

Addressing the Absent Centre of a True Christian Minister in the Parochial Stratum of *Tom Jones*

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ABSTRACT

The preoccupation with parsons and the parochial social order in Henry Fielding's fiction stems from an awareness that the tone and direction of contemporary society were not what they ought to be. This was made clear by a spiraling rise in crime and a series of dangerous riots Fielding had to deal with as magistrate. Conscious of the instrumentality of the parish in securing social order, Fielding gives his reader a visionary landscape of an ideal parochial stratum that offers a paradigm of transfiguration, personal and communal, a more orderly, salubrious, and charitable society, to be secured through a balanced parson/squire dynamic. When one looks at Fielding's novels structurally, a certain symmetry emerges: in *Joseph Andrews* (1742), Parson Adams is a surreal parson; in the main body of the text, *Tom Jones* (1749) has no good parson; and in *Amelia* (1751), Dr. Harrison is an ideal parson. But, it is precisely this absent centre, and the consequent void it creates in the world of *Tom Jones*, that give us a clearer insight into Fielding's idea of balance in the parochial social order.

KEYWORDS: charity, parish, structure, absent, parson, balance,

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描述《湯姆·瓊斯》教區階級制度 下真實基督牧師的缺席中心

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摘 要

亨利菲爾丁小說裡對牧師和教區社會秩序的關注，源於其本身和當代社會風氣、趨勢的不一致。這點可從菲爾丁以治安官身份處理急遽攀升的犯罪和一系列危險暴動中清楚看出。意識到教區為穩定社會秩序的媒介，菲爾丁透過鄉紳和神職人員間的動力平衡，給予讀者一理想的教區階層，提供改變個人和社區形象的模範，呈現更有秩序、健康、慈善的社會願景。細讀菲爾丁小說時，會浮現一確鑿的對稱：在《約瑟夫·安卓》（1742）裡，亞當牧師是位離奇牧師；在《湯姆·瓊斯》（1749）的重要章節中也沒有優質牧師；《雅米莉雅》（1751）裡的哈利森博士則是位理想牧師。然而，正是《湯姆·瓊斯》裡的缺席中心與隨之而起的空虛，給予我們更清楚的洞察力，探究菲爾丁在教區社會秩序裡的平衡想法。

關鍵詞：慈善、教區、結構、缺席、牧師、平衡

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[T]he true Character of a Christian Minister . . . must be . . . Charitable, benevolent, . . . truly sorry for the Sins and Misfortunes of Men, and rejoicing in their Virtue and Happiness. This good Man is intrusted with the Care of our Souls, over which he is to watch as a Shepherd for his Sheep: to feed the Rich with Precept and Example, and the Poor with Meat also. To live in daily Communication with his Flock, and chiefly with those who want him most, (as the Poor and Distress'd) nay, and after his Blessed Master's Example, to eat with Publicans and Sinners, but with a view of redeeming them by his Admonitions, not of fatning himself by their Dainties.

—Henry Fielding, *The Champion*

Henry Fielding, who does not envisage a realm of religious responsibility that is detached from the civic, conceived of a Christian minister as someone who is obliged to foster an ameliorating harmony in the social order, defined in terms of an active Christian charity which, in his fiction and other writings, becomes the touchstone by which a parson will stand or fall. “Above all”, Fielding tells us, “the Virtue of Charity . . . comprehends almost the whole particular Duty of a Christian” and “a Minister of the Gospel is obliged to it in a more strict and exemplary Manner” (*The Champion* 270). It is an active charity “not confined to Munificence or giving Alms” but also includes “brotherly Love and friendly Disposition of Mind”; humility; forgiveness of enemies; feeding the hungry; not being envious of others; not seeking your own wealth; not speaking ill of another; “rejoicing not in Iniquity” by feigning a “Delight in Sin, which we sometimes put on from a Subserviency to great ones”. “By not rejoicing in Iniquity is meant”, Fielding continues, “not taking the Wages of sinful Men, nor partaking of their Dainties, at the Expense of flattering them in their Iniquity”, a virtue which “becomes every Christian, so more particularly a Minister of the Gospel, whose Business it is to rebuke such Men, not to fall in with, or flatter their Vices”; instead, “rejoicing with the Truth” in the “Company of good and virtuous Men, without the Recommendation of Titles and Wealth, or the Assistance of Dainties and fine Wines”; and finally, “entertaining good and kind Thoughts of Men” seeing them “with the Eyes of Love”. “Charity is all this, and he who falls short of any of these, falls short of Charity” (*The Champion* 266-70). A true Christian

minister is possessed of all of “these” and “Can such a Man as this be the Object of Contempt?”, Fielding asks, “or can any be more entitled to Respect and Honour?” (*The Champion* 283). Fielding’s lengthy *Apology for the Clergy* in the *Champion* and his preoccupation with parsons and the parochial social order in his fiction stems from an awareness that the tone and direction of contemporary society were not what they ought to be. An indication of this deplorable fact was the widespread contempt of the clergy, the spiraling of crime, and a series of dangerous riots Fielding had to deal with as magistrate. Conscious of the instrumentality of the parish in securing social order, and imagining more vividly than most the possibilities that lay in the parish as an effective unit of government, Fielding sought to revive again the reputation of the clergy and restore to the basic institution of the country’s religious and political life its proper vigour and vitality. As a social theorist, Fielding was a parochial idealist who pictured the parson’s relation to his parish as that of a father to his family, someone who “fed his flock with meat, precept, and example”, and mediated fairly between different social groups (*The Champion* 278). Parson Adams, however fallible, fulfils this role in *Joseph Andrews* (1742) as does his counterpart Dr. Harrison in *Amelia* (1751). Such is Adams’ relationship with his parishioners that “They flocked about him like dutiful Children round an indulgent Parent, and vyed with each other in Demonstrations of Duty and Love”, as indeed “His Word was little less than a Law in his Parish: for as he had shown his Parishioners by a uniform Behaviour of thirty-five Years duration, that he had their Good entirely at heart; so they consulted him on every Occasion, and very seldom acted contrary to his Opinion” (*Joseph* 48-49; bk. I, ch. xi). In a similar way, all Dr. Harrison’s parishioners “whom he treats as his Children, regard him as their common Father. Once in a Week he constantly visits every House in the Parish, examines, commends and rebukes, as he finds Occasion” and “so good an Effect is produced by this [his] Care, that no Quarrels ever proceed either to Blows or Law-suits; no Beggar is to be found in the whole Parish; nor did I ever hear a very profane Oath all the Time I lived in it” (*Amelia* 145; bk. III, ch. xii). Parson Adams and Dr. Harrison are different in many ways but they are both possessed of the “virtue of charity” necessary to secure parochial social order. Adams will check his poorer parishioners in their extravagancies no less than protect them against the despotic power of Lady Booby, a mediative role balancing anarchy and tyranny. Similarly, Dr. Harrison will

