

Industrialization and Secularization

On the Influences of Industrialization on Religion in the English Culture of the 1850's

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'She looked out upon the dark-gray lines of the church tower, square and straight in the centre of the view, cutting against the deep blue transparent depths beyond, into which she gazed, and felt that she might gaze for ever, seeing at every moment some farther distance, and yet no sign of God!'

(Gaskell, *North and South*)

Content

Introduction	2.
Chapter 1 – Dissent	7.
Chapter 2 – Labourers	12.
Chapter 3 – Ideology	15.
Chapter 4 – Church	18.
Chapter 5 – Discourse	21.
Conclusion	25.
Works Cited	28.

Introduction

‘She looked out upon the dark-gray lines of the church tower, square and straight in the centre of the view, cutting against the deep blue transparent depths beyond, into which she gazed, and felt that she might gaze for ever, seeing at every moment some farther distance, and yet no sign of God!’¹

Margaret Hale, protagonist of the novel *North and South* (1855) written by Elizabeth Gaskell, expresses these thoughts when she comes to know that she will move to the industrialized Milton (Manchester) of the 1850’s. This bachelor thesis will address both the changing role of religion and Industrialization in the English society of the 1850’s, discussing their correlation with each other.

In our contemporary western secularized society, religion seems to be withdrawn from our public and political culture. Therefore, we could, similarly to Margaret Hale, question the presence of God in our society. However, preceding our present day situation, there was a century long process of secularization of which Margaret seems to perceive the beginning. By understanding the influences which caused the changed position of religion in society in the past, we are able to further understand our contemporary society and the place religion has in it, enlightened through a historical context.

Much historical research has already been done on this topic during the last century. That the influence of Christianity in British society has changed during the 19th and 20th century is nowadays widely accepted among historians. Nonetheless, when these changes set in and what has changed, is still a matter of debate. A term frequently mentioned in historical studies is ‘secularization’. The word is used in various contexts and implies different meanings. Secularization can denote that less people go to the (official) church, that less people believe in the Christian God, that more people do not believe in anything at all or that more people search for their religion in secular ideologies such as communism. Since the meaning of secularization is not fixed, in this thesis, every definition of each historian that is referred to will be given. This thesis will focus on the changes of Christianity in the British society in the 1850’s in general and therefore I will not restrict myself to the term ‘secularization’ and one of its meanings.

Historians such as Owen Chadwick, Hugh McLeod and Callum G. Brown all agree that the Industrialization influenced religion in the English society, but they do not agree on the way in which religion changed. All three represent a different perspective on the theme of secularization.

¹ Gaskell, E., 1855. *North and South* (Gutenberg Project 2003) Chapter 5.

Owen Chadwick expresses his views in his book *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century* (1975). He focuses on the history of ideas, or the history of mentalities. In his book he describes influences of for example liberalism, socialism, anti-clericalism, science, and history on religion; which would have caused a secular society. He states that secularization is a scientific construction to deal with social changes such as a decrease of members of the Church of England, a decrease of baptisms and income for the church, and that these social facts correlate with ideas in society.²

Although secularization is of the ‘many’³ and therefore influences all classes of society, in combination with the Industrialization he focuses on the religion of the workers. He found that the workers did not want to be seen as secularists or atheists and that those who were secularist were craftsmen instead of real labourers. Besides, those secularists organised themselves similarly to Christian organisations.⁴ The labourer was not very religious⁵, but: ‘He was somewhere between an unconscious secularist and an unconscious Christian.’⁶

Chadwick discusses the statement that the Industrial Revolution divided men from God⁷, and comes to the conclusion that it was not the alienation from nature or work that caused the declining enthusiasm of labourers for religion or Christianity, but: ‘the failure of “church extension”; that is, the inability of the churches’ machine to adapt itself quickly enough to new areas, new suburbs, new towns. (...) The collapse of religion (if it collapsed) was in this view nothing but the consequence of the collapse of the parochial system.’⁸ Besides, Christianity was, among the labourers, not associated with the church⁹ but with ‘decisive outward acts, hot gospel, teetotalism, and, no smoking’.¹⁰ Going to church was not part of the labour-community but for the bourgeois people.¹¹ The labourers had their own religious events and attitudes. Instead of Christmas for example, they celebrated New Year’s Eve.¹² To summarize, during the Industrial Revolution, the churches did not adapt quickly enough to the growing industrial cities, and a new culture arose among the workers where the Church of England and traditional Christianity was of minor importance and this lead to a secularist society.

² O. Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century* (Cambridge 1975) 1-18.

³ Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind*, 9.

⁴ Ibidem, 89.

⁵ Ibidem, 90.

⁶ Ibidem, 100.

⁷ Ibidem, 94.

⁸ Ibidem, 97.

⁹ Ibidem, 102.

¹⁰ Ibidem, 102.

¹¹ Ibidem 102.

¹² Ibidem, 96.

Hugh McLeod researches the topic of secularization from a social perspective in his book *Religion and the People of Western Europe 1789-1989* (1997). He focusses on class, gender and ethnicity and states about religion in industrial England that ‘in both town and countryside the non-churchgoers came mainly from the working-class population, and middle-class church attendance remained high until the end of the century. (...) urban labourers and craftsmen were probably more likely to be religiously indifferent and certainly were more attracted to secularism than those in the countryside.’¹³ McLeod measures secularization in social statistics such as a decrease in church attendance, baptisms and church memberships.

In his book, McLeod gives several reasons for the fact that workers were the non-churchgoers. There was, for example, a tendency of anticlericalism since many workers were very poor and expected help from their priests who neither represented nor helped them but collaborated with the rich and powerful for their own ends.¹⁴ However, there were radical English clergy that tried to identify with their working-class parishioners and thereby limited the anticlericalism among the workers.¹⁵

The church had an ambiguous relation with the modern cities since Industrialization and Urbanization sometimes threatened churches but on other occasions the churches offered solutions for problems that arose from Industrialization and Urbanization.¹⁶ Churches, for example, ‘often took the first initiatives in establishing workers’ organizations for mutual support and sociability’.¹⁷ Besides, outside the Official Church, many sectarian groups flourished.¹⁸ Religion also gave a common identity to groups of workers¹⁹ and played an important role in establishing a moral order among the labour communities.²⁰ On the other hand although sometimes, in times of danger, there was a religious revival and supernatural help was sought,²¹ the ‘majority of the people no longer needed to seek supernatural aid’ due to the changing role of religion in an urbanized and industrialized society.²² To summarize, due to new religious communities and a decreasing influence of the Church of England during the 19th century, a differentiated pattern of religion came into existence. Membership of the religious

¹³ H. McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe 1789-1989* (Oxford, second edition, 1997) 84.

¹⁴ McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe*, 25-26.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 27.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 75.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 77.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 76.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 77.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 79.

