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The Homiletics of *Hard Times*

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TRAVELLING DOWN TO PRESTON at the end of January 1854 to cover a controversial and widely publicised strike for *Household Words*, Charles Dickens happens to sit opposite "a very emphatic personage," whom he soon mentally christens "Mr. Snapper." When their conversation is published a fortnight later in Dickens' weekly, the author records his own reservations against his fellow traveller's insistence that, in the name of Political Economy, one could not in the present conflict be friends with both "Masters" and "Hands." "I retorted on Mr. Snapper," writes Dickens, "that Political Economy was a great and useful science in its own way and its own place; but that I did not transplant my definition of it from the Common Prayer Book, and make it a great king above all gods."¹ A week earlier Dickens had begun writing what was to become *Hard Times*, his most sustained critique of the same kind of deification of scientific theories (whether economic or educational) that he objects to in conversation with Mr. Snapper. My contention in this essay is that what may seem a cursory reference to *The Book of Common Prayer* in fact leads to the structural germ of the novel, the "idea that lay hold of me by the throat in a very violent manner," as Dickens was to put it in a letter later in the year.²

In short, I read *Hard Times* as a sermon based on key texts in the church year as set out in the Anglican Prayer Book, in particular the Gospel for the 15th Sunday after Trinity (a text indirectly alluded to in Dickens' rebuttal of

¹ Charles Dickens, "On Strike," reprinted in *The Norton Critical Edition of "Hard Times,"* ed. George Ford and Sylvère Monod (New York: Norton, 1966) 287. All citations from *Hard Times* will be taken from this edition, with page numbers given directly in the text. "On Strike" was first published in *Household Words* on February 11, 1854, and the train ride had taken place on January 29.

² From letter to Mrs. Richard Watson, November 1, 1854, as quoted in Ford and Monod 277.

Mr. Snapper). By this I mean not only that the issues discussed in the novel—education and industrialization—are colored by the Prayer Book text, but that Dickens borrows narrative codes from a different genre, the sermon, when planning and writing it. Critics have always agreed that *Hard Times* is different from Dickens' other novels, often damning and occasionally praising him for it.³ A few critics, such as David Lodge, have explained that the main difference lies in its distinctive rhetorical patterns, but only Robert Green to my knowledge has made an explicit connection between the novel and a sermon.⁴ While building on both Lodge and Green, I want to demonstrate that the narrative "code-switching" from homiletics to fiction-writing goes well beyond the use of a few rhetorical tropes.

When Dickens objects to Mr. Snapper that he does not want to make Political Economy "a great king above all gods," he is quoting the second half of a line from Psalm 95, a line that reads in its entirety: "For the Lord is a great God: and a great king above all gods."⁵ As part of the "Order for Morning Prayer," Psalm 95 had been read at every Anglican morning service since the mid sixteenth century, and was therefore so ingrained in the English consciousness that Dickens could assume that a stranger in a train compartment, or a reader of *Household Words*, would pick up a broken line and immediately know the full context. The same assumptions, I would argue, lie behind much of his narrative strategies in *Hard Times*. Building on the biblical images and rhetorical structures embedded in the Prayer Book he connected to broadly held thought patterns in English society. That the English for centuries were reared on biblical cadences is a commonplace, but we need to

³ The most celebrated instances of the latter are the highly appreciative analyses by George Bernard Shaw and F.R. Leavis, who both thought *Hard Times* Dickens' best book. Their essays, as well as those of some of the detractors, can be found in Ford and Monod.

⁴ David Lodge, "The Rhetoric of *Hard Times*," in *Language of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (1966; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) 147 and 149; Robert Green investigated the parallels between Dickens' novel and a sermon by John Henry Newman: "Hard Times: The Style of a Sermon," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 11 (1970): 1375-96.

⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural references are quoted from *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Henry Holt, 1992).

remember that those cadences were for most people mediated through the Prayer Book, whether heard at church or read at home.⁶

The same dichotomy between "God" and "Political Economy" that occupied Dickens' mind as he rode down to Preston, can be found in the novel he was simultaneously planning.⁷ But as in his elliptical objection to Mr. Snapper, the first term of the dichotomy is never spelled out but has to be inferred from partial quotation, this time found in the subtitles provided for the novel's three books: "sowing," "reaping," and "garnering." A host of Bible verses can be deduced from the first two terms (many of them significant for a reading of the novel), but only in one verse do we find all three together: Matthew 6: 26, part of the Sermon on the Mount: "Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them." Taken by itself this may not seem such an enlightening verse; we do have a dichotomy of sorts between the provision of the heavenly Father and the need for earthly sustenance, but the relevance for *Hard Times* is far from obvious. The allusion becomes highly significant, however, as part of the Gospel for the 15th Sunday after Trinity:

⁶ In a nationwide "Census of Religious Worship" conducted in 1851 it was found that on one particular Sunday (30 March), half the population went to church, with the Church of England receiving roughly half the number of churchgoers (i.e., about a quarter of the total population) and all the other denominations dividing the other half (see B.I. Coleman, *The Church of England in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: A Social Geography* [London: The Historical Association, 1980]). Not regularly frequenting an Anglican Church did not mean the ignorance of the Prayer Book, however, since many absentees used it for private or family devotions, while members of other denominations, such as the Methodists, were encouraged to follow it. "Even the poorest homes," writes Frances Knight, "would normally possess a Bible, or at least a New Testament, and very often also a Book of Common Prayer. Bibles and Prayer Books were owned even by those who seldom made an appearance in the pew" (*The Nineteenth-Century Church and English Society* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995] 37).

⁷ Dickens' detailed "Working Plans" are dated "Friday January 20th 1854" (for a transcript of the plans see Ford and Monod, 231-40). In the context of his choice of title for the new book, recorded in the plans, another line from Psalm 95 is intriguing: "To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." That the hardening of the heart is one of the layers of interpreting the novel's title is clear from the repeated references to it in the novel, e.g. "With his unbending, utilitarian, matter-of-fact face, [Mr. Gradgrind] hardened [Louisa] again" (76, see also 172), or "Mr. Gradgrind, it will be observed, being much softened, Mr. Bounderby took particular pains to harden himself at all points" (182).