imprison his closest friend, Captain Booth, when he believes his extravagancies contravene social obligations, but equally will he work indefatigably to unravel a plot, orchestrated by the rich and powerful, against his poor parishioner. So equitably is everything managed in Harrison's parish that his parishioners choose to remain within the law. What is significant in *Tom Jones* (1749), however, is that in the main body of the text there is no "true Christian minister" to guide his flock through ill custom and toward a more equitable balance in the social structure. But, it is precisely this absent centre, and the consequent void it creates in the world of *Tom Jones*, that give us a clearer insight into Fielding's idea of balance in the parochial social order. Indeed, on a structural level, the movement of the novel as a whole can be construed as the search for the paternal figure of a good-natured parson, addressing, and to address, the imbalance caused by his absence.

Village life was under the shadow of the squire and the parson, and there were many ways in which these powers regulated the quality of its well-being. In rural areas there was no rival power to the absolute rule of the Justice of the Peace, an office which was very often occupied by the village squire since the Justices Qualification Act of 1744 stipulated that each justice had to have an estate or freehold, copyhold or customary tenure of the value of £100. Such a stipulation inevitably meant that judge and plaintiff were very often, in practice, one and the same man. Not surprisingly, therefore, country magistrates closed rank when dealing with offenders against property, obliging themselves in the prosecution of each other's poachers. The country magistrate also had at his disposal the provisions of the Black Act (1723), a piece of legislation designed to protect the interests of the propertied and to expedite the operation of legal process in cases relating to offences against property (Thompson 22). In *Tom Jones*, Partridge gives an account of how these provisions overrode customary procedure and the defences of the subject, recalling a Judge Page who sentenced an alleged horse-thief to death without hearing one word from the prisoner's counsel (*Tom* 459-60; bk. VIII, ch. xi). The rulings of Squire Western epitomises the sort of justice the landed magistrate meted out to persons accused of poaching. "In Matters of high Importance, particularly in Cases relating to the Game", Squire Western was not always attentive to the workings of the law: "For, indeed, in executing the Laws under that Head, many Justices of Peace suppose they have a large discretionary Power. By Virtue of which, under the Notion of searching for,

and taking away Engines for the Destruction of the Game, they often commit Trespasses, and sometimes Felony at their Pleasure” (*Tom* 357; bk. VII, ch. ix). According to the Game Laws, only those persons having an estate valued at £100 per year were eligible to possess guns, dogs, or other “Engines for taking of the Game”. Justices could issue warrants to game-keepers authorizing them to search the houses of those suspected of violating this law and to seize such guns, dogs, etc (Fielding, *The History* 357-58). In *Joseph Andrews* (1742) Fielding describes the young squire who forbids the villagers to keep dogs: “he was as absolute as any Tyrant in the Universe, and had killed all the Dogs [including the Wilson family pet], and taken away all the Guns in the Neighbourhood, and not only that, but he trampled down Hedges, and rode over Corn and Gardens, with no more Regard than if they were the Highway” (*Joseph* 228; bk. III, ch. iv). Time and again in his fictional works, Fielding is intent to expose how the power of the squire enveloped village life. Such authority is subtly revealed in “Mr. Allworthy’s Custom never to punish anyone, not even to turn away a Servant, in a Passion” (*Tom* 309; bk. VI, ch. xi). The aside, “not even to turn away a Servant”, Alexander Welsh argues, “gives some idea of the power of the squirearchy, for the class relations implicit in this proviso are no more called in question than the authority of the same character, similarly tempered, as justice of the peace” (52). Lady Booby is certainly not bothered about turning away a servant in a passion either from her own house or from the parish, for well she knew, as her lawyer assures her, “the laws of the land are not so vulgar to permit a mean fellow to contend with one of your ladyship’s fortune. We have one sure card, which is to carry him before Justice Frolic, who upon hearing your ladyship’s name, will commit him without any further question” (*Joseph* 285; bk. IV, ch. iii). Mr. Justice Frolic was as good as his reputation, and at the moment of their rescue Joseph and Fanny were on the point of being sent to Bridewell on the charge of taking a twig from a hedge (*Joseph* 289-90; bk. IV, ch. v). B. M. Jones argues that this is only one of many instances given by Fielding to show how vagrancy laws were stretched to rid the parish of any person against whom the local squire or justice had a grudge: Tom Jones was all but “pressed” at the instance of Lady Bellaston by virtue of the provisions of the Act of 1744 which allowed “vagabonds” to be employed in his Majesty’s service by sea or land (82, 107). “Though on paper the representatives of the central power”, J. L., and Barbara Hammond argue, “the country magistrates were in practice,

by the end of the eighteenth century, simply the local squires putting into force their own ideas and policy” (I: 17).

