

# Gladstone's Preaching and Gladstone's Reading

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**I**n March 1819, the nine-year-old William Gladstone wanted to give his parents a present. What was he to choose? Perhaps a piece of porcelain for the family home at Seaforth, outside Liverpool? Or something more practical? An umbrella for his father, an embroidered handkerchief for his mother? He selected none of these gifts. Instead he decided to present his parents with an attractively bound two-volume set of *Sermons, chiefly on Devotional Subjects* by the Reverend Archibald Bonar, minister of Cramond, near Edinburgh, a prominent Evangelical in the Church of Scotland. The boy inscribed the first volume, "From their affect. and dutiful son, William Ewart Gladstone."<sup>1</sup> Gladstone had been brought up to place a high value on sermons and the habit continued for life. He was not, however, uncritical. At Eton, his teenage rebellion took the form of censuring poor sermons by preachers in the college chapel. Thus J.F. Plumptre, a fellow of the college, was only "fairish" or "middling." At Oxford things looked up. He listened to "a remarkably able and practical sermon from a Mr. Girdlestone" and "an excellent sermon" when he first heard Edward Bouverie Pusey, Regius Professor of Hebrew. A high point of Gladstone's undergraduate years was a visit in 1830 to New Road Baptist Chapel to sit under Thomas Chalmers, the leader of the Scottish Evangelicals.<sup>2</sup> Comments on sermons heard punctuate Gladstone's diary down to the 1890s. At least in the earlier part of his life, he read more sermons than any other form of printed work. And in 1877 he addressed a conference on preaching at the Congregationalists' City Temple, consolidating his political alliance with the Nonconformists at the same time as commending what he called "searching preaching."<sup>3</sup>

Gladstone, as his biographers have acknowledged, was a connoisseur of the sermon genre.

What has been little noticed, however, is that Gladstone was himself a preacher. He does not seem to have delivered sermons in church, which he deemed a clerical privilege, and an allusion in the diaries to “a little street preaching” is not to something he said but to something he heard.<sup>4</sup> In his own home, however, he regularly gave sermons. His first, an isolated performance in London in 1834, examined the “Requisites for attending the Holy Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>5</sup> There seem to have been no further efforts until after Gladstone married in 1839. Early the following year, when putting in order his new household at 13 Carlton House Terrace, London, he started daily prayers. “It is the duty of those who are placed at the head of a house,” he told the servants a few weeks later, “to see that God is reverently worshipped therein by all its inmates.”<sup>6</sup> The ideal, he explained, would be to attend daily prayers in church, but a second best was the sequence of household prayers he inaugurated. Each Sunday, as a supplement to morning and afternoon churchgoing, the prayers were augmented by a sermon. Occasionally there were gatherings on weekdays such as Good Friday when there would also be an address. Usually, though by no means always, Gladstone delivered a sermon of his own composition. The first, on Sunday 23 February 1840, set out a rationale for family prayer: “might God bless so poor a labour!” the amateur preacher remarked in his diary.<sup>7</sup> The practice thus commenced became the standard pattern in the household over subsequent years. Gladstone wrote his final sermon on 4 February 1866. He last recorded delivering one later in the same year, on 29 July 1866.<sup>8</sup> Intriguingly, it was a reused sermon of 1841, from almost the start of his preaching program. Clearly he believed his early exercises were still worth hearing. From that point on, however, the custom of regular sermons came to an end. For the rest of 1866, Gladstone was travelling round the great houses of England and visiting the attractions of the continent. Preaching was never resumed. From 1867 onwards, with the crisis of parliamentary reform, the general election and the first premiership, Gladstone was no doubt too busy to prepare a Sunday address. In his later life, when he was settled at Hawarden, his

son William Henry was technically the head of household and so responsible for the spiritual welfare of the servants. The statesman himself, who was able to attend daily service in the parish church, had no need to produce sermons. Yet for over a quarter-century Gladstone was a frequent preacher.

The British Library contains the surviving manuscript sermons. There are 179 complete texts together with thirty-two fragments. Each of the full sermons is written out on one half of each of eight pages of note paper, a blank half being left on each sheet for subsequent alterations and additions. They show that Gladstone's practice as a preacher was to compose his complete text. As an orator, by contrast, he was content to jot down a few headings and improvise on the platform. Only a few of the sermons are in note form, allowing for this kind of flexibility, and they come from the statesman's travels. It is as though, when preaching, Gladstone normally wanted to ensure his accuracy. There were, after all, eternal consequences from misstating theological truths. Not all the sermons that Gladstone wrote survive, for the diary mentions the composition and delivery of at least six others.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, some that were written were not preached.<sup>10</sup> It may be that the author, after preparing them, was too dissatisfied with their quality to read them, though the undelivered addresses do not seem to be significantly inferior. Other sermons were read, but only after considerable delay – six months, twelve years or, in one case, as many as twenty-two years.<sup>11</sup> A few of those delivered were never repeated. Far more, however, were given more than once. Gladstone carefully endorsed each sermon with every new date of use, though he was not infallible over marking them. One was preached a second time, in revised form, only a fortnight after initial delivery.<sup>12</sup> Its topic was the rite of confirmation, and perhaps there was a second instance of the ceremony involving staff below stairs only two weeks after the first occasion. Another, on the subject of Easter, was delivered as many as six times.<sup>13</sup> Because of this frequent recycling, there was less need to compose fresh sermons as time went on. Hence the majority of the sermons date from the 1840s, a much smaller number from the 1850s and only a few from the 1860s. It was perfectly possible for Gladstone to draw on his old stock and so compose nothing new in a whole year, as was the case in 1851, the sec-

ond of two years he found “terrible.”<sup>14</sup> Yet this is a substantial body of homiletic material, comparable in size to that left to us by many a professional preacher of the nineteenth century.