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what Ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on: Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. And are ye not much more than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or wherewithal shall we be clothed? (for after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself: sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

“Ye cannot serve God and Mammon”: here we have the dichotomy between religious and economic obligations in its starkest and most uncompromising form. The middle section of the text can be applied fruitfully to the carefree lifestyle of Sleary’s Circus, but it is with the variation on the initial dichotomy towards the end that we get the other tangible connection with Dickens’ novel: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God.” It is no coincidence that the very first chapter of *Hard Times* (Book 1, chapter 1) is headed “The One Thing Needful,” while the corresponding chapter of Book 3 is entitled “Another Thing Needful.” The placement and complementarity of the two chapter headings underscore their structural importance in the novel. Both allude to

Luke 10: 42, a parallel text to Matthew 6, in which the same contrast between faith and everyday cares is spelled out.⁸

The fact that the text on God and Mammon was a fixture in the church year meant that the dichotomy was ingrained in the minds of the readership Dickens wanted to reach. Without having to mention either of the two terms he could develop a bipolar structure that would connect to religious and cultural commonplaces in an almost subconscious way. His message of social reform also tied in with the placing of the text within the church year; coming third in a set of Sundays (13th to 15th after Trinity) that coincided with the harvest season, the emphasis, as a contemporary commentary on the Prayer Book puts it, was on "the Christian charities of social life" in conjunction with "thanksgivings for God's goodness in giving us the fruits of the seasons."⁹ The social and ethical aspects of Christianity, rather than the niceties of dogma or ritual, had always been closest to Dickens' heart, for him summed up in Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁰ A further condensation of the gospel, used in the catechism from the Prayer Book, can be seen in Sissy Jupe's response to Mr. M'Choakumchild's query about the first principle of Political Economy: "To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me" (*Hard Times* 43).¹¹ Sissy most likely had learnt her

⁸ While Luke 10 is not one of the official texts for the 15th Sunday after Trinity in *The Book of Common Prayer (BoCP)*, the intertextual ties to Matthew 6 were well established. In the Swedish Lutheran Church both Matthew 6 and Luke 10 are used as Gospel readings on this particular Sunday, and indeed the heading given to the Sunday in *Den Svenska Evangelieboken* (the Swedish equivalent of the *BoCP*) is "Ett är nödvändigt" ("The One Thing Needful").

⁹ *The Annotated Book of Common Prayer, Being an Historical, Ritual, and Theological Commentary on the Devotional System of The Church of England*, ed. Rev. John Henry Blount (London, 1866) 122.

¹⁰ Much has been written on Dickens and religion; while no one doubts the sincerity of his Christian commitments, the consensus seems to be that he belonged to the liberal "Broad Church," strongly disliking both the evangelical and tractarian wings of the Anglican Church, not to speak of Catholics and non-conformists. See Humphrey House, *The Dickens World* (1941; rpt. London: Oxford UP, 1965) 106-32, and Dennis Walder, *Dickens and Religion* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981). Other studies that investigate his novels, though not *Hard Times*, from a religious perspective include Janet L. Larson, *Dickens and the Broken Scripture* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1985), and Barry V. Qualls, *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982).

¹¹ For Dickens own summing up one can turn to the final paragraph of *The Life of Our Lord*, which he wrote in 1849 as a devotional aid to his own children: "Remember!—It

"absurd" answer ("self-interest" being the correct one) from the Catechism, evidently part of the religious upbringing provided by her beloved if destitute father.

Dickens was not alone in using the language and imagery of Bible and Prayer Book for ethical and social purposes. The years leading up to *Hard Times* was in fact a peak period for Christian social involvement.¹² Even those outside the church felt free to tap the scriptural repository for their agitation; this had been especially true for the Sage of Chelsea, Dickens' friend Thomas Carlyle.¹³ A week before finishing the last installment of his novel, Dickens writes to ask Carlyle a favor: "[*Hard Times*] contains what I do devoutly hope will shake some people in a terrible mistake of these days, when so presented. I know it contains nothing in which you do not think with me, for no man knows your books better than I. I want to put in the first page of it that it is inscribed to Thomas Carlyle. May I?"¹⁴ Carlyle's importance for *Hard Times* has yet to be fully appreciated; the writings of the Victorian sage not only determined much of the message of the novel, but also the way that message was packaged and delivered. It was from Carlyle that Dickens learnt to be a secular preacher, using Christian topoi and persuasive strategies in order to effect societal and individual change, and, specifically, it was from him that he learnt to use the dichotomy of God and Mammon.

is christianity TO DO GOOD always—even to those who do evil to us. It is christianity to love our neighbour as ourself, and to do to all men as we would have them Do to us. It is christianity to be gentle, merciful, and forgiving, and to keep those qualities quiet in our own hearts, and never make a boast of them, or of our prayers or of our love of God, but always to shew that we love Him by humbly trying to do right in everything. If we do this, and remember the life and lessons of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and try to act up to them, we may confidently hope that God will forgive us our sins and mistakes, and enable us to live and die in Peace" (London: Associated Newspapers, 1934) 125-27. The book was not intended for the general public and was not published in Dickens' lifetime.

¹² 1848 to 1855 saw the height of Christian Socialism, with active participation from personal friends of Dickens such as the novelist Charles Kingsley; see Elizabeth Jay, *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain* (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1986) 61-65.

¹³ On Carlyle's religious and political ideas, see Basil Willey, *Nineteenth-Century Studies* (1949; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964) 111-41, and for his influence on Dickens and other Victorian novelists, see Qualls and Larson.

¹⁴ Letter to Carlyle written July 13, 1854, as quoted in Ford and Monod 277. The novel was finished on July 19.