There was another class that might, under different circumstances, have helped more in assuaging the hardship and isolation of the poor, but the position and the sympathies of the English Church made this difficult. The association of the Anglican Church with the governing class has never been more intimate and binding than it was during the early eighteenth century: the greatest part of the parochial cures were in the gift of the two universities, the nobility and the gentry of the kingdom; and the government had the right to appoint all bishops, a number of prebends, and hundreds of livings. “The younger sons of the nobility”, Gerald Cragg argues, “were candidates for bishoprics and deaneries, those of the gentry for prebends and the richer benefices. As a result the higher clergy were often related by kinship as well as by interest to the leaders of the political parties. The need for an income appropriate to a noble cleric made the practice of accumulating preferments even commoner than before”. Although the supply of clergymen exceeded the number of livings to support them, some priests, thanks to political and social influence, controlled more than one of the wealthy livings. A certain degree of pluralism was inevitable anyway, Cragg continues: “the income of many livings was patently insufficient to support the incumbents” (124-28). Pluralism meant non-residence. In the parishes where the incumbent was non-resident, if there was a clergyman at all in the place, it was generally a curate on a miserable pittance. The fictional Parson Adams, who has to maintain a wife and six children with a “handsome Income of twenty-three Pounds a-Year”, typifies the condition of the poor curate (*Joseph* 23; bk. I, ch. iii). “The ill-paid curate, even when he was resident and conscientious, as he often was”, Hammond argues, “moved like the pluralist rector in the orbit of the rich. He was in that world but not of it. All his hopes hung on the Squire. To have taken the side of the poor against the squire would have meant ruin” (II: 21-23). As a result, curates rarely tried to shackle the loose tongues or the loose lives of the rich. Even decent men, Thomas Stackhouse argues, went “creeping and cringing to wealthy Tables, where either [they] must become perpetual Parasites and Flatterers, or expect to be receiv’d with Coldness or Superiority” (qtd. in Best 50). But, if a parish was to function well as a social unit, Fielding felt, there should be a certain balance of power between squire and parson. Although livings were in the command of the Squire, the

relationship between the squire and the parson should be one in which the Parson could remonstrate with the Squire's ill-doings.

Mr. Supple is the curate of Allworthy's parish, on whom Squire Western had bestowed a living. The parson was a "good-natured and worthy man", but, to "please his Palate" at Squire Western's table, rather too willing to ignore the infirmities of his host (*Tom* 304; bk. VI, ch. ix). One may consider, with Parson Supple in mind, Gilbert Burnet's description of the sychophantic parson:

They fawned on great persons and trod on those that were below them. They made base submissions, indecent addresses, and often brought presents to those in authority; they durst not in any sort reprove them for their faults, though they reproached the poor out of measure for their failings. (109-10)

The attitude of the Church to the excesses of the governing class is well depicted in Fielding's account of Parson Supple, who never remonstrated with Squire Western for swearing, but preached so vigorously in the pulpit against the habit that the authorities put the laws very severely in execution against others, "and the magistrate was the only person in the parish who could swear with impunity" (*Tom* 304; bk. VI, ch. ix). Far from being an instructive associate of the rich, Supple functions, for the most part, as a type of upper servant who Western sends "down to Basingstoke after [a] Tobacco Box" (*Tom* 886; bk. XVII, ch. iii). Supple is too mindful of his superior's patronage to be anything other than obsequious. Parson Adams, in contrast, is someone who "Endeavours to get [his] Bread honestly" in the service of God. He will not profane his calling by truckling to the whims of his earthly superiors nor abandon his flock to their oppressive designs even when it means the loss of his living (*Joseph* 282-83; bk. IV, ch. ii). However, since Adams is a surreal parson who, among other things, is perfectly bereft of a fiscal expediency, his character serves to intimate Fielding's belief that a parson would have more social worth if free from the structures of patronage. Fielding saw in this mediating role an additional argument for church endowments since it happily rendered the mediator independent of both parties, and thus above suspicion in his interference. Dr. Harrison is an ideal parson in the sense that he is a rare example of a completely independent voice: he doesn't have a worldly stake which helps remove him from the sphere of human envy, neither is he

compromised by networks of favour and patronage since he is well off enough not to be holding his hands out. Perhaps if Parson Supple was similarly independent he would have had a “little more Spirit to tell the Squire of his Wickedness” (*Tom* 809; bk. XV, ch.vii), but not every parson is cut of the same cloth.

In *Tom Jones*, the sycophantic Parson Thwackum lives under Squire Allworthy’s roof as both tutor and spiritual counsellor which provides a further insight into the consequences of a faulty parson/squire dynamic. Thwackum is irascible, easily moved to temper except when he controls it to ingratiate himself with Allworthy (*Tom* 132; bk. III, ch. v). Squire Allworthy is all-worthy, but not all-seeing. He is too good himself to smoke the motives of less virtuous men and becomes, in Henry James Pye’s words, “the dupe of every insinuating rascal he meets” (190). What is amiss in Paradise Hall is a parson who deliberately fails to correct Allworthy in his misconceptions, preferring instead to impose upon his patron’s gullibility in order to orchestrate the punishment of the innocent. Thwackum’s profaned oath against Jones which moves the ill distinguishing Allworthy to banish an innocent man from Paradise Hall may not unjustly qualify the divine as the antithesis of the good parson. His action recalls Fielding’s reference to “little upstarts” in *The Craftsman* (Oct 22, 1737) “on the Ideal Government of the Ancient Egyptians”, an article which may serve as an insight into Fielding’s concept of the true religious mentor:

Men of the most distinguished Birth, Education and Abilities were always chosen for that Office, in order to instil generous Sentiments into [the minds of their masters], and check Them in their Extravagancies; which *little upstarts* could not take the Liberty of doing; for . . . it seldom happens that Kings indulge Themselves in any vicious Excesses, unless their *Ministers*, or *Favourites*, encourage Them in their *Irregularities* and *Passions*. (Fielding, *New Essays* 256; original italics)

“Not only the Happiness of *Particulars*”, Fielding continues, “but the Welfare of the *whole State*” depended on a healthy balance of power between the Egyptian King and his High Priest (Fielding, *New Essays* 257; original italics). Thus, the negative consequences of Allworthy’s pliability unchecked by the energies of a “little upstart” comprehends the chaos that rules the world of

Tom Jones.