The audience for the sermons was mixed. On the one hand there were the members of the family and their visitors. Gladstone’s wife Catherine was a regular attender. At times the head of household made special arrangements so that she could listen. As Catherine was nearing the birth of their first child in June 1840, for instance, her husband transferred the event to the library so that she could hear even though she was confined to bed.<sup>15</sup> Eleven years later, probably when Catherine was feeling unwell, Gladstone read the sermon twice, first to the servants and then to her alone, perhaps a doubtful privilege.<sup>16</sup> The servants, however, were the main target of the sermons. Frequently they are mentioned as composing the congregation.<sup>17</sup> On one occasion in 1843, Gladstone replaced the sermon with a lecture about Elizabeth Roberts, an under-housemaid who had been dismissed for stealing Catherine’s locket and two diamond rings.<sup>18</sup> Gladstone saw his responsibility as the improvement of a group who needed religious instruction and, perhaps even more, moral guidance. That helps account for the didactic and exhortatory tone of much of the preaching. The servants would gather on a Sunday evening for the weekly event. 10 p.m. is mentioned on one occasion as the time, but that is probably because it was exceptional, unusually late.<sup>19</sup> It is evident that Gladstone tried to maintain the practice away from London. One sermon is noted as having been delivered at Fasque, the family home in Kincardineshire in Scotland.<sup>20</sup> Several others were preached during a continental tour in 1850, at Roanne in France and at Naples in Italy.<sup>21</sup> Gladstone believed in keeping up his shepherding of the members of his small flock in whatever meadows they were wandering.

The normal method of preparation, as the author’s diary records, was to write the sermon on the same day as its delivery. On one occasion, 19 December 1841, Gladstone refers in the text to the household having learned “this evening” of the death of Miss Neville, one of Catherine’s relations.<sup>22</sup> Evidently in that case the preparation was done immediately before the use of the sermon on the same day. Probably that was true of others. Sometimes

the intending preacher ran out of time and so abandoned his plan of composing a homily. Thus on 28 June 1840 he noted in his diary that he read a sermon by Thomas Arnold, "not having time to write."<sup>23</sup> Quite often he read published sermons instead of preparing his own. Apart from Arnold, Walter Hook, vicar of Leeds, and John Henry Newman, the Tractarian leader, were among the writers drawn on.<sup>24</sup> Partly because he was familiar with other specimens of the art, Gladstone was a stern critic of his own productions. A manuscript prepared on 13 October 1843 on the love of God and one's neighbor was judged after delivery "ill articulated" and never repeated.<sup>25</sup> Another was considered "improper in arrangement and development," a third "not over-well arranged," and yet both were delivered several times.<sup>26</sup> A further sermon, on justification by faith, was rightly considered "too hard," but nevertheless given a second airing.<sup>27</sup> In the manuscript, Gladstone at one point added his personal mark of reservation, usually applied to works by other authors, the word "ma," the Italian for "but." As a result of his self-criticism, there was a good deal of correcting. Usually this was a matter of style, with a few words inserted to clarify a passage. Occasionally there was a more substantial addition. In his first sermon of 1834, for example, Gladstone added on 9 April 1848, at the height of the year of European revolutions, an excursus on the troubles of foreign lands in contrast with the blessings of peace and order at home.<sup>28</sup> In general, however, references to contemporary events are rare, though a whole sermon was devoted in 1847 to the Irish famine.<sup>29</sup> Also rare are illustrations. One instance comes from an address on the parable of the lost sheep given in 1842: "the early Christians we are told used to represent upon cups the figure of a shepherd bringing home the lost sheep upon his shoulders."<sup>30</sup> This allusion is unusual, for art and history were in general equally absent. Preparation therefore required no elaborate pursuit of material to inject life and color into the exercise. The writing of the addresses was generally a rapid and off-the-cuff affair.

The content of Gladstone's sermons was largely dictated by the church's year. By the time he began his career as a preacher, he had developed a strong liturgical sense, so that he took delight in the changing ecclesiastical seasons. Lent, he remarked in 1842, had been superseded by Easter:

“Instead of sin and its darkness, its bondage, its corroding pain, we have now to think of the Gospel & its light, its liberty, its willing and easy service, its warm and enduring joy.”<sup>31</sup> Accordingly the great majority of the sermons expound one of the lessons for the day as laid down in the Book of Common Prayer. The texts are overwhelmingly drawn from the New Testament, usually from the gospel for the day. Only twenty-one out of the whole 179, in fact, have texts from the Old Testament. Usually some ethical application is made. An exception was a sermon of 7 February 1841 on public worship, but, perhaps because it lacked moral engagement, it was never repeated.<sup>32</sup> The application is sometimes general. Thus an address for Whitsunday 1840 stressed that the gift of the Holy Spirit was made to enable Christians to eschew evil and do good.<sup>33</sup> At other times the application is much more specific:

It is considered with us [said Gladstone when speaking about humility on 28 January 1846] the part of a man of character to be keenly sensible to insult, and to resent it: in some classes and conditions of life, by violence: in others, by refusing all intercourse with those who may have treated us rudely or contumeliously: to assert our own dignity against others, not to allow ourselves to be passed by, not to put up with slights, all these are rules which our modern society honours and observes, but which the Lord Christ whom we profess to serve would have abhorred and utterly condemned.<sup>34</sup>

Gladstone believed in bringing home sins to the conscience. Perhaps the most powerful address was one on John the Baptist composed on 8 August 1847: “Behold him that austere majestic preacher, a standing protest against sin...”<sup>35</sup> As in the contemporary sermons by Newman, therefore, there was a combination in Gladstone’s preaching of an acute awareness of the church year and a strong sense of the call to do battle with the world, the flesh and the devil.