In this brief essay I shall have to limit myself to relevant aspects of only one of Carlyle's books: *Past and Present* (1843). In it we find Carlyle's version of a sermon on the Gospel for the 15th Sunday after Trinity. The contrastive terms of the dichotomy turn up throughout the book, and are indeed implied in the title itself, with the *past* associated with the religious dedication to community shown by a medieval abbot, while the *present* is tainted by a greedy and self-serving *laissez-faire*: "Oh, it is frightful when a whole Nation, as our Fathers used to say, has 'forgotten God'; has remembered only Mammon, and what Mammon leads to!" (*PeP*, 3.1).¹⁵ With a satanic substitution of terms to be emulated by Dickens, Carlyle accuses his contemporaries of having succumbed to "the Gospel of Mammonism" (*PeP*, chapter heading for 3:2):

We for the present, with our Mammon-Gospel, have come to strange conclusions. We call it a Society; and go about professing openly the total separation, isolation. Our life is not a mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under due laws-of-war, named "fair competition" and so forth, is a mutual hostility. (*PeP*, 3:2)

Truly they are strange results to which this of leaving all to "Cash"; of quietly shutting-up the God's Temple, and gradually opening wide-open the Mammon's Temple, with "Laissez-faire, and Every man for himself,"—have led us to in these days! (*PeP*, 3:13)

This, of course, is exactly what Dickens objects to in his conversation with Mr. Snapper, echoing as he does Carlyle's warning against making finance into a Gospel. Like Carlyle, Dickens wanted to "shake some people," and he followed his friend's example by using the Prayer Book in a rhetoric of secular preaching. While Carlyle had conceded, in a final chapter of *Past and Present* entitled "The Didactic," that it would be "a fond imagination to expect that any preaching of mine could abate Mammonism," he had nevertheless believed that there was "one Preacher who does preach with effect, and gradually persuade all persons: his name is Destiny, is Divine Providence, and his Sermon the inflexible Course of Things. ... When Mammon-worshippers here and there begin to be God-worshippers, and

¹⁵ Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London, 1894). References to the work (abbreviated *PeP*) will be given in the text by book and chapter.

bipeds-of-prey become men, and there is a Soul felt once more in the huge-pulsing elephantine mechanic Animalism of this Earth, it will be again a blessed Earth" (*PCP*, 4: 8). While Carlyle in his vituperative *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850) appeared to have given up his attempt to persuade an unrepentant society, Dickens nevertheless as late as 1854 felt called to give Destiny and Divine Providence some further assistance in the struggle against the "elephantine mechanic Animalism of this Earth." (If we recognize a faint echo from *Hard Times* in that last line, that is only because we have here the genesis of those "melancholy mad elephants" and "serpents of smoke" that keep reminding us of Dickens' "Key-note.")

To bring into sharper focus Dickens' use of homiletics one needs to study not only the example of Carlyle, but the sources for both writers: a "real" sermon on Matthew 6 and contemporary handbooks on preaching. The sermon, "God and Mammon," had been preached at St. Paul's Cathedral by Sydney Smith, a leading churchman belonging to the same broad-church camp as Dickens. While my argument does not depend on the novelist having read this particular sermon, he most probably *had* since he kept a copy of it in his own library.¹⁶ What is most striking is how the Gospel text brings out, even from a liberal like Smith, a sharp polarity:

There are few persons who could be brought plainly to say, even in their own hearts, We will not serve God. Most men would be shocked at avowing such a resolution. But there are numbers who act in the spirit of it; who are resolved to serve the world, and, at all events, to have a portion on earth. And what is this, but, in fact, to give up the service of God? It is true that they do not professedly intend to give it up. They mean to secure a portion in heaven, as well as a portion on earth. But in attempting this they are attempting an impossibility. Our Saviour in the text condemns the

¹⁶ The sermon (part of a collection), together with two other works by Smith, is included in the inventory of Dickens' library; see John Harrison Stonehouse, *Catalogue of the Library of Charles Dickens from Gadshill* (London: Piccadilly Fountain, 1935). For a thumbnail sketch of Smith, see Alec R. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution*, The Pelican History of the Church, vol. 5 (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981) 39-40, and for Dickens and Smith, see House 109.

folly of such an attempt ... God and mammon are two masters, and therefore no man can serve them both.¹⁷

This, I believe, is Dickens foremost debt to any actual sermon on God and Mammon he might have heard or read. From this stems the particular qualities of *Hard Times*, its insistent polarity and unrelenting dichotomies. It is no coincidence that he at one point thought of giving his new novel the title *Black and White*.¹⁸

When Smith continues by exemplifying the opposing commands of the two masters, one wonders if Dickens had not picked up the sermon after all:

They are two masters whose interests directly thwart each other, and whose commands are continually crossing and opposing each other. For example, God says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself!" Mammon says, "Love thyself best."—God says, "If thou sell ought unto thy neighbour, or buyest ought of thy neighbour's hand, ye shall not oppress one another." Mammon says, "Make the best bargain in your power. Over-reach and defraud one another, if you are able: —push your interests, and care not at whose loss or expense."

At least one must conclude that the views of liberal churchmen like Smith, no less than those of Carlyle, contributed to the fabric of the novel. We are reminded of Sissy's and Mr. M'Choakumchild's (or Bitzer's) conflicting catechisms, not to speak of Bounderby's raw capitalism. Other parts of the sermon can easily be applied to Mr. Gradgrind, and to his unfortunate children:

Every one understands what is meant by serving a master. It is spending our time and our talents in his service. It is doing his will and his work, furthering his interests, and obeying his orders. ... But when something happens which brings the matter to a trial, then his real mind is discovered: then it is decidedly seen, however ignorant he may have hitherto been of his own heart, that, in fact, he "hates

¹⁷ Rev. Sydney Smith, *Sermons Preached at St. Paul's Cathedral* ... (London, 1846) 305 and 307.

¹⁸ See Ford and Monod 232.

the one, and loves the other; that he holds to the one, and despises the other."¹⁹

The similarities between the two forms of communication (sermon and novel) should not surprise us; they are a consequence of the basic dichotomy found in the Prayer Book text. To narrativize the tensions between God and Mammon, the two abstract poles must unavoidably be humanized as a conflict between personal interests and/or internalized as a divided soul. The *exemplum* is as necessary for the preacher as are characters for the novelist.

In addition to the strong polarities, what is striking about the sermon is its persuasive thrust. Smith is no holy roller, his preaching being free from the fire-and-brimstone tactics of the period, and yet his whole sermon builds towards activating his listeners and readers: "It now only remains, my brethren, that I apply this subject to yourself. You cannot serve God and mammon. One of them you must serve. Both you cannot serve. The question is, Which *will* you serve?"²⁰ The same tactics of goading the reader into action is also used in *Hard Times*, with its revealing subtitle "For These Times." Combined with the insistent use of dichotomization, overt persuasive strategies set the work apart not only from most other Victorian novels but indeed from Dickens' other works (except his Christmas books, to which we shall return). Implied throughout is the need to take sides and to act, made explicit in the final paragraph of the novel: "Dear Reader! It rests with you and me" Smith likewise concludes his sermon by challenging his listeners and readers to choose the One Thing Needful: "Life and death are set before you. May God give you grace to choose that better part, which shall never be taken away from you!"²¹

Another way of finding the homiletic strategies that both Carlyle and Dickens made use of is to study contemporary handbooks on preaching. I have selected two out of many,²² guided by their comprehensiveness,

¹⁹ Smith 306-07.