Allworthy receives Thwackum into his house on the glowing recommendation of “a very particular Friend . . . in whose Integrity he placed much Confidence”. The “Qualifications” by which Mr. Allworthy’s Friend had been induced to recommend him, however, relied less on the proclaimed merit of the candidate as chaplain than on the political obligations he owed to Thwackum’s powerful family (*Tom* 135; bk. III, ch. v). In a sense, Allworthy is duped by Thwackum before he even meets him. The absence of a true parson in Paradise Hall underlines the fact that neither Jones nor Blifil have been properly mentored. Allworthy, who had Bilfil’s and Tom’s best interests at heart, hired Thwackum, the divine, and Square, the philosopher, to provide what he saw as a balanced education for the boys. Their tenets

were, indeed, diametrically opposite to each other. Square held human nature to be the perfection of all virtue, and that vice was a deviation from our nature in the same manner as deformity of body is. Thwackum, on the contrary, maintained that the human mind, since the fall, was nothing but a sink of iniquity, till purified and redeemed by grace. In one point only they agreed, which was, in all their discourses on morality never to mention the word *goodness*. The favourite phrase of the former, was the natural *beauty of virtue*; that of the latter, was the *divine power of grace*. The former measured all actions by the unalterable rule of right, and the *eternal fitness of things*; the latter decided all matters by authority but, in doing this, he always used the Scriptures and their commentators, as the lawyer doth his *Coke upon Lyttleton*, where the comment is of equal authority with the text. (*Tom* 126; bk. III, ch. iii; original italics)

But Thwackum and Square fail as tutors; Blifil becomes a hypocrite and Tom Jones rebels: “Tom Jones showed no more regard to the learned discourses which Square would sometimes throw away upon him, than to those of Thwackum”. Master Blifil, on the contrary, “had address enough at sixteen to recommend himself at one and the same time to both these opposites. With one he was all religion, with the other he was all virtue. And when both were present, he was profoundly silent, which both interpreted in his favour and

their own” (*Tom* 134; bk. III, ch. v). The failure of Allworthy’s “faulty” educational scheme is attributable to the misconception that religious extremes form a balance. Instead, the opposing tenets of Thwackum and Square unite, necessarily, in the exclusion of spontaneous goodness. Their refusal to consider natural goodness “in all their discourses on morality” suggests a pedagogical approach that runs counter to the methodology of the ancient Egyptian priests who sought to “instil generous sentiments” into the minds of their protégés. Benevolence is synonymous with Christian charity in Fielding’s moral thesaurus, the seeds of which remain dormant in human nature until brought to fruition by the pervasive influence of a good-natured mentorship. Who, then, excited the seeds of goodness that were latent in Jones’ nature? As a Calvinist, Thwackum had sought to flog Jones into obedience, but such a pedagogical approach will only produce, at best, a mechanical response to rules. Nor can the impulsiveness of Jones’ good nature be attributable to the influence of Square’s moral mathematics. Good nature is impulsive, independent of the dictates of religion and philosophy, and as such is analogised in the relationship between Jones and his tutors. It follows, then, that Jones was most influenced by the “Assistance” of the third person involved in his education: the good-natured Allworthy whom “there was no Rule in the World capable of making” (*Tom* 134-36; bk. III, ch. v). Guided only by the impulses of his good heart, Jones’ personality is essentially defined by the one quality both Square and Thwackum discard from their systems.

Once Jones has been banished from Paradise Hall, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* becomes, essentially, a heuristic examination of the human condition absent from any social order, termed the “state of nature”; a common starting point for various proponents of social contract. In this state of being, an individual’s action is bound only by his conscience; and Tom, who is distinguished by innate good nature, is constantly attentive to the decisions of the “Lord High Chancellor” of his mind. He never loses sight of the intuitive faculty which unflinchingly “acquits, and condemns” his actions “according to merit and justice” (*Tom* 172-73; bk. IV, ch. vi). Yet Jones, however, very nearly winds up on the gallows which ultimately justifies the need for the social structures formed at the novel’s end. Fielding is intent to show that Jones’ destruction is both natural and probable if left solely to his own good intentions. While Fielding endorsed the natural energies of

benevolence, he realised that it was given, naturally, to foolish extravagancies involving a tendency to vice which needed to be curbed for the well-being of society. Therefore, Fielding conceived of an important role for the church to inculcate in the populace the natural energies of social benevolence, but to check them in their extravagancies. For most of the novel Jones enjoys a complete freedom of thought and action bound only by conscience (synonymous with good nature), a liberty that involves him in every conceivable vice: theft; falsehood; fornication; assault; presumed debauchery; presumed incest; and presumed murder: a downward spiral culminating in his near destruction. Although Jones is possessed of a “Generosity of Spirit”, a quality Fielding believed was “the sure Foundation of all that is great and noble in Human Nature” (*Tom* 657; bk. XII, ch. x), his “Character was on the Outside of Generosity, and may perhaps not very unjustly have been suspected of Extravagance” (*Tom* 633; bk. XII, ch. iv). Such extravagance, though more folly than vice, does involve a “Tendency to vice” (*Tom* 981; bk. XVIII, ch. xiii). It was for this reason, that both Wilson (*Joseph* 202; bk. III, ch. iii) and Captain Booth (*Amelia* 148; bk. III, ch. xii) lamented the absence of a guide to check them in their youthful extravagancies. In a way akin to our impression of Wilson’s womanizing or Booth’s extramarital affair, Jones’ willingness to abandon a woman he thinks he has debauched or his culpability in the Lady Bellaston affair show us that his heart is on the verge of turning sour. He is in need of spiritual guidance because “an entire Profligacy of Manners will corrupt the best Heart in the World; and all which a good-natured libertine can expect is, that we should mix some Grains of Pity with our contempt and Abhorrence” (*Tom* 963; bk. XVIII, ch. x).