The sermons, as has been discussed elsewhere, form the best index to the evolution of Gladstone’s thought during the 1840s, 1850s, and

1860s.<sup>36</sup> Each phase of his changing theological position is illuminated. Although Gladstone's early Evangelicalism was behind him by 1840, its legacy lingered, especially in the frequent exhortations to full Christian commitment. Thus in a sermon of 24 May 1840 on "The Way of Salvation," Gladstone asks his hearers whether they are in the condition of the "ignorant unconverted heathen." The remedy for that situation is that "we who have not as yet given our hearts to God" must believe in Christ.<sup>37</sup> The evangelistic imperative is still very much part of Gladstone's repertoire. By 1840, however, he had moved, as his book of that year on *Church Principles* shows, to a form of High Churchmanship that, while not identifying with the Oxford Movement, shared its exalted view of church authority, the ministry and the sacraments. Gladstone's early sermons reflect this viewpoint, emphasizing the corporate nature of the church and frequently insisting on the centrality of holy communion. We should be thankful, he declared on 31 October 1841, that the Almighty had "cast our lot within a Church which descends even to this day from his own inspired Apostles."<sup>38</sup> There was the doctrine of apostolic succession that guaranteed the authority of the Church of England. Within a few years, however, Gladstone had moved on, under the increasing influence of the Oxford Movement, to a fully fledged Tractarian position. By 14 February 1844, he was urging, in the manner of Pusey, a life of "penitence & mortification."<sup>39</sup> The central mature Tractarian doctrine of the eucharistic sacrifice in due course took its place in his preaching. In a sermon of 1848 on the "Holy Eucharist" the idea is still not stated, but subsequently, and presumably when using the manuscript again in 1865, Gladstone inserted a phrase about our being able to plead Christ's death "by his ordinance here on earth."<sup>40</sup> Yet that was not the terminus of the statesman's theological trajectory. He passed on during the 1850s to a much more broad-minded view that stressed the companionship of Christ, the centrality of love, and the need to engage with contemporary issues. By 1 February 1863 he was preaching on the relation of the miracles to doctrine in a manner typical of the liberal Catholics of the later nineteenth century, the standpoint of the writers of *Lux Mundi* (1889).<sup>41</sup>

The sermons illustrate the phases of thought through which Gladstone passed as he hammered out his personal faith over the decades.

This body of manuscript material has until recently been almost entirely ignored in the study of Gladstone. Even Perry Butler, who published a valuable book on Gladstone's early views of church and state, accords the whole collection of sermons only a single sentence.<sup>42</sup> Yet it provides a useful laboratory for investigating many aspects of the man. Apart from his theological evolution, his personal spirituality is powerfully illuminated. At one point in a sermon of 1845, he bursts into prayer: "O God suffer not us so to deal with thy divine revelation, so to drop as a bird into the snare: but enlighten us with Thy truth, and warm us with Thy love."<sup>43</sup> There is a spontaneity, an authenticity, about a passage such as this. Again, we can glimpse the legacy of the personal crisis that engulfed him between 1847 and 1851. Thus in a sermon of 12 March 1854 there is a powerful sense of relief in the recognition that Christ, by passing through a range of temptations, armored his disciples against them.<sup>44</sup> So there is rich evidence for psychological exploration. In the present article, however, the aim is different. How, we can ask, did Gladstone's reading relate to his preaching? More specifically, we can enquire how the ideas that he had absorbed from books emerged in the spoken words of his sermons. On the one hand, did his long-term stock of reading shape what he told his household? Or on the other hand, did the literature he was exploring at the time affect his preaching? We can evaluate the balance between the cumulative and the current in Gladstone's reading in terms of its influence over his sermons. That is the issue that will occupy the remainder of this essay.

The first and most obvious long-term source for Gladstone's sermons was the Bible. Each address took as its main task the explanation of a verse or passage from scripture. Much of the tissue of the sermons, furthermore, was drawn from the rest of the Bible. Thus in an exposition of Romans chapter 8 delivered on 17 July 1842, Gladstone turns before the end to consider the account in Exodus of Pharaoh's heart being hardened and the warning of Revelation 22 that the unjust and filthy will remain so.<sup>45</sup> The sermon that the author rated "too hard" appeals to the sense of the word "faith"



throughout scripture before going on to allude to 1 Corinthians 13, Galatians 5, and Hebrews 6.<sup>46</sup> Likewise the sermon on John the Baptist gathers evidence from Isaiah, Matthew, and Luke, adding a quotation from Psalm 48 for good measure.<sup>47</sup> Scripture is pervasive. One instance of a quotation from the Bible is particularly instructive. In an exhortation of 12 January 1845 to love God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength, Gladstone condemns the alternative approach to life of pursuing pleasure. "The harp & the tabret, the pipe and the wine are in their feasts," he declares, "but they regard not the work of the Lord."<sup>48</sup> This is intended to be a quotation from Isaiah 5:12, but the preacher not only inserts the definite article before "pipe" and "wine" but also omits the "viol" mentioned in the passage. Gladstone, that is to say, is quoting this obscure verse from memory, an indication of the extent to which the text of the Bible had become part of the fabric of his mind. A further sermon adds another dimension of the politician's treatment of scripture. In expounding "God is love" from 1 John 4:7 on 13 January 1841, Gladstone makes the point that God is not equated elsewhere with other attributes such as wisdom or power. Many biblical passages assign qualities to the Almighty, but they do not define his essence in the way this one does. The thought was not a novelty in the politician's mind. It had occurred to him in the early 1830s, when he had jotted it down on a fragment of paper that has survived.<sup>49</sup> So the sermon was drawing on long-term biblical reflection. It is evident that the Bible formed his way of thinking. He read it daily and the lessons in church reinforced its impact. Here was the most important element from his accumulated reading that molded his preaching.