²⁰ Smith 311.

²¹ Smith 314.

²² Other Victorian handbooks on preaching include George Campbell, *Lectures on Systematic Theology, Pulpit Eloquence, and the Pastoral Character* (London, 1840); Henry J. Ripley, *Sacred Rhetoric; or, Composition and Delivery of Sermons* (London, 1849); Alexander Rodolphe Vinet, *Homiletics; or, the Theory of Preaching*, tr. from the French (Edinburgh, London and Dublin, 1853); Edward B. Ramsay, *Pulpit Table-Talk: Containing Remarks and Anecdotes on Preachers and Preaching* (London and New York,

suitability and year of publication (before 1854): William Gresley's *Ecclesiastes Anglicanus* (1835), supplemented by Charles Simeon's English adaptation of Jean Claude's *Essay on the Composition of a Sermon* (1802). My point is not that Dickens had read these particular works (he almost certainly had not), but that they systematize precepts he would have been familiar with. Considered one of the best public speakers of his day,²³ and having sat through hundreds if not thousands of sermons, the novelist would have known the basic oratorical rules without the aid of a handbook.

Gresley's is a massive work of over 450 pages, divided into Letters on various graded topics, out of which I have selected only a few of special relevance. Letter 2, "The End or Object of Preaching," begins by establishing that "The duty of a preacher ... is to teach clearly, to convince successfully, and to persuade cogently."²⁴ Like most other Victorian manuals on preaching, Gresley's work is in effect a handbook in rhetorics, using Ciceronian eloquence in a pastoral context (the fitting name for another such handbook is *Sacred Rhetoric*).²⁵ Persuasion is consequently the key. To achieve that the preacher (or a sermonizing novelist) needs to gain the confidence of the hearers (the topic of Letter 15):

Your hearers are of all degrees of intellect, and of every shade of character; all you have a right to assume respecting them is, that they have natural feelings, conscience, and common sense. It is through the means of these faculties that you have to influence the will. These are the avenues by which you are to reach it. The will is the fortress which you have to take, and it will require all your skill and energy, all your appliances and means. A simultaneous attack must be made on all points: you must win their confidence, convince their understanding, and move their feelings; and after all,

1868) [Dickens owned a copy of this work]; John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 2nd ed. (London, 1871).

²³ See K.J. Fielding, "Dickens as a Speaker," in *The Speeches of Charles Dickens: A Complete Edition*, ed. Fielding (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988) xix-xxiv.

²⁴ Rev. William Gresley, *Ecclesiastes Anglicanus: Being a Treatise on Preaching, as Adapted to a Church of England Congregation in a Series of Letters to a Young Clergyman* (London, 1835) 16. Further references to this work will be given in the text.

²⁵ The tradition of doing so goes back beyond Reformation and Middle Ages to St. Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*, the first Christian rhetorics.

you must pray for the Divine blessing, without which your most strenuous efforts will be unavailing. The end of preaching is the same as that of all other speaking, *persuasion*. (*Ecclesiastes* 179-80)

The triple objective of winning the readers' confidence, convincing their understanding, and moving their feelings is not a bad way to characterize Dickens' strategy in *Hard Times*. For the third objective he is sometimes criticized, especially when doing it with a sentimental touch. But convincing an audience, the novelist would have agreed with Gresley, "is done principally by moving the passions, or the feelings. When the reason is brought to assent to the truth of any proposition, and the feelings are wrought upon, and urged to action—then, and not till then, will the will be gained, and a man be disposed to act, and by God's grace *will* act in consequence of what he hears; and then, and not till then, is the preacher's task accomplished" (*Ecclesiastes* 273). My point is simply that strategies that bother literary critics (such as overt emotionalism) might be quite effective with the middle-class audience that Dickens wanted to persuade.

Gresley goes on to distinguish between direct and indirect ways of moving the listener, both of which Dickens uses. There are many instances in *Hard Times* of moving the emotions through "direct appeal, or address, including exhortation, warning, expostulation, remonstrance, consolation, reproof, encouragement, and the like" (*Ecclesiastes* 295). A representative example of the narrator's direct exhortation, combining arguments with emotional appeal, comes near the start of Book 1, Chapter 11:

So many hundred Hands in this Mill; so many hundred horse Steam Power. It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but not all the calculators of the National Debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for patriotism or discontent, for the decomposition of virtue into vice, or the reverse, at any single moment in the soul of one of these its quiet servants, with the composed faces and the regulated actions. There is no mystery in it; there is an unfathomable mystery in the meanest of them, for ever. —Supposing we were to reserve our arithmetic for material objects, and to govern these awful unknown quantities by other means! (*HT* 53)

An equally effective way, however, for Dickens to drive home his message is to use the mouths of his less than eloquent characters, in particular Sleary and Blackpool, in place of the narrator. One of his key themes is brought home by the lisping Sleary towards the end of the novel when he contrasts the two opposing catechisms, confessing that "there ith a love in the world, not all Thelf-interetht after all" (*HT* 222). In this Dickens follows sound rhetorical advice by concealing his persuasive intentions: "It is the obvious and professed duty of the preacher to do all he can to awaken the feelings and open the heart. But it is a maxim of Rhetoric, that, in order to attain this object, the speaker must on no account avow it at the time" (*Ecclesiastes* 295).

The indirect approach towards moving the listeners also includes the use of "copiousness and vividness of *description*," which "*through the imagination*, [may] *most powerfully influence the heart*, whether for good or evil" (*Ecclesiastes* 275, 282-83). Here the novelist is obviously on home turf, as Gresley advises his prospective preachers to study works of fiction, especially for "descriptions of character, which is one of the most certain modes of touching the heart, —more certain, perhaps, than description of virtue and vice; for concrete terms are commonly more plain and forcible than abstract" (*Ecclesiastes* 291). Closely related is the use of *exemplum*: "single examples, especially those which are fictitious, can never amount to *proof*; yet, by way of *illustration*, they are of great use, fictitious as well as real, for they often explain better than any other mode of illustration what is the preacher's meaning; so that, joined with his authority, they have the power of conviction" (*Ecclesiastes* 267). Mr. Gradgrind understands the importance of this advice when, in the novel's first public speech, he makes the upbringing of his own children an example to be emulated. That Dickens for his part eagerly seizes on what soon develops into an *exemplum* of the casualties of the Gospel of Mammonism only makes Gresley's advice all the more potent.