²¹ *Ibidem*, 81.

²² *Ibidem*, 93.

communities was determined by class or ethnicity.²³ By the end of the 19th century ‘most workers were members of the church that was dominant in their own country, and most continued to celebrate with religious rites the great turning-points of life; but they seldom went to church at other times, and many of them regarded church and clergy with hostility.’²⁴ Therefore, through various changes in society, the traditional religious culture had disappeared. Religion was no longer self-evident and lost her dominant role in society.

Finally, this thesis discusses Callum G. Brown’s point of view, who in his book, *The Death of Christian Britain* (2001), focuses on the discourse of the English society in the 19th century.²⁵ According to Brown, a society is secularized when Christianity is no longer part of the discourse.²⁶ He concludes that the British society is suddenly secularized in 1963 and gives as the major reason the emancipation of the women.²⁷ In the 19th century however, the English discourse was Christian and therefore Brown does not perceive any secularization during the Industrial Revolution.²⁸

However, Brown observes various changes in the role of Christianity in the English society of the 1850’s. Many people in the industrial cities were members of dissenting congregations such as the Methodists.²⁹ A salvation economy came into existence as part of the evangelical renewal.³⁰ In this economy, emphasis was laid upon capitalist values such as self-help, self-reliance, and taking responsibility³¹ in an evangelical framework which focused on ‘faith in the context of the individual as a “free moral agent”’.³² Faith was therefore no longer connected to the official Church of England but to morality in society and seen as a personal choice.³³ Besides the focus on morality, evangelism influenced the male-female social roles:

‘Evangelical religion, especially in its more radical form, thus became an enforcer of domestic ideology (...) it was evangelicalism which provided the community a location for the elaboration and affirmation of those separate spheres as domestic ideology. Faith was being privatised as an individual choice, but society privileged female piety and instituted anxiety about masculinity.’³⁴

²³ McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe*, 89.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 118.

²⁵ C. G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain. Understanding Secularization 1800-2000* (London 2001), 12.

²⁶ Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 13.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 1.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 9.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 18.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 36.

³¹ *Ibidem*, 36.

³² *Ibidem*, 36.

³³ *Ibidem*, 37.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, 42.

Concluding, Brown perceives an active dissenting evangelical movement in industrialized 19th century Britain which emphasised personal choice and morality. In his perception the women were glorified as examples of moral goodness and men were projected as immoral who needed to be guided by loving, caring and pious women.

This bachelor thesis will take position in the historical debate. To illustrate the influence of the Industrial Revolution on religion in the 19th century English society, this thesis will consist of a literary case study of the novel *North and South* (1855) written by Elizabeth Gaskell. This novel is chosen because it is an English realist novel published in the 1850's. Elizabeth Gaskell was well acquainted with the situations she described and the novel was popular and well read. Religion is only one of the themes Gaskell addresses and therefore the novel is very well suited to use in a research on the relation between themes such as religion, Industrialisation and society.

This novel will function as a historical source to test whether contemporary historical perceptions on the past can be traced back to historical texts. I believe that literary research can be very fruitful in historical research as it both shows and tells perspectives that are unfamiliar to contemporary readers. Although 'the past is a foreign country' and 'they do things differently there'³⁵ according to the British writer L. P. Hartley, literature helps us to engage with another age, mentality and worldview than our own. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum confirms this when she states: 'The tragic form asks its spectators to cross cultural boundaries and national boundaries. (...) In reading a realist novel with active participation, readers do all that tragic spectators do – and something more. They embrace the ordinary.'³⁶ Many historians, such as Callum G. Brown used novels to interpret 'ordinary history' within the academic historical debate.

The conclusion will show whether the perspectives from the novel support or reject any of the views of the historical debate and if so, which perspectives of the historians are confirmed, nuanced or rejected. This research will provide an answer to the question how the Industrialization influenced religion in the English society of the 1850's according to the novel *North and South*.

³⁵ D. Lowenthal, 'Past Time, Present Place: Landscape Memory', *Geographical Review* 65 (1975) 1-36, 3.

³⁶ M.C. Nussbaum, 'From Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education', in: Vincent B. Leitch (ed.) *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. (New York, second edition, 2010) 2302-2328, 2313.

Chapter 1 – Dissent

Although *North and South* mainly deals with the industrialized North of England illustrated by the city Milton, inspired most likely on Manchester, the novel begins in the romantic rural countryside of South England. In the little hamlet of Helstone, we meet the Hale family consisting of a father, the minister of the local church in the village, his wife Mrs. Hale, and daughter Margaret, the protagonist. Later in the novel we find out that there is also an older brother, Frederick, who cannot come back to England as he took part in a mutiny during his service in the British Army. While the novel addresses themes such as family, social justice and gender, it is religion that is the key theme from the beginning of the novel. Mr. Hale, the father of protagonist Margaret, decides to leave the Church of England due to a matter of conscience. Margaret's father was asked by the bishop to declare his conformity to the Liturgy of the Church of England again. This he could not which caused his decision to resign his vicarage. He explains to Margaret: 'You could not understand it all, if I told you – my anxiety, for years past, to know whether I had any right to hold my living – my efforts to quench my smouldering doubts by the authority of the Church. Oh! Margaret, how I love the holy Church from which I am to be shut out!'³⁷

All historians discussed in the introduction, mention dissenting alternative religious communities as a reason for the decreasing membership of the Church of England in the middle of the 19th century. Dissent to these historians meant that people did not feel at home at the official Church of England anymore. People were feeling more freedom from the Industrial Revolution and used this opportunity to change to other Christian communities. Important communities in the 19th century were the Methodists and the Evangelicals. More variation in Christianity besides the Church of England caused a differentiated pattern of churches and communities which shows an important change in religion and the organisation of religion in 19th century England.³⁸

However, the episode of Mr. Hale's dissent is very different from the descriptions of the historians. Mr. Hale resides in the South of England and this novel therefore provides a different perspective than the dissent that is often described in relation to the industrialized and urbanized North of England. Firstly, the choice to resign is remarkable because he was one of the few dissenters of the Church of England in the bourgeois south where the Church of England held her

³⁷ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 4.

³⁸ McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe*, 89.

important position during the 19th century.³⁹ It was mostly in the North of England, among the labourers, where people changed from church and went to the Evangelical or Methodist congregations or decided not to go to any church at all or only on important occasions.⁴⁰

Secondly, although there were more preachers that could not subscribe the dogmas of the Church of England, and therefore decided to become a member of one of the dissenting communities that mostly flourished in the North of England, such as the family of Elizabeth Gaskell, Mr. Hale does not go to another Christian community.