Gladstone used to refer to his "four doctors," the quartet of writers outside the Bible who had most influenced him.<sup>50</sup> One of them, Bishop Butler, the eighteenth-century author of *The Analogy of Religion* (1736), exerted his greatest impact in the later years of Gladstone's life, but the politician made no discernible use of Butler in the sermons. The other doctors, however, did appear: they were Aristotle, Dante, and Augustine. It was Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* that Gladstone read most closely at Oxford, the book laying down the contours of his early political thought.<sup>51</sup> How far did Aristotle impinge on his sermons? It is not to be expected that the technical jargon of the

Greek philosopher such as *telos* and *dynamis* would appear in addresses aimed primarily at servants, but one of Aristotle's core teachings does play a prominent part: the doctrine of habits. As human beings, according to the philosopher, perform a particular deed, they become inclined to repeat it. Character is the result of frequent repetition. That notion is taken into the heart of Gladstone's moral theology. He repeatedly teaches that habits can enslave. A man, he writes in a sermon of 23 March 1845,

forges his own chains. Every act of sin that he does goes to the formation of the habit of sin. As the habit of sin is created within him it becomes more & more a blind propensity that supersedes the free action of the will at first and gradually comes to govern and enchain it: so at last the will cannot deliver him when the habit binds.<sup>52</sup>

Conversely, good behavior can become habitual. Gladstone explains in a sermon of the following year that "the way in which men reflect the likeness of God is by acting like Him, & by acting like Him they become more & more like Him. So that by a natural process, as well as by the Divine command, the work of Christianity is a progressive work."<sup>53</sup> The word "natural," customarily associated by Gladstone with the thought of Aristotle, is an indication of his source. There is never an explicit reference to the philosopher in the sermons, but the intellectual debt is pervasive.

The thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Florentine poet Dante exerted rather less influence. Gladstone had come to love the poet's *Divine Comedy* while in Italy during 1839, when he met his wife there. Ever afterwards he connected Dante with romantic as well as with spiritual love. A passage from Dante is linked with a quotation on joy from Bernard of Clairvaux in an isolated fragment that has been bound up with the sermons deposited at the British Library, but it is not itself part of a sermon.<sup>54</sup> A stray phrase in an address of 19 January 1845 does reveal the sway of the poet over Gladstone's imagination. He refers in passing to the Almighty "nursing Saint Paul to sit upon a lofty throne among the thrones of heaven."<sup>55</sup> Although a verse in Matthew's gospel refers to the twelve apostles sitting on twelve thrones,<sup>56</sup> Paul was not among the twelve. There can be little doubt that the

allusion owes more to the vision of thrones in heaven at the climax of Dante's *Paradiso*, Gladstone's favorite part of the *Divine Comedy*. Similarly a passage confidently predicting "a gradation of punishments" in the after-life, a subject on which scripture is silent, probably owes more to Dante's discrimination between various forms of penalty for sin in the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*.<sup>57</sup> The poet seems to have permitted speculation on a topic which was otherwise clouded in mystery. At one point Dante makes an appearance in a sermon, though in a marginal note rather than in the discourse as delivered. The poet is quoted on 23 October 1842 in order to demonstrate the priority of love.<sup>58</sup> Dante therefore adds nothing to the substance of the sermons, but a little to the frills.

Augustine, the fourth- and fifth-century bishop of Hippo, was as a theologian likely to enter more fully into the warp and woof of Gladstone's preaching. His influence may probably be glimpsed in several compositions. In 1848 Gladstone insisted, in a manner typical of Augustine, on the intrinsic connection of "the idea of justice" with the character of God.<sup>59</sup> In 1852 the politician stressed the Augustinian theme of the vision of God.<sup>60</sup> And earlier, in 1840, he had enunciated a doctrine of infant salvation that reflects Augustine's stern position: without baptism, there was no warrant for believing that an infant's soul was saved; with baptism, we have a firm assurance that the soul is saved.<sup>61</sup> Most significantly, Augustine's doctrine of grace was foundational to Gladstone's theology. The politician's chief anxiety about Newman's teaching, which in most respects he admired, was that the Oxford theologian held that the faithful could accumulate merit for themselves.<sup>62</sup> On the contrary, according to Gladstone, nothing we receive from God is deserved, for it is all the result of divine mercy. "It is founded wholly," as the politician put it in a sermon of 1848, "upon grace and favour, given wholly for the sake of Christ Jesus our Lord...."<sup>63</sup> The idea recurs in a sermon of the following year and elsewhere.<sup>64</sup> The chief book in which Augustine expounded his doctrine of grace was his polemic against the Pelagians. Gladstone nowhere refers in his diary to reading this work by name, but his manuscript notes show that he studied it carefully between 5 September and 24 October 1837, referring to it in his diary under another

title.<sup>65</sup> The authority of Augustine therefore bolstered his earlier Evangelical conviction that salvation is of grace alone. Augustine is also mentioned twice in the sermons. In one on the love of God and neighbor of 1845, Gladstone argues that a Christian loves only those whom God is presumed to love. In illustration, he quotes an exclamation from Augustine: "blessed is the man that loveth Thee, and his friend in Thee, and his foe for Thy sake."<sup>66</sup> The other explicit reference to Augustine is in a much later sermon, of 21 September 1862, on the words of Christ from John's gospel, "Mine hour is not yet come." The address is far more preoccupied with alternative interpretations than earlier compositions. Gladstone first considers the view of the majority of commentators that the words indicate that it is not yet the time for signs and wonders, but he comes down in favor of a different opinion, that the meaning is that it is not yet time for Christ's death. "This interpretation of the passage," Gladstone notes, "is the one given by that great & famous Doctor of the Church Saint Augustine."<sup>67</sup> Gladstone's judgment is based primarily on the merits of the case, but it is equally clear that the standpoint of Augustine helps clinch the issue. Gladstone wrote in a late autobiographical memorandum that his theology had long followed "the general sense of St. Augustine."<sup>68</sup> His reading of this father of the early church left a profound impression on his mind that is apparent in his preaching.