That *Hard Times* has a carefully crafted rhetorical structure has long been recognized. David Lodge, in order to demonstrate that it "remains a novel of considerable polemical effectiveness," investigated the whole first chapter in detail, showing "its highly rhetorical patterning, in particular the manipulation of certain repeated words."²⁶ The conscious repetition of terms is a result of Dickens' emulation of homiletic strategies. "Employ *repetition*," advises Gresley: "It is necessary, as we observed, to dwell for a certain time on

²⁶ Lodge 147 and 149.

the same idea, in order that it may fix itself on the mind of you hearers. ... What I recommend, then, is this: *employ concise language, but repeat the same idea*; repeat it in several forms, dwell on it, turn it over, bring it out again and again, even though with little variation of sense" (*Ecclesiastes* 149).²⁷ As we shall see, not just individual sentences or paragraphs but the whole novel is planned in accordance with such guidelines. As Gresley goes on to stress: the unity of the sentence needs to be expanded to the unity of the whole sermon: "The first essential point in a sentence is *unity*. This, indeed, is an excellence which ought to run throughout your whole composition. There ought to be an unity of subject in your sermon" (*Ecclesiastes* 156).

As we investigate that unity, we need to juxtapose Gresley's advice with the Gospel text on which Dickens' novel is based. The unity of the work, whether sermon or novel, is achieved by letting it be governed by its biblical text: "In preaching, *you should choose one principal object*, and group your materials so as to best illustrate *that*; keeping the main design always in your mind's eye ... It is very desirable, not, indeed, as an essential requisite, but as a primary beauty, that *your sermon should take its complexion and character from the text*" (*Ecclesiastes* 377, and 379). For *Hard Times* this means that the novel is structured by the Gospel for the 15th Sunday after Trinity. This reliance on the Gospel text has two aspects: firstly, in the unifying function of the verse about sowing, reaping and garnering, which is not only reflected in the titles of the three books, but in the larger plotting of the novel. Secondly, in the basic dichotomy of God and Mammon that is ubiquitous in the novel, expressed as a series of contrasting polarities: fact and fancy, art and nature, head and heart, square and round.

Both aspects are present in the very first paragraph of the novel, when Gradgrind preaches his own demonic sermon on "the Gospel of Mammonism" (to use Carlyle's term). The sowing symbolism is pervasive as he hammers home the metaphors of planting and growth connected with the 15th Sunday after Trinity, while his polarized and rigid dichotomy is conditioned by the same Gospel text:

"Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out

²⁷ Other rhetorical tropes that Gresley recommends and Dickens makes use of include "anadiplosis or reiteration of a word or form of expression," climax and antithesis (*Ecclesiastes* 164-65).

everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts; nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!" (HT 1)

Gradgrind's deliberate inversion of the Gospel is seen in the way he preaches his own version of "The One Thing Needful." If "Facts" rather than "Self-interest" or "Laissez-faire" is the key word in the speech and in the novel, that is because Dickens had deepened Carlyle's attack on the economics of the day with an incisive polemic against the social and educational foundations of a laissez-faire economy. It is in the schools, argues Dickens, that the earliest and therefore most effective sermons on Mammon are preached to a both impressionable and vulnerable congregation, who, if won over, will form the next generation of Mammon-worshippers.

Dickens follows up the topos of a demonic "church order" based on Mammon rather than God elsewhere in the novel. Bitzer, Mr. Gradgrind's model student, talks of self-interest as the "catechism" by which he had been brought up (HT 218), and when the narrator, mimicking the Prayer Book, ends a long paragraph describing Coketown with the phrase "world without end, Amen" (HT 17) we are to take that as an ironic comment on a society that makes "Political Economy ... a great king above all gods." That "the members of eighteen religious persuasions" in their "pious warehouse[s] of red brick" (HT 17) instead of providing the needed salt seem to live by the same rules can only make things worse. The best that can be said for them is that they are mute; no one, except for the Bounderby marriage party, ever enters a church in this novel. All public speeches are instead based on the Gospel of Mammon. That Bounderby's marriage oration does is only to be expected, but that the union agitation, "the gospel according to Slackbridge" (HT 189), also conforms to this pattern is noteworthy. All the "good" characters, on the other hand, are conspicuously tongue-tied, mumbling about great muddles or lisping over their brandy and water.²⁸ Only the novelist, it would seem, is willing and able to stand in the gap, preaching his sermon on an unfalsified Gospel.

²⁸ I am talking about their abilities as *public speakers*; as we have already seen, Dickens puts some of his most deeply felt sentiments into Sleary's mouth especially.

Dickens accomplishes this by making the whole book a sermon on the same text as that on which Mr. Gradgrind builds his opening speech (quoted above). The two key aspects of the Gospel text—sowing symbolism and polarized dichotomy—are thus unwittingly announced at the outset by a public orator who himself will be under scrutiny as an *exemplum*. The first chapter of *Hard Times* in fact forms Dickens' exordium, which according to Simeon "is that part, in which the minds of the hearers are *prepared*, and a natural and easy way opened to the discussion" and in which the whole sermon is reduced "to one common idea."²⁹ The exordium, in a well-written sermon, leads into a discussion followed by an application or conclusion (*Ecclesiastes* 294). The application of Dickens' sermon comes, appropriately, in the novel's last chapter. After a concluding summary has informed us about the future of the key actors of the book, we are admonished in the novel's very last words:

Dear Reader! It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not. Let them be! We shall sit with lighter bosoms on the hearth, to see the ashes of our fires turn grey and cold. (*HT* 227).

Sandwiched between the introduction and the application comes the "discussion," the main body of the sermon, which throughout the Victorian period "ought normally to be divided into three parts."³⁰ The three part division should be reduced, explains Simeon, "as often as possible to single words or terms; and, as often as possible, connect[ed] by way of opposition, or of cause and effect, or of action and end, or action and motive, or in some way or other."³¹ The relevance of these suggestions to Dickens' three-partite division of his novel into "sowing," "reaping," and "garnering" is obvious. The "cause and effect" or "action and end" implied by the three terms is

²⁹ Charles Simeon, *Claude's Essay on the Composition of a Sermon* (Cambridge, 1802), as cited in Charles Smyth, *The Art of Preaching* (London: S.P.C.K., 1953) 189.

