status, and subsequently Rochester’s desire for her to become his mistress as he is unable to marry.

Though they have found this love for one another, they undergo a struggle over Jane’s future in which Jane stands up for herself and thereby determines how she is seen by Mr. Rochester. Jane speaks of equality of spirit rather than gender, race, or class when she boldly remarks “I am not talking with you now through medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even mortal flesh—it is my spirit which addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grace, and we stood at God’s feet, equal—as we are” (Brontë 338). Here Evangelical ideology is apparent as she insists on the equality of all individuals before God. Jane’s “distinctly religious vocabulary” is significant for this argument that “Jane establishes a system of equality based on innate qualities of mind and spirit” (Kees 885). It is important for Jane to do so in order to maintain her desire to determine her future for herself rather than depending on others to determine it for her. By having made an idol out of the influential people in her life until this point, she has not had the urgency to determine God’s calling on her life.

After Jane discovers Bertha Mason, Mr. Rochester’s insane wife, and the truth of Mr. Rochester’s inability to marry her, he begs Jane to abandon her religious and moral principles and continue to live with and love him even if they cannot be wed (Brontë

326). Jane, however, cannot accept a position as Rochester's mistress because she observes God's law and has her own integrity and self-respect. Jane takes a step away from idolatry in her relationship with Rochester by demanding his respect on a spiritual level; she sees through Rochester's proposition that he does not respect her faith and conventional Christian morality. Though she is in agony, Jane's rejection of Mr. Rochester in the name of faith is her stand against being ruled by the sin of idolatry. She puts her God and His values before the man she loves and before her own personal happiness, trusting in her moral code to bring her more peace than living as Rochester's mistress ever could.

Another voice striving to influence Jane belongs to St. John Rivers, a minister and later-discovered relative to Jane. St. John shelters her and finds a job for her after she flees from Thornfield and is in need of protection. Despite his integrity and Christian piety, St. John lacks the characteristics first seen in Helen's faith: sympathy and love. St. John delivers sermons to Jane and his congregation which do not comfort, sustain, or encourage them. Instead, they contain a "strange bitterness; an absence of consolatory gentleness" which bothers Jane (Brontë 399). Lamonaca defines St. John's soul as one "made rigid by its own moral strengths" which he loves to impose upon others (250). His lectures echo Helen's previous depiction of Jane's greatest vice; caring too much for people. St. John lacks and is critical of the sympathy and love that Jane's faith needs. Jane is bothered that his "stern allusions to Calvinistic doctrines—election, predestination, reprobation—were frequent; each reference to these points sounded like a sentence pronounced for doom" (Brontë 399). Jane continues to live under his roof and

look upon him as a brother, but she remains uncomfortable with his unsympathetic way of guiding his congregation.

Though at first Jane ignores his systematic coldness, St. John oversteps the bounds she has drawn around her personal faith and spurs a rebellion in her. He invites her to become a missionary alongside him as his wife in India, and when she declines, he pushes back, telling her that he “is not going out under human guidance... [his] lawgiver, [his] captain, is the All-perfect” (Brontë 445). While it is possible St. John truly believes this is God’s call for Jane, he “seems to believe that he himself, as God’s servant, is likewise omniscient” and refuses to hear her own voice on the matter (Lamonaca 250). He continues to push Jane, telling her that by rejecting his offer, she denies not just him, but God, in order to make her feel guilty and obliged to agree with St. John (Brontë 453). It is tempting to surrender her own identity and allow him to control her access to God, but she resists. He chooses not to hear her when she responds that she would marry him “were I but convinced that it is God’s will I should marry you” (Brontë 460). His incessant badgering proves that he does not respect her spiritually enough to allow her to determine God’s will for her life. St. John may truly believe he can speak authoritatively of Jane’s spiritual calling, but “the coldness and dominance of River’s character reveal the dark side of the missionary spirit. His is a mission of dominance, not of liberation, let alone love” (Franklin 469, Ward 20). St. John does his best to influence Jane to abandon her own interpretation of God’s will and follow his interpretation instead, treading on her independence and faith.