Other patristic works were by comparison trivial in their influence. There are allusions to only three more early fathers. In the same sermon on the interpretation of "Mine hour is not yet come," the majority view that Christ meant that it was no time for signs and wonders is said to be supported by Chrysostom. Another explanation, not Augustine's, is drawn from Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>69</sup> Both are rejected in favor of Augustine's interpretation. Again, in a sermon of 24 March 1847, Gladstone tries to explain Christ's allusion to the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices by quoting some remarks of Cyril. Gladstone had read the *Catechetical Lectures* of Cyril of Jerusalem in the previous year, and this may have been the source of his memory.<sup>70</sup> The politician's marginal citation, however, is to Cyril in the catena, that is a list of patristic quotations, and the Chrysostom quotation is said to be from the same source.<sup>71</sup> Although Gladstone mentions

in his diary using a catena on the gospels, a form of reference tool, he does not identify it.<sup>72</sup> Resorting to that work for the citation of Chrysostom is probably a sign that this author had not entered the tissue of Gladstone's thinking. Certainly other early fathers had not received the devoted attention that the politician had lavished on Augustine. Consequently they did not shape his preaching in the same way as Gladstone's doctor.

Of Gladstone's contemporaries, the authors who exerted the most powerful sway over him were those associated with the Oxford Movement. Among them was Isaac Williams, curate to Newman at St Mary's, Oxford, a writer of poetry and a contributor to *The Tracts for the Times*. One of his addresses was included in volume 2 of *Plain Sermons by Contributors to the "Tracts for the Times,"* published in 1840. Its subject was "The Cross of Christ," expounding Galatians 6:14. The crucifixion, according to Williams, represented not only the atonement for our sins and the humility of Christ, but also an image of our being "crucified together with CHRIST from all worldly affections as long as we are in this life."<sup>73</sup> Gladstone looked at this volume on 30 August 1840, and would almost certainly have read this, its second sermon.<sup>74</sup> A similar theme was taken up by Pusey, the scholarly leader of the movement, in volume 3 of *Plain Sermons*, which appeared in the following year. "The whole of the Gospel is the doctrine of the Cross," he wrote, "but that two-fold; the Cross borne *for* us ... and henceforth to be borne *by* us."<sup>75</sup> Christ, that is to say, achieved his atonement on behalf of humanity, once for all; but the repression of sin was the painful responsibility of the believer. Gladstone did not chronicle reading this volume, but it is nevertheless extremely likely that he did absorb it in a spare, unrecorded moment. The idea that the cross was far more than an atonement because it symbolized the moral struggles of human life, made a deep impression on the politician. It appears repeatedly in a series of sermons that Gladstone preached between 1845 and 1849. In October 1847, for example, he contended that the cross brought not only pardon but also "our renewal unto holiness, our servitude to righteousness, our life with Christ in God."<sup>76</sup> It was from a common notion in the writings of the Tractarians that Gladstone drew this idea.

Even more significant were the writings of Robert Wilberforce, one of the sons of the abolitionist and the Tractarian archdeacon of the East Riding of Yorkshire. Although Gladstone was not originally close to Wilberforce, the politician was in 1854 to try earnestly to persuade him not to follow Newman and Henry Manning into the Roman Catholic communion, but to no avail.<sup>77</sup> The legacy of Wilberforce to Gladstone can be illustrated by a particular concept. In a late sermon of 28 April 1861, Gladstone spoke of Christ as a "Pattern Man" whom Christians are to imitate in their lives.<sup>78</sup> That is the key phrase, oft repeated, in Wilberforce's *Doctrine of the Incarnation* (1848), a book that Gladstone read on 4 and 11 March 1849.<sup>79</sup> This classic text of dogmatic theology, the greatest produced by the Tractarians, was one that the politician hugely admired, comparing its author's achievement to that of Augustine in defining the doctrine of original sin.<sup>80</sup> The notion of the "Pattern Man," though never explicitly credited to Wilberforce, evidently entered deep into the fabric of Gladstone's mind, emerging in the sermon twelve years later. Another theme present in the book but articulated more fully in Robert Wilberforce's *Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature* (1850) was that Christ's human nature gradually developed to perfection while he was on earth. Christ, according to Wilberforce, was "the subject of that wonderful discipline, whereby through the sufferings of His worldly life, was perfected the Incarnate nature of the Son of God."<sup>81</sup> Gladstone, who read the *Sermons* in the year of their publication, found this idea profoundly helpful.<sup>82</sup> He reproduced it in one of his own addresses of 1854. Christ, he explained, took a stainless humanity at his birth, but during his life he strengthened it. Gladstone the collector of Wedgwood pottery deployed a rare illustration: "He [Christ] found it [human nature] without a flaw like perfect porcelain: but He left it such that however it might be strained or dashed upon the ground it would resist with the strength of well wrought iron."<sup>83</sup> This reinforced human nature, as it were, provided a mold for that of his disciples. In this thought Gladstone found personal strength, often repeating it in subsequent sermons.<sup>84</sup> The idea was to shape his later understanding of humanity, a foundation of

his political thought as Liberal leader.<sup>85</sup> The origin of this extraordinarily important notion, as the sermons show, can be traced to Gladstone's reading of Robert Wilberforce.

The only modern theologian to be cited explicitly in the sermons is John Pearson, a late seventeenth-century bishop of Chester. Pearson's scholarly *Exposition of the Creed* (1659) remained a standard work of Anglican divinity down into the nineteenth century. While still at Oxford, in the summer vacation of 1831, Gladstone went through the book carefully as part of his Sunday reading.<sup>86</sup> Pearson therefore retained a place in the politician's memory. When, in 1843, composing a sermon in which he wanted to make the point that the church contained a mixture of folk, he naturally turned to Pearson. Saints and hypocrites, Pearson stated in a quoted passage, are to be found together in the church.<sup>87</sup> No doubt Gladstone had to look up the exact words, but the point had lingered in his mind. Yet it is significant that, apart from the writers of the Oxford Movement, Pearson was the sole theologian of recent centuries to be honored in this way. Among modern works, only the Tractarians occupied an equivalent place to ancient texts among the enduring influences over Gladstone's preaching. The chief bookish factors were drawn from the remoter past and from the contemporary Oxford Movement.