³⁰ Smyth 208, who adds that the division into three parts "persisted throughout the 19th century." The commonplace nature of the division can be seen in Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* (1865; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), where Bella Wilfer tells John Rokesmith: "'It's not all, John dear,' Bella hesitated. 'It's only Firstly. There's a dreadful Secondly, and a dreadful Thirdly to come—as I used to say to myself in sermon-time when I was a very small-sized sinner at church'" (670).

³¹ Simeon, as paraphrased by Smyth 192.

equally clear, conveniently epitomizing the "progress" not only of the Gradgrind siblings but of all the major characters. The progress is reinforced by the contrasting polarity of "God and Mammon," which (as we saw in connection with Smyth's sermon) must be incarnated into human history as *exempla* or the narrativization of character. And thanks to the built-in telos of the dichotomy, both preacher and novelist must shape their narratives into stories of salvation or damnation.

The Progress, whether of Pilgrim or Rake, was one of the key Victorian tropes in literature as in the church.³² "What must I do to be saved?" was the question that "echoed throughout the century."³³ This question, as George Bernard Shaw noted, also permeates Dickens' novel: "*Hard Times* is the first fruit of that very interesting occurrence which our religious sects call, sometimes conversion, sometimes being saved, sometimes attaining to conviction of sin."³⁴ Virtually every character in the novel is described (or describes him- or herself) in terms of ascent or descent. "Up" and "down," connected as they are with the novel's other polarities, carry a heavy metaphorical and metaphysical weight. For those committed to the "Gospel of Mammonism" the progress is often couched in economic terms. Mr. Bounderby, whose whole self-image builds on a fake if carefully crafted and often repeated upward progress, is ironically described by the narrator as "a self-made man, and a commercial wonder more admirable than Venus, who had risen out of the mud instead of the sea" (*HT* 186-87). Bitzer, "in a very business-like and logical manner," explains that the choice to turn Tom in "will be a rise to me" (*HT* 218), while Mrs. Sparsit, in a rare direct allusion to *Pilgrim's Progress*, is described as "fallen from her pinnacle of exultation into the Slough of Despond" (*HT* 200).

The followers of Mammon all reap what they have sown in the final chapter of the novel, when the narrator has Bounderby stand "before the fire"

³² See Qualls.

³³ Knight 31.

³⁴ George Bernard Shaw, "*Hard Times*," reprinted in Ford and Monod 332. As Shaw went on to note, the conversions had communal rather than individual repercussions: "Now the great conversions of the XIX century were not the convictions of individual, but of social sin. The first half of the XIX century considered itself the greatest of all the centuries. The second half discovered that it was the wickedest of all the centuries." See also William J. Palmer, "*Hard Times*: A Dickens Fable of Personal Salvation," *Dalhousie Review* 52 (1972): 67-77.

(which is as close as Dickens gets to the everlasting bonfire, even with his most wicked characters), "projecting himself ... into futurity." While seeing Mrs. Sparsit fighting it out with Lady Scadgers, and Bitzer licking boots as a "rising young man," Bounderby fails to foresee that he himself in a few years is "to die of a fit in the Coketown street" (*HT* 225). Mrs. Gradgrind, as a borderline case, is granted a death-bed conversion of sorts long before the novel is over, complete with a Psalm snippet from the "Burial of the Dead" in the Prayer Book: "Mrs. Gradgrind, emerged from the shadow in which man walketh and disquieteth himself in vain, took upon her the dread solemnity of the sages and patriarchs" (*HT* 153).³⁵

But these static if entertaining characters are of course only the backdrop for Mr. Gradgrind, his children Tom and Louisa, and, to a lesser extent, Stephen Blackpool. Of these the Gradgrind family, we have already seen, is firmly placed center stage from page 1 as the proud father makes his offspring exemplary models of Fact. It is he who sets them (and himself) up for a fall by invoking the sowing paradigm, thereby forcing his listeners to follow their progress. What from his perspective was supposed to be a successful Pilgrimage of Mammon soon turns into a Rake's Progress. In book 1 ("Sowing") we get the upbringing and education of Tom and Louisa (who together with the other school children form "the Innocents"). Twelve out of the sixteen chapters of Book 1 are given to them, with the remaining four (10-13) dedicated to Stephen, that other innocent victim of Mammonism, the exemplary worker who "by the prejudices of his own class, and by the prejudices of the other, ... is sacrificed alike" (*HT* 121). Book II ("Reaping") allots three chapters each to the winnowing of Tom (1-3), Stephen (4-6), and Louisa (10-12), with the remaining three (7-9) largely given to Harthouse's assigned role as tempter. The biblical echoes surrounding Harthouse are insistent: "What was there in [Louisa's] soul for James Harthouse to destroy, which Thomas Gradgrind had nurtured there in its state of innocence!" (*HT* 127):

³⁵ For the context of Mrs. Gradgrind's death-bed scene (only one of many in Dickens' novels), see the section on "Salvation and the Last Things" in Knight, 46-60, in which the historian discusses the "fever pitch of eschatological excitement" (50) that was reached in 1840s and 1850s, inspiring, among other things, an abundance of literary death-bed scenes.

When the Devil goeth about like a roaring lion, he goeth about in a shape by which few but savages and hunters are attracted. But when he is trimmed, smoothed, and varnished, according to the mode; when he is aweary of vice, and aweary of virtue, used up as to brimstone, and used up as to bliss; then, whether he take to the serving out of red tape, or to the kindling of red fire, he is the very Devil. (*HT* 137)

The metaphors of ascent and descent come to a head at the end of this book with Louisa going down Mrs. Sparsit's Staircase until "lying, an insensible heap" at her father's feet (*HT* 167). While Book III ("Garnering") pursues the final harvesting of Tom, Louisa and Stephen, the main focus is on Mr. Gradgrind himself, who like his children experiences a conversion (as Stephen needs not) from Mammon to God, "making his facts and figures subservient to Faith, Hope and Charity" (*HT* 225). That the denouement for all these characters take place in the autumn underscores the harvest symbolism. It is particularly intriguing that Stephen dies on a Sunday in the autumn (*HT* 201), inviting the conjecture that his translation takes place while the Gospel of God and Mammon is being read in the surrounding churches.³⁶