The only “spiritual assistance” Jones receives on his travels takes the form of Jacobite superstition. For most of his journey, Jones is accompanied by the Jacobite Partridge, a former schoolmaster Allworthy had dismissed for being the supposed father of Tom himself (*Tom* 101-03; bk. II, ch. vi). Partridge’s “Head was full of nothing but of Ghosts, Devils, Witches, and such like” to the extent that he was always looking for omens that could be interpreted as affecting individual fortunes (*Tom* 444; bk. VIII, ch. x). However, one does not get an impression that Partridge’s reading of omens paves the way to success or that his incessant prattling is anything other than a major source of Jones’ troubles: “How often”, said Jones, “am I to suffer for your Folly, or rather for my own in keeping you? Is that Tongue of yours

resolved upon my Destruction?" (*Tom* 751; bk. XIV, ch. iii). Such is the character of his moral authority that Jones ignores his Christian remonstrances against going to war. Partridge's conviction that "the Scripture is so much against it, that a Man shall never persuade me he is a good Christian while he sheds Christian-blood" (*Tom* 630-31; bk. XII, ch. iii) is unveiled as cowardly and self-serving:

Just as *Partridge* had uttered that good and pious doctrine... they arrived at another Cross-way, when a lame Fellow in Rags, asked them for Alms; upon which *Partridge* gave him a severe Rebuke saying, 'Every Parish ought to keep their own Poor.' *Jones* then fell a laughing, and asked *Partridge*, if he was not ashamed with so much Charity in his Mouth to have no Charity in his Heart. 'Your Religion,' says he, 'serves you only for an Excuse for your Faults, but is no Incentive to your Virtue. Can any Man who is really a Christian abstain from relieving one of his Brethren in such a miserable condition?' and at the same time putting his Hand in his Pocket, he gave the poor Object a shilling. (*Tom* 631; bk. XIII, ch. iv; original italics)

Partridge accompanies Jones in what he believes is an expedition to join the rebels, but his "Zeal for the Cause" rests on the self-serving prospect of persuading Jones to return to Paradise Hall where he might regain Allworthy's favour and his old annuity and position as schoolmaster (*Tom* 426-27; bk. VIII, ch. viii). "However well affected [Partridge] might be to *James* or *Charles*, he was still much more attached to *Little Benjamin* than to either"; for which reason he no sooner discovered that Jones was a Hanoverian than he thought proper to conceal, and outwardly give up his own "Principles" to the man "on whom he depended for the making his Fortune" (*Tom* 441-42; bk. VIII, ch. ix). In a structural sense, Partridge is Parson Adams' counterpart since he accompanies the young Jones on his journey, but, paradoxically, in doing so, he highlights the fact that the novel has no true religious guide. On first meeting Partridge, Jones thought he had found his missing father, but as someone who is not a paternal figure, uncharitable, given to superstitious prophesizing, and abandons his "principles" for money, what the foundling had discovered was the antithesis of a true Christian minister.

The narrative of *Tom Jones* is defined in key ways by the absence of a

good clergyman. In a world void of paternal guidance, confusion reigns: one sees the inability of characters to get to their destinations, the turning back, the aimless wandering, the foolish decisions, and the search for identity. Fielding creates an atmosphere of restlessness in a world void of direction in order to manifest, structurally, the consequences of a fatal lack of balance in the social order. Tom Jones is born into a world of blundering squires and sycophantic parsons. Squire Allworthy, acting from mistaken motives, and with no spiritual counsellor to protest, expels Jones from Paradise Hall. The hapless Jones doesn't know who his parents are or where he is going:

I will go this moment – but whither? – why let Fortune direct; since there is no other who thinks it of any consequence what becomes of this wretched person, it shall be a matter of equal indifference to myself *The World*, as Milton phrases it, *lay all before him*; and Jones, no more than Adam, had any man to whom he might resort for comfort or assistance. (*Tom* 330-31; bk. VII, ch. ii; original italics)

Jones determines to go to sea, but he is nothing if not impetuous, and one doubts his keeping to this. Indeed, he soon volunteers to join a band of soldiers marching north against the forces of “The Pretender” (*Tom* 368; bk. VII, ch. xi) before deciding to pursue his beloved Sophia (*Tom* 554; bk. X, ch. Vii). Unlike Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones has no religious mentor to accompany him on his journey and therefore must learn everything in a more peripatetic and experimental way. But Jones' downward spiral towards the gallows together with the fact that he only learns prudence by making every conceivable mistake, highlights, further, the absence of a true guide in the novel. By “Reflexion on his past Follies”, and without the help of a guide, Jones will acquire “Discretion and Prudence” (the balance of the different ways of going wrong), but it is only in prison, when his life and liberty are no longer in his own hands, that he learns the folly of his ways (*Tom* 981; bk. XVIII, ch. xiii). Jones will, of course, triumph in the end, but his personality does not carry with it the confidence of ultimate vindication; his deliverance rests entirely on luck and, therefore, does not vindicate an attentiveness to individual conscience that negates a reliance on a mentor-parson. Rather, the necessity of a good parson is conveyed through the character and actions of Jones, a moral discovery that can be made through the narrative movement of

the novel as a whole. Jones is a “*Felo de se* [a felon to himself]”; the “Calamities” which befall him are “owing to his Imprudence” and lead, ultimately, to his imprisonment where he languishes unable to secure his own deliverance. It is significant that in prison, at the nadir of his misfortunes, when Jones finally realises the folly of his ways (*Tom* 916; bk. XVIII, ch. ii), there is no Ordinary to offer him guidance or consolation; no good parson like Adams to deliver at a prime moment of intervention, no Dr. Harrison to facilitate his release from prison. There is only the bumbling Partridge whose main contribution is to further traumatize the prisoner by erroneously accusing Jones of incestuously bedding his supposed mother. The narrator tells us that he will not, like “the Antients” supply a supernatural deity to assist his hero, but look, instead, to “natural Means alone” to see what “may be done for poor Jones” (*Tom* 875-76; bk. XVII, ch. i). Thus Jones’ deliverance in the providential conclusion is contingent on a series of chance encounters and the happy recovery of Mr. Fitzpatrick, all of which suggest an arbitrary universe rather than a religious denouement. Thus, Jones’ progress towards moral maturity is essentially a secular pilgrim’s progress because without a good parson Fielding cannot create a religious landscape based on a religious point of view. One does not get a sense that Tom’s spontaneous reactions to stimuli on his travels are manifestations of a developing religious life. However, it might be argued that Tom Jones and Joseph Andrews are similar in this way with or without a “good parson” as their guide and, by consequent, one is led to question the extent of Adams’ influence on Joseph and whether or not Fielding had any serious intention of creating a truly religious atmosphere or landscape in his novels.