Thirdly, the father of Margaret is a minister and not one of the ‘ordinary church-goers’, which makes his decision more radical since he studied theology at Oxford⁴¹ and was an example for his parish for years. Therefore, his choice is clearly very difficult and painful. He is used to this church, and his profession as a minister makes clear that the church played a very important role in his life. He has no anticlerical attitude that drove various workers to become dissenters.⁴²

Fourthly, besides the emotional farewell to the church the family is connected to, there are also radical practical changes. They cannot stay at Helstone since the father is no longer a minister, and therefore they need to move to the North of England where Margaret’s father hopes to find a job as a personal tutor. This move has great implications on the living conditions and the income of the family and even the health of Margaret’s mother, who becomes very ill in Milton and dies.

Fifthly, the resignation of the father of Margaret is also not socially accepted. Margaret’s father even does not dare to tell his wife of his plans to resign and leave Helstone. Margaret is assigned this difficult task. Margaret’s mother cannot understand the doubts of her husband and also thinks he should have discussed them with her. She does not understand why he did not tell her anything of his plans. Mrs. Hale explains the social consequences: ‘Though, of course, if your father leaves the Church, we shall not be admitted into society anywhere. It will be such a disgrace to us! Poor dear Sir John! It is well he is not alive to see what your father has come to!’⁴³ Besides close family, also the servants do not support the plans of Mr. Hale. Dixon says: ‘Since your mamma told me this terrible news, when I dressed her for tea, I’ve lost all count of time. I’m sure I don’t know what is to become of us all. (...) And master thinking of turning

³⁹ McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe*, 84.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 118.

⁴¹ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 40.

⁴² McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe*, 25-26.

⁴³ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 5.

Dissenter at his time of life, when, if it is not to be said he's done well in the Church, he's not done badly after all.'⁴⁴

Elizabeth Gaskell, the writer of the novel, was very well acquainted with dissenting communities. Her father, William Stevenson (1770-1829), went in 1787 to the Dissenting academy at Daventry. This was an alternative college instead of Oxford or Cambridge for those students who could not 'in conscience subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England.'⁴⁵ Afterwards he ministered a small Unitarian congregation at Dob Lane. However, he resigned again since he did not want to be paid for preaching the gospel which was again 'a principled act of conscience.'⁴⁶ Elizabeth's mother was raised in a Unitarian family but Elizabeth's parents married in the Church of England because of the law.⁴⁷ After Elizabeth's mother died, Elizabeth was raised by her mother's sister, Aunt Hannah. The family was a member of the Knutsford's Old Dissenting Chapel, which was a Unitarian congregation since 1740.⁴⁸ Elizabeth married William Gaskell on Thursday the 30th of August 1832 at Knutsford parish church.⁴⁹ Elizabeth's husband was also a Unitarian and was the second minister of Manchester's Cross Street Chapel⁵⁰.

Elizabeth Gaskell was therefore strongly acquainted with the dissenting community, but did not experience the act of becoming a dissenter personally. She was part of the Unitarian community which consisted of approximately two hundred congregations. The Methodist community was much larger, but the Unitarians were much more influential because they had important positions in society, organised themselves thoroughly in societies, charity schools and institutes, and used the printing press a lot, since they were very 'tolerant, progressive and liberal, they cooperated with other faiths in good works.'⁵¹ Unitarians did not subscribe the orthodox Trinitarian Doctrine and believed that Jesus was not the son of God but a 'divinely inspired guide and teacher.'⁵² Besides their denial of the Trinity, which was quit radical since it was against the law of England between 1689 and 1813,⁵³ they supported 'Enlightenment ideals

⁴⁴ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 5.

⁴⁵ J. Chapple, 'Unitarian Dissent', in: J. L. Matus (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*. (Cambridge 2007) 164-177, 165.

⁴⁶ D. D'Albertis, 'The Life and Letters of E. C. Gaskell', in: J. L. Matus (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*. (Cambridge 2007) 10-26, 17.

⁴⁷ Chapple, 'Unitarian Dissent', 165.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 166.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 169.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, 167.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 166-167.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 164.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 164.

of freedom of rational thought and inquiry, liberty of conscience, tolerance and self-improvement.⁵⁴

Chapple stated that: ‘Although Unitarianism as such is absent from her [Gaskell’s] fiction, its humane perspectives are omnipresent. Criticism of social evils, compassion for suffering humanity, and hard-won trust in divine providence pervade the stories that became her most satisfying form of personal action.’⁵⁵ Besides the other mentioned elements, Gaskell’s Unitarian background returns in her tolerant description of various people with diverse religious backgrounds. Both Elizabeth Gaskell⁵⁶ and her husband William Gaskell⁵⁷ were convinced that correctness of belief did not determine eternal salvation and therefore were socially connected with all kinds of people from all kinds of religious backgrounds. This very much fits to the tolerant, progressive, and liberal attitude of the Unitarian community.

A well-known example of Gaskell’s tolerant attitude is the family prayer where: ‘Margaret the Churchwoman, her father the Dissenter, Higgins the Infidel, knelt down together. It did them no harm.’⁵⁸ By mentioning that this prayer together did them no harm, Gaskell clearly shows her tolerant perspective on religion in which all people can join. Margaret’s brother is a converted Roman Catholic, who, according to Margaret, converted for love. Margaret does not understand it and she is throughout the novel portrayed as a very moralizing lady. Her father, however, is very tolerant, which is shown in the following example:

‘Mr. Hale treated all his fellow-creatures alike: it never entered into his head to make any difference because of their rank. He placed a chair for Nicholas stood up till he, at Mr. Hale’s request, took a seat; and called him, invariably, ‘Mr. Higgins,’ instead of the curt ‘Nicholas’ or ‘Higgins,’ to which the ‘drunken infidel weaver’ had been accustomed.’⁵⁹

Although Nicholas Higgins is from a lower social class and described as an infidel, Mr. Hale treats him as his equal. In the last example, religion functions as a connection between various people. During the funeral service of Mrs. Hale, not only Margaret, as a religious woman, her father as a doubtful former minister, but also their help, the religious Dixon, the ‘infidel’ Nicholas Higgins and the irreligious reasonable economic Mr. Thornton attend the service.

In correlation with Chadwick, McLeod and Brown dissent is an important theme in the novel describing religion in England in the middle of the 19th century. However, dissent is

⁵⁴ Chapple, ‘Unitarian Dissent’, 165.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, 165.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, 176.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, 171.

⁵⁸ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 28.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, Chapter 28.

described outside the usual industrialized urbanized context of the North of England, in the old order of the south. Mr. Hale represents the old order and the older generation who doubted and had difficulty with the authority of the church in the 18th century. Margaret, Nicholas Higgins, Bessy Higgins and Mr. Thornton, whom will be discussed in the following chapters, present the younger generation of the 19th century and their diverse religious perspectives.