As Harthouse plays the role of Satan (or, using a different literary source, Mephisto), instrumental in the downfall of both Louisa and Tom, and, through the latter, indirectly of Stephen, so Sissy Jupe acts Christ (or Gretchen), having her hand in the salvation of all the other four. While Louisa and her father act as exemplary penitents, agonizing over their hardened hearts at length in the last chapter of Book II and the first of Book III before softening under Sissy's benign influence, Tom remains obdurate almost till the very end. Indeed, in some respects he plays the role of an impenitent and despairing Judas (he does not live up to the ambition of a Faustus), betraying not only Stephen but his own sister, all the while "tearing his hair, morosely crying, grudgingly loving her, hatefully but impenitently spurning himself, and no less hatefully and unprofitably spurning all the good in the world" (*HT* 146). For long it seems the most he can expect is "to be saved from justice" (*HT* 210), all the while "repulsing" his sister's pleas for him to "atone, by repentance and better conduct" (*HT* 216). In the end it

³⁶ Since the 15th Sunday after Trinity, depending on the year, may occur between August 31 and October 3, Dickens had to be vague about the exact date of Stephen's death.

takes another not-very-convincing death-bed scene for him to die "in penitence and love of [Louisa]" (*HT* 226). As with *Bounderby*, one suspects Dickens' theology prevented Tom from following his model to the bitter end.

Stephen, in addition to his role as innocent sufferer under the yoke of political economy (as the children under utilitarian education), also plays another part, not as easily conformable to the Prayer Book patterns we have investigated: the innocent sufferer under the equally constrictive yoke of an incompatible marriage. That Dickens, haunted by his own matrimonial demons, brings in the divorce theme has often been criticized, but there is actually a connection to the Prayer Book in this also. Almost exactly contemporaneous with Dickens' writing of *Hard Times*, the Convocation of Canterbury, meeting for the first time in almost 200 years, on 1 February 1854 appoints a Joint Committee to revise the Prayer Book. Their report was given in July of the same year, a few weeks after the novel was finished.³⁷ By giving Stephen's extra-marital companion the name of "Rachel" Dickens is subtly suggesting a needed revision of the "Form of Solemnization of Matrimony" contained in *The Book of Common Prayer*. The Marriage Order contains a prayer, said by the priest right before he admonishes the couple not to put asunder what "God hath joined together," in which the Old Testament Patriarch Isaac and his wife Rebecca are proposed as an *exemplum* of life-long fidelity:

O Eternal God, Creator and Preserver of all mankind, Giver of all spiritual grace, the Author of everlasting life: Send thy blessing upon these thy servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in thy Name; that, as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together, so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made, (whereof this Ring given and received is a token and pledge,) and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to thy laws; through Jesus Christ our lord. Amen.

³⁷ R.C.D. Jasper, "The Prayer Book in the Victorian Era," in *The Victorian Crisis of Faith*, ed. Anthony Symondson (London: S.P.C.K, 1970) 113. Parliament let the suggested reforms die, and the Committee anyway did not actually attempt to change the wording of the Prayer Book, but Dickens could not have known that when he wrote the novel. Since it was serialized in *Household Words* from April 1, he could well have seen the novel as an opportunity to convince the committee members, as he attempted to persuade the general public.

Dickens clearly wants to provide the Committee with an alternative *exemplum* by suggesting another Patriarch, Isaac and Rebecca's son Jacob, whom God allowed to marry not only his first wife Leah but also the love of his heart, Rachel.

If the sowing metaphors of the Prayer Book provide the three-partite structure of the novel, and much of the plotting, the polarity of God and Mammon permeate every part of it. In almost every chapter, often in their beginning paragraphs, we are reminded of it through interrelated sets of contrasted pairs.³⁸ The Fact/Fancy dichotomy of the two first chapters is only the first instance. It is as if Dickens won't let his readers off the hook, insistently reminding them of the text of the sermon. Some representative samples, taken from initial paragraphs of various chapters, will have to suffice as examples, but they could easily be multiplied:

Coketown, to which Messrs. Bounderby and Gradgrind now walked, was a triumph of fact; it had no greater taint of fancy in it than Mrs. Gradgrind herself. Let us strike the keynote, Coketown, before pursuing our tune. (*HT* 16).

The Fairy palaces burst into illumination, before pale morning showed the monstrous serpents of smoke trailing themselves over Coketown. A clattering of clogs upon the pavement; a rapid ringing of bells; and all the melancholy mad elephants, polished and oiled up for the day's monotony, were at their heavy exercise again. Stephen bent over his loom, quiet, watchful, and steady. A special contrast, as every man was in the forest of looms where Stephen worked, to the crashing, smashing, tearing piece of mechanism at which he laboured. Never fear, good people of an anxious turn of mind, that Art will consign Nature to oblivion. Set anywhere, side by side, the work of God and the work of man; and the former; even though it be a troop of Hands of very small account, will gain in dignity from the comparison. (*HT* 53)

³⁸ In the first book all but two chapters (7 and 13) contain clearly spelled out dichotomies. In Book 2 and first half of Book 3 only about half the chapters contain instances of both poles together, while they again become insistent towards the end of the novel.

The national dustmen, after entertaining one another with a great many noisy little fights among themselves, had dispersed for the present, and Mr. Gradgrind was at home for the vacation. He sat writing in the room with the deadly statistical clock, proving something no doubt—probably, in the main, that the Good Samaritan was a Bad Economist. (HT 164)

Day and night again, day and night again. No Stephen Blackpool. Where was the man, and why did he not come back? Every night, Sissy went to Rachel's lodging, and sat with her in her small neat room. All day, Rachel toiled as such people must toil, whatever their anxieties. The smoke-serpents were indifferent who was lost and found, who turned out bad or good; the melancholy mad elephants, like the Hard Fact men, abated nothing of their set routine, whatever happened. Day and night again, day and night again. The monotony was unbroken. Even Stephen Blackpool's disappearance was falling into the general way, and becoming as monotonous a wonder as any piece of machinery in Coketown. (HT 194)

Around the poles of each pair increasingly complex and comprehensive clusters of meaning are attached. Dickens' genius can be seen in his ability to constantly vary and interconnect the contrasted terms without boring his readers. Taken in isolation, any particular dichotomy may appear reductive, as when critics have complained about the Fact and Fancy polarity that Dickens' answer to laissez-fair and utilitarianism seem to be the "amusement" provided by Sleary's horse riding. But, as Thomas Linehan has cogently demonstrated, the "Fancy" of the novel is much more than a diversion: "Dickens sees a connection between Fancy and the way in which we respond to human affliction. ... Fancy should be viewed as the source of distinctly religious emotions which bind human beings to one another in very solemn ties."³⁹ And as even my small sampling shows, the same is true for the Art/Nature contrast, as it is for the Head and Heart dichotomy that color the

³⁹ Thomas M. Linehan, "Rhetorical Technique and Moral Purpose in Dickens's *Hard Times*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 47:1 (1977): 31 and 33.

different discussions between Louisa and her father, or the wonderfully surreal interchange between Mr. Gradgrind and Bitzer towards the end of the novel.