It is clear, however, that a central debate in *Joseph Andrews* is one that was very much in vogue during Fielding’s lifetime: the role of the parson in the social structure, a theme Fielding had before introduced in *Shamela* and treated extensively in the *Champion*. The numerous and various representations of vocations in *Joseph Andrews* prove that the author was extremely well versed in the contemporary controversies about how the clergy should conduct themselves, and that he saw this issue as representative of many of the failings of contemporary society. When viewed collectively, the persistent exploration of diverse religious vocations in Fielding’s fiction seem to suggest that their creator not only believed that there was very little substitute for the good example of a parson, but such clerical goodness was, in

reality, a fairly rare quality. Parson Adams is not a religious icon (nor is *Joseph Andrews* a Bildungsroman), but an imaginative exploration of religious possibilities in a world of conflicting vocations. Although Adams is the central parson in the novel, the reader can not identify with him; his views are not given as sacrosanct, but must be viewed in relation to a variety of other contending moral perspectives. Fielding's authoritative stance as novelist can be structurally defined in terms of the provisions of the Toleration Act (1689) which provided for a freedom of conscience within the bounds of social obligation. What this means analogically in narratological terms is a narrative that provides for the autonomous development of reader subjectivity bound only by the inculcation of charity ("a regard to the good of others"). Social harmony is Fielding's goal and Adams, like the other parsons, will be judged in terms of the totality of his influence. Besides Adams there are no fewer than six Anglican clergymen in *Joseph Andrews* who all make a claim for their priest status in different ways: for Trulliber and Barnabas it is justification by faith and wealth alone; for Adams it is Christian charity, poverty, and learning. Since very few other people in the early eighteenth century were educated, the ability to read Greek was a convenient test of a clergyman. At Adams' trial one finds "the Parson of the Parish" "putting on his Spectacles and Gravity together", when asked to determine if "Aeschylus" was, as the defendant claimed, a Greek manuscript. Contemptuously disregarding Adams' claim, he knowingly pronounces it a "Manuscript of one of the Fathers": "The beginning is the Catechism in Greek", and concludes that "it was stolen from the same Clergyman from whom the Rogue took the Cassock" (*Joseph* 148-49; bk. II, ch. xi). It is the ignorant parson of the parish who proves to be the impostor. Another parson is the arrogant priest who invites contempt by his utter lack of humility: "instead of esteeming his Poor Parishioners as a part of his Family, [he] seems rather to consider them as not of the same Species with himself. He seldom speaks to any, unless some few of the richest of us; nay, indeed, he will not move his Hat to the others" (*Joseph* 172; bk. II, ch. xvi). Though Adams is himself proud to be a clergyman, he shirks the company of the rich for an ale shared with the maids and servants of his parish. For he "looked on all those whom God had entrusted to his Cure" as his children, a relationship that is admirably documented in his paternal care of Joseph and Fanny (*Joseph* 172; bk. II, ch. xvi). His manner contrasts sharply with that of his non-resident superior's

who perceives his parishioners to be nothing other than his debtors, the satisfaction of which “debt” he is intent to have in any shape or form: “The Parson had for many Years lived in a constant State of Civil War, or, which is perhaps as bad, of Civil Law, with Sir Thomas himself and the Tenants of his Manor” but “he had not yet been able to accomplish his Purpose, and had reaped hitherto nothing better from the Suits than the pleasure (which he used indeed frequently to say was no small one) of reflecting that he had utterly undone many of the poor Tenants, though he had at the same time greatly impoverished himself” (*Joseph* 25; bk. I, ch. iii). Another parson who views his parishioner as a type of customer is Barnabas’ who is loath to administer the last rites to the penniless Joseph when he could be better employed drinking a bowl of punch. However, when one of the thieves was taken and brought to the inn, together with Joseph’s recovered gold, Barnabas is intent to requisition it for himself, under the pretence of producing it in evidence against the criminal, when, in reality, he had not the least interest in the “Prosecution”, nor had he “ever been suspected of loving the Publick well enough” to give them his services for nothing (*Joseph* 66-68; bk. I, ch. xv). In contrast, Adams’ parish is Christian largely on the assertion of its charity. We see this in Adams’ hospitality to his poor parishioners: no sooner had he heard “that Fanny had neither eat nor drank that morning, than he presented her a Bone of Bacon he had just been gnawing, being the only Remains of his Provision, and then ran nimbly to the Tap, and produced a Mug of small Beer, which he called Ale, however it was the best in his House” (*Joseph* 307; bk. IV, ch. viii), a paternal care that is reciprocated in Joseph’s impulsive generosity to Adams’ children (*Joseph* 323; bk. IV, ch. xi). Indeed, such is Adams’ generosity to his flock that a few of Lady Booby’s servants voluntarily “redeemed” the horse “[he] had left behind him at the Inn” (*Joseph* 272; bk. III, ch. xii). In his neighbourhood, the wealthy Parson Trulliber “was reputed a Man of great Charity: for tho’ he never gave a Farthing, he had always that Word in his Mouth”. Adams will discover this when he asks him for a loan and, further, when he sallies out into Trulliber’s parish in search of money to pay “the Reckoning” he finds the same attitude to charity echoed throughout and returns penniless. Adams finds it impossible to accept how a person could believe in the Bible without obeying its social message, and voices what is essentially Fielding’s notion of a sincere faith: “Whoever therefore is void of Charity, I make no scruple of pronouncing that he is no Christian” (*Joseph*

167; bk. II, ch. xiv). He cannot understand how “it was possible in a Country professing Christianity, for a Wretch to starve in the midst of his Fellow-Creatures who abounded”. The answer is, of course, to be found in the power of Parson Trulliber’s example. It is not surprising that Adams “could easily have borrowed such a Sum in his own Parish” when “he would have lent it himself to any Mortal in Distress” (*Joseph* 169; bk. II, ch. xv). It is not, therefore, a parson’s preaching that most effectively determines his spiritual influence, but the power of his example that fosters the religious character of his parishioners. Herein lies the extent of Adams’ influence on Joseph Andrews. As someone who is good-natured and spontaneously generous, courageous and righteously violent, Joseph has obviously been inspired by his mentor whose influence lies pervasively in the workings of his life. The intention to present Parson Adams as an exemplary figure rather than a quintessential preacher is signalled by our first impression of him as someone who loses his sermons.