We can turn now from the long-term influences to the short-term ones. What did the books currently under Gladstone's eye have to do with his preaching? Several authors whom Gladstone had just finished or was presently reading made their mark on the sermons. One was Bernard, the twelfth-century abbot of Clairvaux. There is an isolated fragment, not from a sermon, quoting Bernard on joy,<sup>88</sup> but otherwise he features twice. Both instances occur in a single sermon, delivered on 17 December 1848 on the parable of the talents. The first allusion is only a marginal reference. Bernard's *Apologia to William* is cited as the source of the point that we weigh service by outward criteria, whereas God measures it by inward willingness.<sup>89</sup> Later in the same sermon the abbot appears in the text: "St Bernard says that as on Jacob's ladder all the angels either ascended or descended, so in the Christian course none can remain where he is, those who are not mounting to heaven are sinking down to hell."<sup>90</sup> Gladstone had started read-

ing Bernard's sermons in 1844 and his exposition of the Psalms early in 1847.<sup>91</sup> The passages the politician quotes, however, are drawn from regular examination of Bernard's letters begun on 17 September 1848 and maintained every Sunday down to the day Gladstone composed the sermon. The letters, which Gladstone had commenced in 1847 and was to continue reading into 1849, were evidently firing his imagination.<sup>92</sup> Neither point derived from Bernard, it is true, is very substantive. Nevertheless there is evidence here that Gladstone was being influenced by his current reading.

Again there is an indication of the sway of the literary preoccupations of the hour in a sermon of 16 March 1845 on "The Holy Eucharist." Although it purports to be an exposition of a passage from Matthew 26 about the Last Supper, the address makes no attempt to discuss the scriptural text at all. Instead it launches into an enthusiastic declaration of faith about the nature of the sacrament. The outward part, Gladstone states, is bread and wine; "but there is also an inward part, the blessed Body and Blood of the Lord which are truly and really received."<sup>93</sup> The context explains the character of the sermon. Gladstone was busy preparing a set of devotions for the communion service, the "Secreta Eucharistica." Accordingly he was exploring writings about the sacrament. In particular, from 9 February he was reading *Considerations on the Eucharist*, a devotional work by Olympe Gerbet, the Roman Catholic bishop of Perpignan, published in France in 1829 and translated into English ten years later.<sup>94</sup> Gladstone commented on 23 February that he followed Gerbet "with great sympathy" and completed his reading of the book a week later.<sup>95</sup> The sermon, with a high and almost Roman Catholic estimate of the eucharist, was composed only a fortnight afterwards. Here again Gladstone's recent reading had left its mark on his preaching.

There had been a similar instance three years before, in 1842. Gladstone remarked when preaching on 5 June in that year that the passages prescribed by the Book of Common Prayer for the services following Trinity Sunday "are such as bear immediately on conduct."<sup>96</sup> The politician had not made this discovery for himself. In learning his skills as a conductor of worship, he had been reading a book called *The Churchman's Year* by George



Townsend, a clergyman who was to be rewarded with a Lambeth D.C.L.<sup>97</sup> Gladstone commenced this work on 26 May, dashing off a letter to its author on the following day, a common indication that he approved the contents of what he was imbibing. The book became a staple of the politician's Sunday reading over the next few weeks.<sup>98</sup> On 24 June, while still going through Townsend, Gladstone was moved by his growing ardour for the ecclesiastical calendar to write a sermon for Trinity Sunday, even though it could not be used for at least another eleven months. In it he referred to the pattern of the church year that he was absorbing from Townsend.<sup>99</sup> The book consolidated Gladstone's allegiance to the annual cycle of Christian festivals that formed the framework of his preaching. Here is a case of a text affecting Gladstone's practice of preaching as well as its content.

A less likely source that nevertheless left a significant mark was *The Wrongs of Woman* (1842-43), by Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, an Evangelical of strong adventist views who was also a copious novelist and a formidable feminist. She showed in her work how, whereas Christ had enhanced the status of women, modern industrialization was repressing them.<sup>100</sup> Gladstone dipped into the book on 11 January 1845.<sup>101</sup> Nine days later he composed a sermon on Christian hardships. He included a passage pointing out the blessings that the Christian faith had brought in its train. By far the most exhaustive was this: "it caused women who in heathen times were regarded as in many respects inferior even to slaves, to be viewed as the helpmate of man, according to the ordinance of the Lord who created our race male & female."<sup>102</sup> Gladstone is summarizing part of the case mounted by Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna. The point was a minor one in the sermon, but momentous in Gladstone's thinking. There is no previous sign of the politician writing of Christianity as the benefactor of women. He had married only three years before, and perhaps his wife Catherine, by voice and example, had contributed to the evolution of his views, but his reading of *The Wrongs of Woman* seems to have provided the evidence that crystallized a higher estimate of the status of women. That meant breaking with the authority of Aristotle, who assigned a lowly place to the female role in the household. So Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna appears to have made an impact on Gladstone's convictions

on a matter of fundamental importance. Later in his career he was often to contend that the raising of the standing of women was one of the greatest achievements of Christianity.<sup>103</sup> An idea derived from a brief bit of reading (Gladstone does not record returning to Tonna) was set firmly in the politician's mind when it became the material for a sermon.