Chapter 2 – Labourers

Various historians pointed out that the Industrialization mostly influenced the religion of the working class. Their new situations, jobs, and social hardships made them irreligious, made them search for a secular social organisation or made them enthusiast for the evangelical movements. In the novel *North and South*, Gaskell pays lots of attention to the labourers in Milton, whom she knew very well from her personal life as the wife of the minister in Manchester.⁶⁰ Gaskell draws a very realistic portrait of the workers in her novel by sharing her knowledge of the culture and the northern accent. Two important labourers that are described are Nicholas Higgins, who organises a Workers Union, and his daughter Bessy, who will die soon because the cotton fluff from the factory poisoned her lungs. Both draw very different conclusions during the same hardship. Bessy is very religious but her father states he cannot believe in a God due to the difficulties he is been through.

Bessy is very religious and given her illness and impending death, she mentions her expectations of heaven several times. When Margaret attends her, Bessy murmurs to herself: ‘They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.’⁶¹ This passage comes from the Bible⁶² and this is Bessy’s source for her heavenly prospect after a tough life. Bessy’s expectations are also very practical. She is afraid that there will not be time enough to recover before she can enjoy heaven. ”Don't be afraid, Bessy,” said Margaret, laying her hand on the girl's; “God can give you more perfect rest than even idleness on earth, or the dead sleep of the grave can do.”⁶³

Besides her religious longing for heaven, she also uses biblical associations in ordinary life. She mentions the days of Lazarus for example, when Margaret is invited for a luxurious dinner and the workers almost die of hunger.⁶⁴ Her practical belief even gives her visions and dreams: ‘And why might I dream a dream in my affliction as well as others? Did not many a one i' the Bible? Ay, and see visions too!’⁶⁵ by which she makes herself part of the biblical tradition. Religion clearly plays an important role in her everyday life.

Nicholas Higgins has an opposite view on religion. The author uses him to portray the religious perception of the labourers and states:

⁶⁰ D’Albertis, ‘The life and letters of E. C. Gaskell’, 23.

⁶¹ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 11.

⁶² *King James Version*, ‘Revelation’ 21: 4.

⁶³ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 13.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, Chapter 19.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, Chapter 19.

'They don't believe i' the Bible,—not they. They may say they do, for form's sake; but Lord, sir, d'ye think their first cry i' th' morning is, "What shall I do to get hold on eternal life?" or "What shall I do to fill my purse this blessed day? Where shall I go? What bargains shall I strike?" The purse and the gold and the notes is real things; things as can be felt and touched; them's realities; and eternal life is all a talk.'⁶⁶

Nicholas Higgins shows the perspectives of the workers who have a hard life and already experience difficulty in making ends meet. Religion has no place in their life, since their life is filled with cares and worries and daily matters, without the added complications of religion.

At the first instance, Nicholas Higgins appears to be an atheist, but on the other hand, religion has not disappeared from his mind altogether. It states in the novel that Higgins was no habitual drunkard or infidel but 'he had never yet found any form of faith to which he could attach himself, heart and soul.'⁶⁷ He does not want his daughter to be preached to, but on the other hand he says: 'But if it amuses her I let it be, but I'm none going to have more stuff poured into her'.⁶⁸ Nicholas Higgins seems to have lost his faith in the supernatural and states: 'I believe what I see, and no more.'⁶⁹ He repeats this clear statement after Bessy died, but appears to be doubting his own beliefs. He decides to talk to Margaret's father since he was a parson. The reader sees this as remarkable as Nicholas Higgins has a very negative perspective on the church, which he perceives as hypocritical: 'I'm glad, sir,' said Higgins, with a curious wink of his eye, 'that yo' put in, "so they think." I'd ha' thought yo' a hypocrite, I'm afeard, if yo' hadn't, for all yo'r a parson, or rayther because yo'r a parson. (...) No offence, I hope, sir.'⁷⁰

Nicholas Higgins asks Mr. Hale why he believes in something he cannot see. Mr. Hale states that there is a difference between reason and belief, and he believes in God although there is no rational proof. The author continues to portray Nicholas Higgins as the worker who is not a Christian, but neither a conscious atheist:

'There's many a time when I've thought I didna believe in God, but I've never put it fair out before me in words, as many men do. I may ha' laughed at those who did, to brave it out like—but I have looked round at after, to see if He heard me, if so be there was a He; but to-day, when I'm left desolate, I wunnot listen to yo' wi' yo'r questions, and yo'r

⁶⁶ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 28.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, Chapter 28.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, Chapter 11.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, Chapter 11.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, Chapter 28.

doubts. There's but one thing steady and quiet i' all this reeling world, and, reason or no reason, I'll cling to that. It's a' very well for happy folk---⁷¹

The older conservative religious communities somehow do not appeal to the industrial labourer and, in the case of Nicholas Higgins, neither did the new evangelistic movements. Mr. Hale however is convinced that Nicholas Higgins believes in God and states: “I trust, whatever else you have given up, you believe” —(Mr. Hale's voice dropped low in reverence)—“you believe in Him.”⁷² Protagonist Margaret also shares with the reader her impression that Higgins could not be totally unaware of God’s existence. Once he told her: ‘I could wish there were a God, if it were only to ask Him to bless thee.’⁷³

Various elements discussed in this chapter, correlate with the historical perspectives mentioned in the introduction. Throughout the novel there are multiple examples of Nicholas Higgins’ belief or disbelief concerning the Christian God to be found that confirm the before mentioned notion of Chadwick that labourers were neither atheist nor Christian.⁷⁴ Besides, Nicholas Higgins makes clear that the workers focus on daily matters without the added complications of religion. Chadwick mentioned this to when he states: ‘the European working-man was interested in bread, and drink, and the next meal, and the pub on the corner.’⁷⁵ Nicholas Higgins hypocrite perspective of the church and her members confirms McLeod’s notion of anticlerical tendencies among the labourers.⁷⁶ Bessy’s religious attitude is opposite to Nicholas Higgins’ perspective and shows the personal evangelical belief which is described by Brown.⁷⁷ It is remarkable that there is no mention of Bessy being a member of a religious (dissenting) community. Besides Mr. Hale, she is the second person that believes without being attached to a church. Gaskell gives with the descriptions of these two characters a diverse perspective of the role of religion in the labour community.

⁷¹ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 28.

⁷² Ibidem, Chapter 28.

⁷³ Ibidem, Chapter 11.

⁷⁴ Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind*, 100.

⁷⁵ Ibidem, 103.

⁷⁶ McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe*, 14.

⁷⁷ Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 36.

Chapter 3 – Ideology

The before mentioned historian Owen Chadwick discusses the fact that during the 19th century, various ideologies substituted religion in one way or the other. Some of these new ideological communities organized themselves as religious communities but focused on social concerns.⁷⁸ In the novel *North and South* two of these ideological substitutes are mentioned in great detail, without however, placing them in the ideological context. One of these secular ideologies is mentioned in relation to the workers and defended by Nicholas Higgins and the other is shown in relation to the factory owners, and in this case Mr. Thornton seems a clear example of their ideals.