It is doubtful that Joseph would ever reach moral maturity listening to Adams’ sermonising given that his guide is quixotic, too precariously ignorant of the ways of the world, and quite often contradicts himself. In fact, Joseph, who often behaves with more sense and practical judgement, will outgrow Adams’ sermonising. Further, even though it is Adams’ role as a mentor to check young men’s “extravagancies” involving a “Tendency to vice”, he is, paradoxically, often given to passionate and emotional extravagancies himself. Yet Adams’ excesses never hurt anyone and we do not get a sense that his impulsive benevolence is misdirected on any level. Although he is possessed of many ridiculous precepts which are humorously mocked in the novel, he is supremely right in his sense of charity and his charitable acts and immediate sympathy with those in distress are never arguable. When he acts purely and unreflectively from the impulses of his good heart, Adams is the embodiment of Christian charity, a Christian charity that is essentially a social affection, involving him sympathetically and selflessly in the affairs of society and, in the world of *Joseph Andrews*, he is ultimately rewarded for his impulsive benevolence. Significantly, it is Adams’ selfless stand against the despotic power of Lady Booby that brings about the transparent *telos* of the novel: the marriage of Joseph and Fanny. Even though a politically minded rector had formerly expelled Adams from his curacy for not influencing an election against his conscience (*Joseph* 132-33; bk. II, ch. viii), he refuses Lady

Booby's request to "publish [the banns] no more", despite her threat to take away his living (*Joseph* 281-83; bk. IV, ch. ii). When Lady Booby, who covets Joseph, tries to unite Fanny with her gentleman assailant, Beau Didapper, who is not only a man she loathes but someone who attempts to take her lover's life with a sword, it is Adams who springs to Joseph's rescue, fully armed with the lid of a pot (*Joseph* 320-21; bk. IV, ch. xi). Joseph will outgrow Adams' sermonising but he is not without relying on the good-natured Adams to deliver at a prime moment of intervention. When judged by the totality of his influence in the social structure, Joseph and Fanny will not be sorry they threw in their lot with Parson Adams.

The touchstone of an active Christian charity which condemns all parsons but Adams in *Joseph Andrews* functions in a similar way in the world of *Tom Jones*: had not Thwackum and Square "utterly discarded all natural goodness of heart, they had never been represented as the Objects of Derision in this History" (*Tom* 129; bk. III, ch. iv). Parson Supple is not without good-nature but he fails to qualify as a true Christian minister in that he lacks an essential element of "charity": the courage to rebuke and reprove an unjust squire. Most damning, perhaps, is the lack of spirit Supple shows in remonstrating with the Squire when he carries off Sophia "swearing she [would] marry Mr. Blifil", a man she truly detests (*Tom* 808; bk. XV, ch. vii). Parson Supple begged Western "to be a little more moderate", but, as his name suggests, he has a supple conscience and, therefore, soon abandoned his entreaties when the Squire threatened to take away his Living (*Tom* 799; bk. XV, ch. v). Mrs. Honour wishes

That Parson *Supple* had but a little more Spirit to tell the Squire of his Wickedness in endeavouring to force his Daughter contrary to her Liking; but then his whole Dependance is on the Squire, and so the poor Gentleman, though he is a very religious good sort of Man and talks of the Badness of such Doings behind the Squire's Back, yet he dares not say his Soul is his own to his Face. To be sure I never saw him make so bold as just now, I was afeard the Squire would have struck him. (*Tom* 809; bk. XV, ch. vii; original italics)

As long as Squire Western is against it, Parson Supple will do little to facilitate the transparent *telos* of the novel: the marriage of Tom and Sophia.

Nor will Tom, on his release from prison, be able to secure Sophia's hand in marriage without Western's consent. Significantly, when Tom and Sophia are eventually joined in matrimony, the ceremony takes place in a chapel at Doctors' Commons with no parson to unite them. Amusingly, and symptomatic of Fielding's style as a comic-satirist, the *telos* of the novel is, to a certain extent, contingent on the happy discovery of the identity of Tom's "natural" parents: a squire's deceased sister and the departed son of a longer deceased good-natured parson. What is also symptomatic of Fielding's wit is the likelihood that Tom's real father will somehow prove to be a happy reversal of his supposed one.

The supreme recognition scene to which the novel has been moving is the disclosure of Tom's true parentage. Fielding suspends this revelation until the end, discovering Allworthy's sister, Bridget, and Mr. Summer, the son of a clergyman, as the foundling's true parents. Summer becomes an intriguing character, symbolically, when one realises his vocation and relates it to the fact that he has been dead from the outset of the novel. Within the text, Fielding withholds Summer's profession, but gives his reader the all important clue that he was the son of a clergyman whom Allworthy had "maintained . . . at the University" where "he had finished his Studies" (*Tom* 940; bk. XV, ch. vii). Although it was common at the time for young members of the landed-class to dissipate a few years at university (few aristocrats troubled to graduate), other students, who were less endowed for the future (many of them curate's sons), diligently pursued a viable career (Porter 161). As the son of a clergyman, in need of Allworthy's sponsorship to attend university, it is most unlikely that Mr. Summer was possessed of a large estate. What then was the viable career Mr. Summer might have pursued? Since the two universities of Fielding's day, Oxford and Cambridge, were confessional in nature, instituted, primarily, for the education of Anglican clerics and the propagation of the state religion, the overwhelming evidence would point to Summer pursuing a clerical career. That Summer achieved this goal is suggested by the fact that "he had finished his studies", but the evidence is not conclusive; one cannot, unequivocally, confer on him clerical status because it is not possible to determine exactly how many University graduates during this period were subsequently ordained. "Oxford University [1690-1710]", G. V. Bennett argues,

did not itself keep information on the ecclesiastical careers of

its members and college records are inadequate. The task of correlating the names of Oxford graduates with those admitted to orders in the various English dioceses is a formidable and ultimately impossible undertaking since some bishop's registers have not survived. Even when statistics have been laboriously compiled from a variety of manuscript and printed records they will necessarily always understate the true numbers. It must, therefore, be the patterns which are accounted significant rather than the totals arrived at. (392)