One contrast that might not be as obvious at first sight is the geometric one between the squareness of everything connected with utilitarianism or capitalism, and the roundness of the opposing forces. That everything about Mr. Gradgrind in the first two chapters is "square," from his forefinger to the implements of his trade, "a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table" (*HT* 2), we cannot miss, but the importance of the contrasting "ring" may at first elude us. But as Dickens keeps adding details to these geometric contrasts, new clusters of meaning emerge. That Mr. Gradgrind's house is as square as his person is to be expected, but so is Coketown with its monotonous grid of "several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another ..." (*HT* 17). The significance of the symbolism of the eternal circle, seen in the reference to the recurring natural cycles—"the circle of their daily labor" and "the great wheel of earth" (*HT* 201)—becomes only gradually evident. The Circus obviously functions as a focal point for it, but it is in the small details that Dickens paints his picture: the "loophole" (*HT* 7) that provides a opening vista of freedom for the Gradgrind siblings, the "round mistake in the arithmetic" that their father never made (*HT* 21), or even the rim of Sleary's brandy and water (*HT* 222). The figure becomes prominent in the third Book as Stephen and the Gradgrinds in their various ways turn to face their Maker. Again, the Circus in which "Mr. Gradgrind sat down forlorn, on the Clown's performing chair in the middle of the ring" (*HT* 215) is an obvious instance, but equally powerful is the communal "large ring round the Old Hell Shaft" (*HT* 204), enclosing the dying Stephen. The theme of sowing and harvesting of course underscores the concomitant theme of the circle of life, which Dickens throughout the novel contrasts with the dead, machine-like uniformity of Mammonism:

Time went on in Coketown like its own machinery: so much material wrought up, so much fuel consumed, so many powers worn out, so much money made. But, less inexorable than iron, steel and brass, it brought its varying seasons even into that wilderness of smoke and brick, and made the only stand that ever *was* made in the place against its direful uniformity. (*HT* 69)

This is also a reason why the Prayer Book becomes associated with the life-giving forces, since it too follows the seasonal and circular changes of the Church year.

In my own rhetorical performance, it is now time for the concluding peroration. I have tried to demonstrate that *Hard Times* takes its controlling idea from a Gospel reading associated with the harvest season of the Church year, the 13th to 15th Sundays after Trinity. It remains to show that another set of holidays from the circle of the church year is used in the novel, and in some respects contrasted with the harvest series: the three days after Christmas, Saint Stephen's Day (December 26), Saint John the Evangelist's Day (December 27), and The Innocents' Day (December 28). As with the harvest series, these holidays are related: "the three days after Christmas represent the three ways of suffering, love and purity, by which the Incarnation bears fruit in the saints of God."⁴⁰ If the harvest series can be twisted into a Gospel of Mammonism, then these holidays represent the Gospel that "bears fruit," the suffering, love and purity that counteract Mammon in all its manifestations. Stephen Blackpool embodies the suffering worker, while Sissy Jupe, together with the other students of Gradgrind's school incarnate the innocent children (cf. the chapter heading "Murdering the Innocents").⁴¹ Centrally positioned in between these two holy days is that of St John, the apostle of charity or love, which of course is the central concept of Dickens' catechism, seen in all those characters who strive against inhumanity, whether Sleary, Sissy, Rachel, or Louisa towards Tom, and Mr. Gradgrind in the latter part of the novel.

Dying in Old Hell Shaft, Stephen keeps "looking up at the sky" (*HT* 206-08), iconographically representing both the Gospel and the Collect of Saint Stephen's Day, with its prayer that "we may stedfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed; and being filled with the

⁴⁰ *The Annotated Book of Common Prayer* 78.

⁴¹ "Innocence" is a word that keeps recurring in connection with Sissy and Louisa. See especially *HT* 150-51: "Remembrances of how she [Louisa] had journeyed to that little that she knew, by the enchanted roads of what she and millions of innocent creatures had hoped and imagined; of how, first coming upon Reason through the tender light of Fancy, she had seen it a beneficent god, deferring to gods as great as itself: not a grim Idol, cruel and cold" This passage is the closest Dickens gets to naming Mammon outright in the novel. It also brings to mind his conversation with Mr. Snapper.

Holy Ghost, may learn to love and bless our persecutors, by the example of thy first Martyr Saint Stephen” Only by placing the allusion to St. Stephen in the context of the Prayer Book, thereby contextualizing it within the Christmas season, does Stephen Blackpool’s vision of the star of Bethlehem take on its full significance (or even sense). Similarly, Dickens’ childlike rendering of the Murder of the Innocents in *The Life of Our Lord* brings out the Christmas context:

But when this cruel Herod found that the wise men did not come back to him, and that he could not, therefore, find out where this child, Jesus Christ, lived, he called his soldiers and captains to him, and told them to go and Kill all the children in his dominions that were not more than two years old. The mothers of the children ran up and down the streets with them in their arms trying to save them, and hide them in caves and cellars, but it was of no use. The soldiers with their swords killed all the children they could find. This dreadful murder was called the Murder of the Innocents. Because the little children were so innocent.⁴²

It is in this context that the similarities between *Hard Times* and the Christmas books, often commented on by scholars, take on their full significance. Indeed, on 27, 29 and 30 December 1853, i.e., on two of the Christmas holidays we have just discussed, and less than a month before starting on his new novel, Dickens conducted his very first public readings of *A Christmas Story*, in which Scrooge turns from Mammon to God. No wonder Dickens did not want to make Political Economy a great king above all gods.

⁴² Dickens, *Life of Our Lord* 17-18.