While Nicholas Higgins is not clear about his religion, he is clear about his trust in the union: 'An' I say again, there's no help for us but having faith i' th' Union. They'll win the day, see if they dunnot!'⁷⁹ Nicholas Higgins is one of the leaders of the Union that organises a strike among the workers to demand higher wages from the factory owners for their work. The Union has become religion for Nicholas Higgins since he very much emphasises the fact that the combination of all workers in a Union is the only way to a better world. The union is shown to be a very strong community. When you are part of that community you are cared for, but if you are not part of it or even break the strike, you are put out: 'Well! If a man doesn't belong to th' Union, them as works next looms has orders not to speak to him—if he's sorry or ill it's a' the same; he's out o' bounds; he's none o' us.'⁸⁰

The ideology of the workers within this text seems to resemble Marxist ideals, among others described by Chadwick. There is a struggle between the workers, who fight for more social rights and moreover higher wages, and the factory owners such as Mr. Thornton, who do not have much more money due to decreasing prizes for their products. There is no mention of a national movement or any Chartist associations, but the workers are organised among the factory where they work. Thornton's mother found some communist ideals among the workers:

'For the mastership and ownership of other people's property,' said Mrs. Thornton, with a fierce snort. 'That is what they always strike for. If my son's work-people strike, I will only say they are a pack of ungrateful hounds. But I have no doubt they will.' (...) But the truth is, they want to be masters, and make the masters into slaves on their own ground.

⁷⁸ Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind*, 89.

⁷⁹ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 19.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, Chapter 28.

They are always trying at it; they always have it in their minds and every five or six years, there comes a struggle between masters and men.’⁸¹

Mrs. Thornton clearly shows the change of the classes that the workers are trying to achieve.

This correlates to Marx and Engels’ Communist Manifesto what states according to this struggle:

‘The proletariat goes through various stages of development. With its birth begins its struggle with the bourgeoisie. At first the contest is carried on by individual labourers, then by the workpeople of a factory, then by the operatives of one trade, in one locality, against the individual bourgeois who directly exploits them.’⁸²

Besides, Mrs. Thornton mentions their critique on capital and property. Communist theory ideally would like to divide all capital and property among everybody in a way that nobody has more than the others. Again a reference to Marx seems into place: ‘the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property.’⁸³ Nicholas Higgins defends the union and makes clear that the workers have to defend their rights together: ‘A man leads a dree life who's not i' th' Union. But once i' the' Union, his interests are taken care on better nor he could do it for himsel', or by himsel', for that matter. It's the only way working men can get their rights, by all joining together.’⁸⁴ This statement of Higgins copies Marx’ request: ‘working men of all countries, unite!’⁸⁵

Nicholas Higgins’ ambiguous belief in God correlates with his communist ideology since Marx severely opposes Christianity which functions as ‘the opium of the people’, that is to say, which causes the workers to focus on heaven, honour authority and bear their sorrows instead of organising themselves and fight for their rights.⁸⁶ However, on the other hand, while the workers have to deal with their severe conditions, religion can offer comfort and support.⁸⁷ This twofold perspective on religion can be seen by Nicholas Higgins who on the one hand is rational and practical, trying to fight for his rights, and on the other hand has doubts and after the loss of his daughter longs for comfort.

This novel also shows Margaret’s meeting with the factory owner Mr. Thornton. Although Margaret is clearly very critical of his conduct and behaviour towards his workers, the author uses his monologues to show the reader that Margaret judges too fast. The reader learns that Mr. Thornton does not come from an important and wealthy family but is a self-made man.

⁸¹ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 15.

⁸² K. Marx, & Friedrich Engels. 1848. *The Communist Manifesto*. (Gutenberg Project 2005).

⁸³ Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*.

⁸⁴ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 36.

⁸⁵ Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*.

⁸⁶ Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind*, 65.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, 50.

His view closely corresponds to the description of a self-made man by the Scottish author and politician Samuel Smiles: ‘It was the force of his character that raised him; and this character not impressed upon him by nature, but formed, out of no peculiarly fine elements, by himself.’⁸⁸ A good character consists of: ‘sense, industry, good principles, and a good heart’⁸⁹ according to Smiles. Mr. Thornton owes his position by his strong character, perseverance and independence from both religion and the state. He states:

‘It is one of the great beauties of our system, that a workingman may raise himself into the power and position of a master by his own exertions and behavior; that, in fact, every one who rules himself to decency and sobriety of conduct, and attention to his duties, comes over to our ranks; it may not be always as a master, but as an over-looker, a cashier, a book-keeper, a clerk, one on the side of authority and order.’⁹⁰

He himself is the perfect example of a self-made man since his father died ‘under very miserable circumstances’⁹¹ when he was sixteen years old. Mr. Thornton had to stop going to school and needed to work in a draper’s shop with which he had to care for his mother, his sister and himself. Thanks to his character he ‘earned’ a powerful position in society.

The two above discussed ideologies are contradictory. On the one hand the novel portrays communist ideals and on the other hand the capitalist ideology. The novel mirrors with this contradiction the divergent views in society. However, the situation of the labourers was much criticized in various classes of the English society of the 1850’s. A couple of years before the publication of *North and South*, *Condition of England* was published in 1839, written by Thomas Carlyle. In this essay, Carlyle asks the important question: ‘Why Parliament throws no light on this question of the Working Classes, and the condition or disposition they are in?’⁹² Gaskell’s novel does clearly address the same question, although it portrays more perspectives than the views of the workers. The novel *North and South*, bears in some publications the subtitle *On the Condition of England* which underlines the social questions Gaskell tries to address.⁹³

⁸⁸ S. Smiles, 1845 *Self Help*. (Gutenberg Project 1997) Chapter 13.

⁸⁹ Smiles, *Self Help*, Chapter 13.

⁹⁰ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 10.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, Chapter 10.

⁹² Th. Carlyle, 1840. ‘Chartism’, in: J. M. Guy (ed.) *The Victorian Age: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*. (London, 1998). 156-160, 157.

⁹³ ‘Elizabeth Gaskell: 1810-1865’, in: S. Greenblatt (ed.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Victorian Age*. (New York, London 2012). 1259-1260, 1260.

Chapter 4 – Church

In the novel *North and South*, specific views on religion are related to specific classes in society. Mr. Hale, Nicholas Higgins, Bessy Higgins and Mr. Thornton are all described from the protagonist's point of view. Margaret herself is the last character this thesis will address. She is called 'the churchwoman'. The church is the symbol of Christianity and although no service is described, Margaret is literally linked to the church. The church is very important in the beginning of the novel in which Margaret is introduced as part of the old world which does not experience the practical changes of the Industrial Revolution.