Bennett traced the career of all those who matriculated in the years 1690, 1700 and 1710 and found that 314 men are known to be ordained out of 828 who matriculated and 489 who proceeded to a bachelor's degree. Bennett thus estimates, allowing for the incompleteness of the records,

that an average of 125 went into orders in any one year, and that about 70 per cent of graduates made the church their career... The Oxford-educated clergy were drawn predominantly from the children of the poor and of the clergy themselves. Half of those who matriculated as plebeians or *pauperes pueri* (132 out of 265) are known to have been ordained. The priesthood was the only profession to which they could aspire... The largest proportion of any group of undergraduates going into the church was provided by the sons of the clergy, and 78 out of 132 such matriculants (or 59 per cent) followed into their father's profession. For them, perhaps, the priesthood had been an expectation since childhood and the object of such influence and connection as their families could muster. (392-93; original italics)

Lamenting, albeit mistakenly, the death of his good-natured and intelligent child, Parson Adams sobs: "He would have made the best scholar, and been an ornament to the Church – such parts and such goodness never met in one so young" (*Joseph* 309; bk. IV, ch. viii). But meeting the cost of a university education, Bennett continues, was difficult for the poorest classes of undergraduate. Plebeians and poor vicar's sons hung on grimly long enough to get a BA degree because this was the minimum requirement for ordination.

It was also at this point that funds ran out and benefactors withdrew their support (371). It is no surprise then that the sons of the poorer classes were hurried into orders as soon as possible after graduation. But a young man, Bennett argues,

who was forced to give up his university course on completing the degree of BA was hardly ready for ordination. It was thus important that for most of them there was a period of compulsory waiting before they could be admitted to deacon's orders at the canonical age of 23. Some had to return home, hoping to read a little theology before presenting themselves to a bishop's chaplain for examination. (388)

Perhaps this is what Summer was doing at Allworthy's house. A more obvious choice would have been to return to his father who was a clergyman, but one gets a sense that Summer may have been orphaned at this point: "[Allworthy] bred the young Man up", an act Mrs. Waters felt testified to the friendship Allworthy once "had" for Summer's father (*Tom* 940; bk. XVIII, ch. vii). However, given Summer's intelligence, and Allworthy's generosity as a benefactor, it is possible that the young scholar obtained an MA degree and thereby finished his preparation for the priesthood at college. The great majority of those who progressed to MA level, Bennett continues, were the sons of gentlemen or the better-off clergy and of these nearly all were intended for ordination. Unlike the BA graduate (many of whom failed the chaplain's exam), a candidate who had stayed on in Oxford for an MA and studied theology for two or three years rarely had any difficulty in securing a title to a living. To remain in Oxford after the MA degree would have meant the acquisition of a fellowship (369-71), an unlikely possibility in Summer's case since it seems that it was Allworthy, alone, that had "maintained him at the University". Apart from the heads of houses and a few professors, Bennett argues, fellows

were for the most part young, unmarried clergymen, overwhelmingly of a gentry or professional background. The number of college fellows not in orders or intending to be ordained was, at this period, quite small and confined to the places reserved for physicians and civil lawyers. Few had any

intention of remaining permanently in the university and their hopes for a future career and an eventual settlement lay in obtaining some substantial preferment in the church... They acted in all respects as the learned spokesmen of a professional interest, and they waited anxiously for the time when some preferment came their way of sufficient value to allow them to resign their fellowships, marry and move on to become a gentleman, pastor and keeper of order in some local community. (372)

The fact that Summer, on completion of his studies, retired to Allworthy's house dispels any notion that he had progressed beyond MA level. He may have come to reside at Paradise Hall as a chaplain, or simply to dissipate the time while he awaited the offer of a curacy or living. The offer of courtship, however, came sooner, as did his death before the product of his amours. Since Summer was "untimely snatch'd away" by the smallpox, Jones was not the wages of promiscuity or casual sex, but of a serious courtship which failed to result in marriage (*Tom* 940; bk. XVIII, ch. vii); Minos would not have turned Summer away (Fielding, *The Complete Works* 240-41). At the time, "couples frequently began having sex once they were courting in earnest, with the assumption that a formal wedding would take place when circumstances were right" (Porter 148). Since Bridget knew she had her brother's approval, it is most likely that the wedding was put on hold pending the offer of a living for Mr. Summer. There is a sense that Summer was not employed at Paradise Hall because he lived "in the House as if he had been [Allworthy's] son" and was buried as such (*Tom* 940; bk. XVIII, ch. vii). Testament to his character is the fact that Squire Allworthy and Mrs. Waters tenderly lamented his loss, both regarding him as an intelligent and good-natured man (*Tom* 940, 942; bk. XVIII, ch. vii). On a structural level then, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* is essentially a search for the paternal figure of a good-natured parson, a search for someone who is painfully absent.

The absent centre of a true clergyman bears out the chaos in the novel instigated by a parallel dynamic of one blundering and one despotic squire unchecked by their respective self-seeking sycophantic parsons which, in the main, nurtures a lawless, wayward, and uncharitable bunch of parishioners. This fatal lack of balance in the social order is structurally addressed when Allworthy takes a Parson Abraham Adams into his house to replace

Thwackum as spiritual counsellor; and when Sophia employs the good-natured Adams as a tutor to her children (*Tom* 980; bk. XVIII, ch. xiii). The introduction of Parson Adams suggests an idyllic preserve, a visionary landscape of an ideal parochial stratum that offers a paradigm of transfiguration, personal and communal, a more orderly, salubrious, and charitable society, to be secured through a balanced parson/squire dynamic.

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