The sway of Gladstone's intimate friend Henry Manning, then arch-deacon of Chichester but later the Roman Catholic cardinal archbishop of Westminster, can also be traced over the short term. On 2 October 1842 Gladstone composed a sermon on Ephesians 4:25: "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members of one another." He began by urging his hearers to tell the truth, but he also dwelt on the final clause of his text about believers being united together. "This union of Christians in one body," he explained, "is no fiction and not even a figure alone: but a substance and a reality for Christians who are such indeed ... Christ abides in them ["them" inserted] and governs them, as the mind in the body."<sup>104</sup> Why is there such a stress on the solidarity of Christians? The same day Gladstone finished reading Manning's new treatise on *The Unity of the Church*.<sup>105</sup> The book represented the bond between the author and the politician. Gladstone had read the proofs for Manning in February; and Manning had dedicated the work to Gladstone.<sup>106</sup> Its message was the neglected principle that the church, as the body of Christ, was a single entity. It is not surprising that the teaching should appear in Gladstone's exposition. Manning must stand behind a good deal of the other material in Gladstone's sermons. The two men developed much of a common mind over church affairs during the 1840s before Manning, unlike Gladstone, was attracted by the superior degree of unity displayed by the Church of Rome. In one case the influence is explicit. On Tuesday 23 March 1847, Gladstone preached on "The Public Fast" in preparation for the following day of national penitence during the famine that afflicted Ireland and parts of Scotland. Gladstone listed the possible modes of fasting, ranging from entirely going without food until sunset to a mere exclusion of costly food. The list, he noted in the margin, came from "H.E.M.," that is Manning.<sup>107</sup> Gladstone's closest friend of the 1840s was among the most potent influences over his preaching.

Gladstone's sermons therefore form an instructive case-study in the interaction of intellectual absorption and literary production. Because we possess Gladstone's published diaries with their indexes, his private manuscripts in the British Library and his own annotated books, now made more accessible by GladCat, the politician provides an almost unparalleled opportunity for the analysis of the genesis of a person's ideas. In due course it should be possible to track down the trajectory of his thinking on a wide variety of issues, public as well as private. The sermons studied here have the advantage of being a relatively small and self-contained body of material. There will undoubtedly be other items in Gladstone's reading that shaped his sermon output but that have not been noticed. Nevertheless an attempt has been made to catalogue all the explicit, and as many as possible of the implicit, intellectual debts. How, then, did the politician's reading affect his efforts to form the theology and behavior of his household? There were major long-term influences. Fundamental was the Bible, which is quoted and otherwise drawn on far more than all the other sources put together. There were also three of Gladstone's four doctors: Aristotle, Dante, and Augustine. As is natural in a body of preaching, Augustine the theologian predominates. Among contemporary sources, the writers of the Oxford Movement hold pride of place. Isaac Williams, Edward Pusey, and especially Robert Wilberforce exercised a formative influence over the preacher's doctrinal position. Wilberforce did more, sowing a seed-thought that sprang up into a fresh understanding of the role of human beings in the world. There are traces of additional writers, ancient and in a single case modern, but the indebtedness is overwhelmingly to early texts and Tractarian writings. Other authors, however, did make a more immediate impact and so were reflected in the sermons shortly after Gladstone encountered their works. Among older writers, Bernard was cited while the politician was reading him; Olympe Gerbet, George Townsend, Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, and Henry Manning were instances of recent authors whose ideas appeared just after their pages had been scanned. Tonna, with her exposition of the treatment of women, and Manning, with his stress on the unity of the church, had an effect on Gladstone's mind that was both immediate and enduring. The balance between

long-term and short-term influences, however, undoubtedly leans heavily in favor of the long-term. The content of the sermons was most determined by scripture, Augustine, and the Tractarians. These texts, which were part of the tissue of Gladstone's mind, constituted the reading that affected his preaching most profoundly.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Archibald Bonar, *Sermons, chiefly on Devotional Subjects*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Macredie, Skelly & Muckersy, 1815-17). Set in possession of the author, previously in Fasque House library.

<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Jagger, *Gladstone: The Making of a Politician: The Personal Religious Life and Development of William Ewart Gladstone, 1809-1832* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1991), 65, 185, 186.

<sup>3</sup> *The Times*, 23 March 1877, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *The Gladstone Diaries*, 14 vols, ed. M.R.D. Foot and H.C.G. Matthew (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968-94) [hereafter *D*], 14 September 1859. The index to the diaries misunderstands the incident as "G's street-preaching."

<sup>5</sup> Gladstone Papers, British Library, Add MS [hereafter GP] 44,779, f. 1.

<sup>6</sup> GP 44,749, f. 29.

<sup>7</sup> *D*, 23 February 1840.

<sup>8</sup> GP 44,781, f. 188; 44,779, f. 133.

<sup>9</sup> *D*, 29 March 1840, 9 January 1842, 28 July 1844, 15 February 1846, 19 November 1848, 16 October 1859.

<sup>10</sup> GP 44,779, ff. 280, 304; 44,780, ff. 1, 15.

<sup>11</sup> GP 44,780, ff. 121, 264, 61.

<sup>12</sup> GP 44,780, f. 100.

<sup>13</sup> GP 44,780, f. 252.

<sup>14</sup> *D*, 19 August 1851 n.

<sup>15</sup> *D*, 7 June 1840.

<sup>16</sup> *D*, 18 April 1852.

<sup>17</sup> *E.g.*, *D*, 21 April 1844.

<sup>18</sup> *D*, 14 May 1843, 3 May 1843 n.

<sup>19</sup> *D*, 19 April 1840.

<sup>20</sup> GP 44,780, f. 268.

<sup>21</sup> GP 44,781, ff. 23, 24, 25, 26, 30.

<sup>22</sup> GP 44,779, f. 180.

<sup>23</sup> *D*, 28 June 1840.

<sup>24</sup> *D*, 16 January 1842, 24 March 1842.

<sup>25</sup> GP 44,779, f. 155.

<sup>26</sup> GP 44,779, ff. 222, 246.

<sup>27</sup> GP 44,781, f. 17.

<sup>28</sup> GP 44,779, ff. 8v, 9.

<sup>29</sup> GP 44,780, f. 179.

<sup>30</sup> GP 44,779, f. 254v.

<sup>31</sup> GP 44,779, f. 222v.

<sup>32</sup> GP 44,779, f. 86.

<sup>33</sup> GP 44,779, f. 64.

<sup>34</sup> GP 44,780, ff. 176-6v.