When an acquaintance asks Margaret how she would like to organize her wedding she starts with the 'walk to church through the shade of trees'⁹⁴. She very clearly points out that she does not need an elaborate wedding, but that she does want to go to the church in Helstone where she grew up and where her father is the minister. The church is clearly part of her life. When she describes Helstone she begins with the center: 'Oh, only a hamlet; I don't think I could call it a village at all. There is the church and a few houses near it on the green—cottages, rather—with roses growing all over them.'⁹⁵ She describes a very idealistic picture of a southern hamlet, of which the church is the centre.

The Church shows her inner life. The church is even the first thing she looks at in the morning, and the church is perceived by her expectations of the day. 'That morning when she had looked out, her heart had danced at seeing the bright clear lights on the church tower, which foretold a fine and sunny day.'⁹⁶ That her perspective of the church tower is a reflection of her inner life is clear when she describes the church tower again after she heard that her father resigns his position at the Church of England:

'She looked out upon the dark-gray lines of the church tower, square and straight in the centre of the view, cutting against the deep blue transparent depths beyond, into which she gazed, and felt that she might gaze for ever, seeing at every moment some farther distance, and yet no sign of God!'⁹⁷

Whereas Margaret was one full of expectations, after her father's choice to leave the church she is disappointed in her father, and questions the church. She is very sad and looks for God but he does seem no longer there where she would have expected him.

⁹⁴ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 1.

⁹⁵ Ibidem, Chapter 1.

⁹⁶ Ibidem, Chapter 5.

⁹⁷ Ibidem, Chapter 5.

A couple of days before the Hale family will move to Milton, Margaret walks in the garden during the evening. Charlotte, the servant, is closing the doors because she thinks that everybody is inside the house. Margaret runs to the house and says: 'I was afraid you were shutting me out altogether, Charlotte,' said she, half-smiling. 'And then you would never have heard me in the kitchen, and the doors into the lane and churchyard are locked long ago.'⁹⁸ It is striking that even before the family leaves Helstone, the doors into the lane and the churchyard are locked. Since Mr. Hale resigned his position, Margaret and her mother are also shut out and with the move from the South to the North of England, they have to leave the church behind.

Margaret strives to see the church tower when they leave, and she cannot hold her tears: 'A sting at Margaret's heart made her strive to look out to catch the last glimpse of the old church tower at the turn where she knew it might be seen above a wave of the forest trees.'⁹⁹ When she leaves Helstone, it is not the house she is leaving or the neighbours, but it is the church, the centre of her old world that attracts her attention. The church is perceived as an emotional object that reflects the emotions of the people who look at it and was a stronghold of comfort and tradition.

In Milton there is almost no reference to the church by the author. The church does not belong to the new world and when one looks around; one sees factories and filthy chimneys. However, there is an example of a church: 'Mr. Thornton (...) was rather late, and walked rapidly out to Crampton. He was anxious not to slight his new friend by any disrespectful unpunctuality. The church-clock struck half-past seven as he stood at the door.'¹⁰⁰ There is however, in this quote no feeling attached to the church, it only points out the time. It is striking that in this quote the church is still attached to Mr. Hale whom Mr. Thornton will pay a visit. The clock on the church and the importance of time and punctuality portray the new mentality of the industrial society.

In the new industrial society, Margaret stays a very pious woman. In her religious attitude she tries to correct and teach others and to be an example.¹⁰¹ Margaret even thinks it necessary to teach Bessy by saying: 'Bessy—we have a Father in Heaven.'¹⁰² In this example, she reacts on Bessy's sadness concerning the disbelief of her father and his anger sometimes. Margaret comforts Bessy by telling that although she is sick and will die very soon of the severe

⁹⁸ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 6.

⁹⁹ Ibidem, Chapter 6.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem, Chapter 10.

¹⁰¹ J. L. Matus, 'Mary Barton and North and South', in: J. L. Matus (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*. (Cambridge 2007) 27-45, 36.

¹⁰² Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 13.

circumstances she lived in, God does not hurt his flock: ‘Oh, Bessy, God is just, and our lots are well portioned out by Him, although none but He knows the bitterness of our souls.’¹⁰³ Besides: ‘Nay, Bessy—think!’ said Margaret. ‘God does not willingly afflict. Don’t dwell so much on the prophecies, but read the clearer parts of the Bible.’¹⁰⁴ Margaret knows what parts of the Bible should be read, and how they should be interpreted. Bessy asks some very serious questions concerning heaven and whether she or her father will be accepted or not. Margaret knows it all: ‘It won’t be division enough, in that awful day, that some of us have been beggars here, and some of us have been rich,—we shall not be judged by that poor accident, but by our faithful following of Christ.’¹⁰⁵ Bessy however, is very religious to and has the strength to answer Margaret by her strong faith: And, opening her eyes, and looking earnestly at Margaret, ‘I believe, perhaps, more than yo’ do o’ what’s to come. I read the book o’ Revelations until I know it off by heart, and I never doubt when I’m waking, and in my senses, of all the glory I’m to come to.’¹⁰⁶

When Bessy dies, Margaret tells Nicholas Higgins of the hope that lived in Bessy and of her faith in the glory she would enter after her death: ‘she did not fear death as some do. Oh, you should have heard her speak of the life to come—the life hidden with God, that she is now gone to.’¹⁰⁷ But Nicholas Higgins does not believe in an afterlife, is extremely sad and tries to focus on his life on earth. Margaret however, does find comfort in biblical texts; ‘And that was death! It looked more peaceful than life. All beautiful scriptures came into her mind. ‘They rest from their labours.’¹⁰⁸ ‘The weary are at rest.’¹⁰⁹ ‘He giveth His beloved sleep.’¹¹⁰¹¹¹

There are many ways in which Margaret tries to do the right thing as a pious woman: ‘Instead, she would go and see Bessy Higgins. It would not be so refreshing as a quiet country walk, but still it would perhaps be doing the kinder thing.’¹¹² And ‘If I saved one blow, one cruel, angry action that might otherwise have been committed, I did a woman’s work. Let them insult my maiden pride as they will—I walk pure before God!’¹¹³ Here daily life is influenced by her strong faith and she tries to do what God asks her to do in the society she lives in.

¹⁰³ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 17.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, Chapter 17.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, Chapter 19.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, Chapter 13.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, Chapter 28.

¹⁰⁸ *King James Version*, ‘Revelation’ 14:13.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, ‘Job’ 3:17.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, ‘Psalm’ 127:2.

¹¹¹ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 28.

¹¹² *Ibidem*, Chapter 17.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, Chapter 23.