St. John tramples on not only her sympathy but also her ability to determine God’s call for herself in these moments in *Jane Eyre*. “I claim you,” St. John says, “not

for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign's service" (Brontë 354). St. John's use of spirituality is a manipulative tactic, a means to an end. Because Jane is moral and cares for her faith, he knows it would be an effective persuasive technique. If Jane had not cared, St. John's communicative efforts would have remained powerless. Perhaps because of this, "It is St. John Rivers—that ostensibly unattractive, even repulsive character—who poses to Jane the greater temptation, the one she clearly has the more difficulty resisting" (Lamonaca 249). To maintain her personal spiritual identity, Jane must introduce a new doctrine to her readers – one of freedom and liberation, allowing God to inform and inspire her movements instead of relying on those around her to satisfy her and hear God for her.

Faced with the severe and intense provocation to merely trust St. John with her spiritual wellbeing, Jane renounces his influence:

I mounted to my chamber; locked myself in; fell on my knees; and prayed in my way—a different way to St. John's, but effective in its own fashion.

I seemed to penetrate very near a Mighty Spirit; and my soul rushed out in gratitude at His feet. I rose from the thanksgiving—took a resolve—and

lay down, unscarred, enlightened—eager but for the daylight. (Brontë 537)

Jane manages to liberate herself from the spiritual chains which had shackled her from childhood and have a personal experience with her Savior in this moment. While Robert Francis George argues that she "escapes the deadly clutches of Evangelical Christianity to become a missionary of her own, rejuvenated, spirituality," I contend that it is not Christianity that she rejects, but dogmatic religion (112). Instead, she embraces the forgiveness and freedom of individual faith. Brontë allows Jane to be capable of and

responsible for hearing God's voice for herself, functioning as a participant in a two-way relationship with her God rather than looking to others to interpret His will for her.

This embrace of personal faith falls more in line with Evangelical Christianity than with the strict religions of Brocklehurst, St. John, and with the opposing acceptance of all or universalism from Helen Burns. Jane's insistence that her own salvation depends on her relationship with God rather than an interpretation from another being is "consistent with Evangelicalism's emphasis on an... intimate, direct, and unmediated relationship between the soul and its Creator" (Lamonaca 249). Jane communes with God and hears His call for her life to stay in England and return to Mr. Rochester, uncertain of what she would find there. In the end, "Jane marries Rochester because it is her vocation – the divine call that only she herself can hear" (246).

Jane's ability to hear and commune with God breaks her spiritual chains; after she undergoes this important transformation and returns to Mr. Rochester, she finds that he, too, has changed. Humbled, crippled, and desperate without Jane, Mr. Rochester turns to prayer and cannot help but to call for Jane. Jane's return to Mr. Rochester finds him reformed, and they finally may stand equal together in spirit with neither as an idol.

Jane is influenced by but ultimately rejects Mr. Brocklehurst's rigid religion, Helen Burns's beautiful acceptance of everything, Mr. Rochester's unwillingness to abide by conventional Christian morals, and St. John's lack of sympathy. Jane rejects these versions of faith because none of them are right for her relationship with God – while she needs a loving God unlike Mr. Brocklehurst's condemning God, Helen Burns's passivity lacks the justice and vitality Jane craves in this life. Likewise, Mr. Rochester presents a temptation for Jane to make an idol of him while he remains unmoved by the principles

that guide her. St. John's faith lacks the sympathy and love Jane naturally needs in faith. Instead of accepting any of these creeds, Jane learns to listen to God's voice and depend on Him alone, rather than the people in her life. Only by finally accepting this aspect of her relationship with God is Jane able to act on her own calling in life – to be a missionary of love.

Part III: Brontë's Personal Beliefs

Charlotte Brontë wrote in the second edition of *Jane Eyre* that “to pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns” (3). Brontë's own defense of the religious stance of the novel allows us to study it with “masks” in mind, identifying the characters to critique rather than condemn. Instead of using the characters to define Brontë's Christianity, readers should see that Brontë addresses her evaluation of common spiritual discourses through Jane's interactions with characters of differing faiths. Jane openly admits that “The Source of Life was also the Savior of spirits,” which to this reader does not sound like a rejection of Christ, but rather a rejection of salvation in works or as only available to some people (Brontë 285). *Jane Eyre* displays these conflicting spiritual discourses that were complicating “the Christian discourse of the time” and helps determine “Brontë's own spiritual position” (Franklin 459).