<sup>35</sup> GP 44,780, f. 230.

<sup>36</sup> David W. Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone: Religion, Homer and Politics* (Oxford UP, 2004), chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>37</sup> GP 44,779, ff. 55, 57v.

<sup>38</sup> GP 44,779, f. 154v.

<sup>39</sup> GP 44,780, f. 87.

<sup>40</sup> GP 44,780, f. 251v.

<sup>41</sup> GP 44,481, f. 151.

<sup>42</sup> Perry Butler, *Gladstone: Church, State and Tractarianism: A Study of his Religious Ideas and Attitudes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 159.

<sup>43</sup> GP 44,780, f. 121.

<sup>44</sup> GP 44,781, f. 77.

<sup>45</sup> GP 44,779, f. 259.

<sup>46</sup> GP 44,781, ff. 17, 21v.

<sup>47</sup> GP 44,780, ff. 227, 228.

<sup>48</sup> GP 44,780, f. 123.

<sup>49</sup> GP 44,722, ff. 307-12. Gladstone tentatively dated the fragment to

1833-35.

<sup>50</sup> John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, 3 vols (London: Macmillan, 1903), vol. 1, p. 207 n.

<sup>51</sup> Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, Chapter 2.

<sup>52</sup> GP 44,780, f. 136.

<sup>53</sup> GP 44,780, f. 169.

<sup>54</sup> GP 44,781, f. 212.

<sup>55</sup> GP 44,780, f. 128.

<sup>56</sup> Matthew 19:28.

<sup>57</sup> GP 44,779, f. 41.

<sup>58</sup> GP 44,779, f. 290v.

<sup>59</sup> GP 44,780, f. 276.

<sup>60</sup> GP 44,781, f. 55.

<sup>61</sup> GP 44,779, f. 75v.

<sup>62</sup> Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, 53-54.

<sup>63</sup> GP 44,480, f. 276v.

<sup>64</sup> GP 44,781, f. 20v.

<sup>65</sup> GP 44,727, ff. 124-25.

<sup>66</sup> GP 44,780, f. 123v.

<sup>67</sup> GP 44,781, f. 150.

<sup>68</sup> John Brooke and Mary Sorensen, eds., *The Prime Ministers' Papers: W.E. Gladstone: 1. Autobiographica* (London: H.M.S.O., 1971), 152.

<sup>69</sup> GP 44,781, ff. 147v, 148v.

<sup>70</sup> *D*, 20 September 1846.

<sup>71</sup> GP 44,780, f. 193.

<sup>72</sup> *D*, 18 March 1849. The identification of the catena by the editor is incorrect since the suggested title refers to the Pentateuch, not the gospels.

<sup>73</sup> *Plain Sermons by Contributors to the "Tracts for the Times,"* 10 vols. (London: J.G.F. and J. Rivington, 1839-48), vol. 2, 27.

<sup>74</sup> *D*, 30 August 1840. The volume is not specified, but it would surely be the newly published volume 2.

<sup>75</sup> *Plain Sermons*, vol. 3, 225.

<sup>76</sup> GP 44,780, f. 233v.

*D.W. Bebbington, "Gladstone's Preaching and Gladstone's Reading"*

<sup>77</sup> David Newsome, *The Parting of Friends: A Study of the Wilberforces and Henry Manning* (London: John Murray, 1966), 381-83.

<sup>78</sup> GP 44,781, f. 132v.

<sup>79</sup> Robert I. Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ: In its Relation to Mankind and the Church* (London: John Murray, 1848), spec. chapters 1-4. *D*, 4, 11 March 1849.

<sup>80</sup> Gladstone to R.I. Wilberforce, 24 September 1854, quoted by Newsome, *Parting of Friends*, 382.

<sup>81</sup> Robert I. Wilberforce, *Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature* (London: John Murray, 1850), 17.

<sup>82</sup> *D*, 12 May 1850.

<sup>83</sup> GP 44,781, f. 79.

<sup>84</sup> GP 44,781, ff. 95-5v, 100-00v, 132v.

<sup>85</sup> Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, 288-94.

<sup>86</sup> *D*, 26 June - 11 September 1831.

<sup>87</sup> GP 44,780, f. 73v.

<sup>88</sup> GP 44,781, f. 212.

<sup>89</sup> GP 44,780, f. 277.

<sup>90</sup> GP 44,780, f. 279v.

<sup>91</sup> *D*, 18 August 1844, 25 February 1847.

<sup>92</sup> *D*, 1 August 1847, 7 January 1849.

<sup>93</sup> GP 44,780, f. 131.

<sup>94</sup> Olympe P. Gerbet, *Considerations on the Eucharist, viewed as the Generative Dogma of Christian Piety* (London: n. pub., 1840).

<sup>95</sup> *D*, 23 February 1845, 2 March 1845.

<sup>96</sup> GP 44,779, f. 246.

<sup>97</sup> George F. Townsend, *The Churchman's Year; or, Liturgical Remarks on the Sundays and Saints' Days, and the Lives of the Apostles; with an Explanation of Every Epistle, Gospel and First Lesson*, 2 vols. (London: printed for J.G.F. & J. Rivington, 1842).

<sup>98</sup> *D*, 26, 27, 29 May, 12 June, 3, 31 July, 7 August 1842.

<sup>99</sup> GP 44,779, f. 261v. The sermon was actually first preached on 3 June 1849.

<sup>100</sup> Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, *The Wrongs of Woman*, 4 vols. (London: n. pub., 1843-44).

<sup>101</sup> *D*, 11 January 1845.

<sup>102</sup> GP 44,780, f. 127.

<sup>103</sup> Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, 270-72.

<sup>104</sup> GP 44,779, f. 274v.

<sup>105</sup> *D*, 2 October 1842.

<sup>106</sup> *D*, 27 February 1842. H.E. Manning, *The Unity of the Church* (London: John Murray, 1842).

<sup>107</sup> GP 44,789, f. 190.