Chapter 5 – Discourse

The before mentioned Callum G. Brown focuses in his research on the religious discourse of England from the 18th until the 20th century, which, in his opinion, made clear which role religion played in the English culture. Brown's primary sources were for example newspapers, magazines and novels. Discourse is described by Michel Foucault as an unavoidable language web, constructed by society. This language web consists of the language signs such as letters and sentences, and the meaning of that language in a specific context. The signs, the meaning and the society are therefore related. By studying the text of a historical period, the culture, social judgements and power relations can be found. The dominant discourse can be known by 'grand narratives' which are standard textual constructions that are often repeated.¹¹⁴ According to Brown, important elements of the grand narratives of the English society in the 1850's are the pious women and immoral fathers. Both of these elements appear in the novel *North and South* and therefore it takes part in the grand narrative. Besides, the novel *North and South* was printed as a series in the popular magazine *Household Words* edited by Charles Dickens.¹¹⁵ Since the novel was written in line with the dominant narrative, well read and Gaskell was a much respected writer¹¹⁶, it took part of the discourse of the time. Margaret, as shown in the previous chapter, is the pious women of the novel and related to three men; Nicholas Higgins, her father and Mr. Thornton.

Nicholas Higgins is throughout the novel described as an infidel. Although Owen Chadwick states that the change of labour from the countryside to the industrialized city does not determine the change in religion,¹¹⁷ in the novel *North and South* the alienation of labour is mentioned as a cause for demoralization among the men and Nicholas Higgins is one of them. Bessy's sister says:

'And father—all men—have it stronger in 'em than me to get tired o' sameness and work for ever. And what is 'em to do? It's little blame to them if they do go into th' gin-shop for to make their blood flow quicker, and more lively, and see things they never see at no other time—pictures, and looking-glass, and such like.'¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ M. Foucault, 'The Discourse on Language', in: J. Medina & D. Wood (ed.) *Truth: Engagements Across Philosophical Traditions* (Oxford 2005) 315-333.

¹¹⁵ Matus, 'Mary Barton and North and South', 35-36.

¹¹⁶ J. L. Matus, 'Introduction', in: J. L. Matus (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*. (Cambridge 2007) 1-9, 1-2.

¹¹⁷ Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind*, 94.

¹¹⁸ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 17.

After the death of Bessy, Nicholas Higgins asks Margaret whether he can talk to her father, since he is a parson. Margaret is surprised with his intention and deliberates with herself: 'his drinking tea with her father, who would be totally unprepared for his visitor—her mother so ill—seemed utterly out of the question; and yet if she drew back now, it would be worse than ever—sure to drive him to the gin-shop.'¹¹⁹ Having a religious conversation is clearly an alternative to becoming drunk. Religion has a moralizing function, even in this case, in the industrial society. This alternative for drinking fits with the wishes of Bessy whose last words were: 'Give her [Margaret] my affectionate respects; and keep father fro' drink.'¹²⁰ This question of Bessy helps Mary, her sister, to ask Nicholas Higgins no to drink:

'Oh, father, father!' said Mary, throwing herself upon his arm,—'not to-night! Any night but to-night. Oh, help me! he's going out to drink again! Father, I'll not leave yo'. Yo' may strike, but I'll not leave yo' She told me last of all to keep yo' fro' drink!'¹²¹

These quotations make clear, in line with Brown's perspectives, that women were described as pious moral guidance of the immoral infidel men. Bessy, Mary and Margaret all try to stop Nicholas Higgins from drinking and finally their influence pays off.

Margaret tries, even after her father's death when she is to leave Milton, to influence Nicholas Higgins with moral advice and Christian dogma. She gives him her father's Bible which she urges him to read: 'Look, Higgins! here is his Bible. I have kept it for you. I can ill spare it; but I know he would have liked you to have it. I'm sure you'll care for it, and study what is in it, for his sake.'¹²² Nicholas Higgins answers; 'Well, wench! I can nobbut say, Bless yo'! and bless yo'!—and amen.'¹²³ Nicholas Higgins is touched by the gesture and since he came to appreciate Margaret and her father's company he is sad that she is leaving. Again it becomes clear that he might tell the reader he does not believe, but in the end the religious discourse is still part of his communication since he answers with the wish that Margaret will be blessed (by God) and with 'amen' a Christian finish of a prayer.

In relation to her father and towards Mr. Thornton is Margaret the stronger one and the pious leading lady. This might have been inspired by Gaskell's own independent and strong attitude since 'Unitarian women were intelligent, active, and strong-minded, but most believed

¹¹⁹ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 28.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*, Chapter 27.

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, Chapter 28.

¹²² *Ibidem*, Chapter 43.

¹²³ *Ibidem*, Chapter 43.

that husbands had the right to take the lead in marriage. Fortunately, Elizabeth could boast that William would never have “commanded” her.¹²⁴

Margaret has to be the stronger one in relation towards her father. Mr. Hale does not dare to tell his wife that he resigned his position at the Church of England, therefore Margaret has to tell her mother of the sudden changes. Besides, after Margaret’s mother died, she is the stronger one and cares for her father. Mr. Hale even asks her to pray for him since he is so full of doubt and so sad he cannot speak to his heavenly Father:

‘He looked wistfully at Margaret; and, when released, he tottered towards her, murmuring, ‘Pray for me, Margaret. I have no strength left in me. I cannot pray. I give her up because I must. I try to bear it: indeed I do. I know it is God’s will. But I cannot see why she died. Pray for me, Margaret, that I may have faith to pray. It is a great strait, my child.’¹²⁵

This difference between father and daughter is again described by Dixon, the servant, towards Mr. Thornton: ‘They are much as is to be expected. Master is terribly broke down. Miss Hale bears up better than likely.’¹²⁶ Mr. Hale has not become irreligious as he loves to talk to Nicholas Higgins about belief and comfort. But when he himself is in doubt, he needs Margaret to support him. Margaret however, seems the perfect pious daughter who does not doubt but always believes in God and tries to follow her God day by day.

Margaret is positioned by the author as the pious independent woman, not only towards Nicholas Higgins and Mr. Hale, but also towards Mr. Thornton whom she firstly despises and later on marries. Concerning religion they have a very different attitude. As mentioned before, Mr. Thornton is very much focused on economics, character and earthly wealth. Margaret however is the churchwoman focused on her father in heaven, social rights and charity. In a violent discussion Margaret disagrees with Mr. Thornton’s attitude towards his workers during the strike. She thinks he has to take into account the human rights of the workers: ‘I said you had a human right. I meant that there seemed no reason but religious ones, why you should not do what you like with your own.’¹²⁷ Mr. Thornton perceives himself not as irreligious but thinks his religious opinions differ from Margaret’s principles: ‘I know we differ in our religious opinions; but don’t you give me credit for having some, though not the same as yours?’¹²⁸ Margaret clearly

¹²⁴ Chapple, ‘Unitarian Dissent’, 170.