Is it possible to determine Charlotte Brontë's own personal creed by studying her portrayal of Christianity in *Jane Eyre*? This chapter argues that Brontë infuses her characters with her thoughts on religion vs. faith, Calvinism vs. Arminian, and rigidity vs. sympathy. To watch Jane's faith develop and conclude in sacrifice, freedom, and joy is to see Brontë's ideal definition of true Christianity. Franklin reminds readers that “Brontë is

acutely aware of the loss of religious perspective that characterizes the Victorian age” (478). Brontë must have had something specific to demonstrate to an audience whose members held these conflicting religious views, then, but what? I would argue that she wanted to show a difference between salvation through works and rules, only available to some, and salvation through a personal relationship with a loving, sympathetic God. Brontë was neither anti-Christianity nor anti-faith; she was, however, against rule-based religion and had no qualms about identifying hypocrisy in religious sects.

Readers can see evidence of Brontë’s Christian belief not just by examining Jane’s personal faith but also by studying Brontë’s personal letters after the deaths of her siblings and during times of deep depression. Especially in times of personal tragedy and loss, Brontë “evidently knew God’s presence and consolation” states Griesinger, citing letters to Brontë’s friend Ellen Nussey after Emily and Anne’s death (46). These letters reference God’s comfort, something Jane also needed from Him. “It is God’s will,” Brontë told Ellen, “I do not know how life will pass, but I certainly do feel confidence in Him who has upheld me hitherto” (Smith 2:222 qtd. in Griesinger 46).

Brontë’s fiction and personal letters prove that she held to the tenets of Evangelicalism outlined in Chapter 2, with most emphasis on the “belief that the Atonement of Christ entailed pardon to everybody. God’s love for mankind, manifested in his Son’s sacrifice, has already lifted the burden of sin – all that human beings have to do is realise it” (Thormahlen 88). There is a freedom seen through Jane’s actions and situation within *Jane Eyre*; by highlighting adherence to that, Brontë herself resisted the doctrines of Calvinism and traditional Anglicanism but instead focused on her belief in a loving and forgiving God and the relationship one might have with Him.

Conclusions:

While it is impossible to ultimately determine the exact beliefs held by Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë, through an examination of the factors that influenced them religiously and a close reading of their works, specifically in this case *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre*, an understanding of their religious views emerges in which readers can be confident. Austen, following after her father and brother James for most of her life, held strictly to traditional Anglican views. By the time she wrote *Mansfield Park*, however, her focus on inner transformation and choice shows that religion should have a personal connection, which aligns more closely to the Evangelical discourse than any of other novels. That she embraced Evangelicalism fully is not likely, but as depicted in the Austen chapter, she absolutely knew of the movement and believed in some of the tenets. Brontë, meanwhile, was more explicitly Evangelical, taking after her father in her focus on love, conversion, and the choice of a personal relationship with God.

Charlotte Brontë's disinterest in and disapproval of Jane Austen is puzzling, and the reason for such a reaction can only be theorized. For the sake of this thesis, however, I posit that Brontë was unimpressed with Austen's subtlety in her discussions of religion. Even if Brontë had read *Mansfield Park*, her disinterest in Austen likely would have persisted. Austen's traditional faith and gentle critiques of the English church ensured her writing remained void of the extremes toward which Brontë's writing gravitated. Brontë clearly clung to a religious passion that included compassion, unlike St. John's zeal or Mr. Brocklehurst's rules. Austen's characters and clergymen were far more traditionally Anglican, avoiding the passion of Evangelical zeal. Austen's subtlety was due to her highly valued religious decorum and utility as "she consciously excluded explicitly

religious material because it was improper” to discuss such “‘serious’ material within the world of the popular novel and because she was also aware that subtler messages were more likely to succeed than straightforward didacticism or preaching (White 86). Perhaps that subtlety was viewed as detachment by Brontë, coming across as less sincere because it lacked the passion to which Brontë herself was drawn; if Austen had read Brontë, she might have disliked Brontë for the zeal Austen so carefully avoided. Regardless, Brontë was unimpressed with Austen, and I argue that this disapproval is due to Austen’s dispassionate display of the faith they shared.

Although Brontë’s disapproval of Austen remains an insolvable mystery, evidence of the Evangelical Reformation Movement as a strong tie between the two authors can be claimed confidently. Although they were affected by Evangelicalism in different ways as they lived and wrote at different moments of the movement, it was obviously influential on both women and their Anglican faith. Because the Evangelical Reformation Movement is apparent in Austen and Brontë’s works through their endorsements and critiques, it remains a specific bond between the two authors that deserves to be further examined.

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