¹²⁵ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 33.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*, Chapter 33.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*, Chapter 15.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*, Chapter 15.

uses the biblical passages in every part of her daily life and also in the way she perceives the strike:

I do not think that I have any occasion to consider your special religious opinions in the affair. All I meant to say is, that there is no human law to prevent the employers from utterly wasting or throwing away all their money, if they choose; but that there are passages in the Bible which would rather imply—to me at least—that they neglected their duty as stewards if they did so. However I know so little about strikes, and rate of wages, and capital, and labour, that I had better not talk to a political economist like you.¹²⁹

Although Mr. Thornton is initially very harsh towards his workers, he softens during the novel. Perhaps he is not convinced by Margaret's arguments, but her example and the fact that he slowly falls in love with her, determines his change in behaviour towards his workers. He hires Nicholas Higgins again so that he can earn money for the Boucher-family of which the father committed suicide and he discusses the state of affairs in the factory with his workers. He becomes a strict but good master due to Margaret's influence.

¹²⁹ Gaskell, *North and South*, Chapter 15.

Conclusion

In the previous chapters, attention is given to various religious aspects in an industrial environment during the 19th century, which are described by Gaskell in her novel *North and South*. In the first chapter, the religious views and doubts of Mr. Hale, the dissenter, are discussed. In the second chapter, the religious differences among the Higgins family are portrayed. Chapter three devoted attention to the alternative secular 'religions,' that are mentioned in the novel and therefore showed the contrastive ideologies of Nicholas Higgins and Mr. Thornton. Chapter four and five dealt with the religious pious attitude of Margaret, the churchwoman, in relation towards Nicholas Higgins, Mr. Hale and Mr. Thornton. Margaret is the centre of the story and connects all kinds of different classes and different religious views.

As mentioned in the introduction, this conclusion will show whether the perspectives from the novel support or reject any of the views of the historical debate or not, and if so, which perspectives of the historians are confirmed, nuanced or rejected. I expect that this research provides an answer to the question how the Industrialization influenced religion in the English society of the 1850's.

In relation to Chadwick the novel shows us Nicholas Higgins who is a labourer, and unconsciously a Christian and an atheist at the same time but does not think of himself as an atheist. More than atheist and Christian at the same time, Nicholas Higgins is a socialist with communist ideals which he strives to achieve. Bessy however, is also a worker but is very religious and depends on her faith in God and the glory she expects to come in heaven after her death, which contradicts Chadwick's perspective. Chadwick also states that the main reason for secularization in industrial societies is the shortcoming of the churches that did not adapt quickly enough to the industrial cities. However, the daughters of Nicholas Higgins see the alienation of labour as the main reason for immoral behaviour among the men. Besides, except for one reference, there is no mentioning of churches in Milton and therefore also no mentioning of alternative religious communities besides the Church of England. Chadwick stated that the labourers had their own culture in which going to church was of minor importance except for holidays but that there was an alternative religious labour culture. Although there are many references to the labour culture such as dialects, houses, clothing and social relations, there is little description of a religious labour culture except for individual Christians such as Bessy. Chadwick described the influence of ideologies as alternatives for religions and this is confirmed in the novel since both for Nicholas Higgins and Mr. Thornton focus on their ideology instead of religion. The Marxist sympathies of Higgins prevent him from being overtly religious since he

needs to focus on the class struggle. Bessy, however, does focus on heaven and she fears the strike which closely correlates with Marxist ideology discussed by Chadwick.

According to McLeod one of the reasons of secularization in the industrial cities was a growing tendency of Anticlericalism. Nicholas Higgins' perspective on the church does confirm this statement since he sees the parsons as hypocrites. McLeod also mentions dissenter communities that fulfil various roles in industrial societies that however are not described in the novel. Religion seems very personal since all the characters have a different perspective on religion and they are all from a different social class. The only community that is described is the alternative secular socialist workers community. McLeod's statement that religion was no longer necessary to explain life except for severe hardships is partly true. Nicholas Higgins only believes what he sees but Bessy focuses on heaven which cannot be seen from the earth and therefore is something one must believe without natural proof. McLeod is right with his final conclusion in which he stated that religion is differentiated. This is clearly described in the novel in which every main character from a different social class has another perspective on religion.

Finally, although Brown focuses on the changing centre from the Church of England towards the dissenting communities, from the moment the Hale family lives in Milton, there are no references any more to either the Church of England or the dissenting communities. Brown upholds that religion in the industrial communities was very much associated with morals and perceived as an alternative for among other vices, drinking for example, which is confirmed by the novel. Besides, Brown's contradiction between the pious and morally correct women and the immoral men who needed to be corrected by their pious women appears in the novel. In his research, Brown's focus was on strong and stable families while all the families in *North and South* are incomplete and therefore no examples of the Christian families that Brown described can be found. In the Higgins family there is no mother and Bessy dies, in the Thornton family there is no husband or father and in the Hale family the brother of Margaret, Frederick, is not allowed to enter England and both Mr. and Mrs. Hale die.

Although this research has been conducted according to the method of Brown, not all the results confirm Brown's findings, and other findings from the text confirm Chadwick and McLeod's findings that were rejected by Brown. It is very remarkable that although all three historians focus on dissenting communities and Gaskell was a member of a dissenting community, the Unitarians, herself, in this text dissenting communities do not play a role. While researching the influences of Industrialization on religion, historians always describe the influences on the labourers. However, Gaskell also described the religious views of a former preacher from the south, his daughter of the bourgeoisie and the factory owner of the

nouveau riches. With this broad description she shows the wide variations in religious views during the middle of the 19th century. Although Christianity is closely related to the church, Gaskell describes various kinds of Christianity without describing one service and only in relation towards Margaret she mentions the Church. She therefore portrays a personal religion which mirrors the religious attitude of the time.

The answer the novel gives to the question how the Industrial Revolution did influence religion in the English society of the 1850's according to the novel *North and South* is that the Christian tradition no longer fitted into the lives of any of the social classes. The workers had a personal belief that was not determined by the Church or founded their hopes in social organisations. Mostly they were busy making ends meet. The new elite such as Mr. Thornton did not rely on religion, but on rational economical systems and a strong character with which they created their own wealth. The older elite were left in doubt by the new developments, scientific discoveries and waning authority and influence of the church. Margaret, part of the old world but living a new mechanical city, stays a convinced Christian but the church is no longer necessary since she believes with her heart.

This research based itself only on one novel, and although it was well-read and well-reviewed in those days, and it is seen as realist and influential literature today, many more texts would need to be discussed to create a more complete perspective on the past. Although Brown used a comparable method with various literary and other textual sources, this research proves that new perspectives can be found and confirmed by further literary research.

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