

THE RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES OF MARK TWAIN

A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by
Cynthia Swiedom Hunter
May, 1976

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Man must maintain an open mind in his search for vital and meaningful religious truths. Preoccupation with traditional theology brought about the division of virtuous men into hundreds of hostile sectarian camps. Twain, who was not an atheist although he was radical in his personal religious attitudes and beliefs, could find no reason why all those who share a belief in such basic values as those of love, high ethics, freedom, integrity, and truth should not join together as members of a universal religion based on realism and freed from antiquated practices and beliefs.

Far from being misanthropic, Twain sought throughout his lifetime to improve the human condition by provoking men to discard false values and conventional faith and look, not to institutions, but to themselves and their intuition for ethical principles and virtuous guidelines. He tried to promote betterment by creating an awareness of societal and religious oppression, sham, superstition, and hypocrisy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain was troubled throughout his lifetime by the ironies and paradoxes of orthodox religion. In a letter of January 6, 1869, he confided to Livy, his future wife, that he would not trust a religious faith that came upon him suddenly or as the result of emotionalism; he desired a faith that was proven step by step as it was deliberately gained.¹ Twain felt that especially evangelical religion "consists in a set of things which the average man thinks he believes, and wishes he was certain."² He could not bring himself to stretch "the narrow garment of belief to fit the broad shoulders of a wish" (N, 108) as he felt many Christians did. A deist, he believed in God as the creator and governor of the universe, but he did not believe in the divinity of Christ, the divine inspiration of the scriptures, or the intervention of special providences. In spite of his skepticism, he was not contemptuous of the ideals of Christianity,

¹Mark Twain, The Love Letters of Mark Twain, ed. Dixon Wecter (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), p. 45. Subsequent references to this work will hereinafter be cited parenthetically in the text as LL followed by the page number.

²Mark Twain, Mark Twain's Notebook, ed. Albert B. Paine (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935), p. 153. Subsequent references to this work will hereinafter be cited parenthetically in the text as N followed by the page number.

as revealed by his intense admiration and defense of the Christian ethic and the Golden Rule. Twain had an honest, loving Christian character but would not subscribe to any systematic belief because he felt that issues rather than doctrines determine man's responsibilities.³

Twain's tendency to act as a functioning Christian by upholding high ideals and morality while rejecting formal religious orthodoxy, could have been transmitted to him from his father, John Marshall Clemens, who was "a free-thinker . . . a man who did not attend church, or speak of religious matters, or participate in family religious exercises, but who scrupulously observed a personal integrity that Mark took over intact."⁴ Twain was reared in a religious home and community, however, and, prompted by his mother and sister, he had read the entire Bible before he was fifteen years old.⁵ Even at that early age, he could not accept the Old Testament God or what he deemed myths and fables in the Bible. As a result of the Sunday school lessons and sermons which he heard as a boy, he associated

³Frederick Anderson, ed., A Pen Warmed-Up in Hell: Mark Twain in Protest (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. x.

⁴Kenneth R. Andrews, Nook Farm: Mark Twain's Hartford Circle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 67.

⁵Eugene Hudson Long, Mark Twain Handbook (New York: Hendricks House, 1957), p. 294.

theology with "long expositions of predestination and hell-fire, which began by scaring and ended by boring him."⁶

The dogmas and superstitions learned in his childhood which did not correspond "with his developing tolerance for humanity and [were] not necessary to observance of ethical standards and equable social justice"⁷ were later attacked although he revered and admired Christian ethics and those who lived by its high standards.

Much of Twain's rage at people who called themselves Christians resulted from their failure to reach their goals. He noted some instances of progress in social reform, but he was not satisfied with improvements such as the abolition of slavery because they had been slow in coming and more improvements were needed. He was incensed by the "military actions of the so-called Christian powers"⁸ and by the self-induced illusion held by many Christians that such atrocities are blessed by God. American believers should, according to Twain, correct the lynchings and other injustices then occurring in their own country before spreading religion to foreign countries. The establishment of moral progress in

⁶John DeLancey Ferguson, Mark Twain: Man and Legend (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1943), p. 25.

⁷Andrews, p. 67.

⁸John S. Tuckey, ed., Fables of Man by Mark Twain (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 7.

America would then enable missionaries to begin their true task of serving the spiritual needs of foreign countries and stop serving American financial and imperialistic interests.⁹ In Twain's opinion, men must effect change by refusing to accept and obey orders given by corrupted religious and governmental institutions which no longer conform to the ideals that he felt were still privately held by the majority of the people; "a universe is well-nigh futile in which man's intelligence is shackled by superstition and his humane impulses are trampled on in the mad pursuit of prosperity."¹⁰ When wrongdoing is sanctioned or ignored by religious institutions at the cost of the compassion and honesty of men, those institutions must be reexamined.

America was the personification of "the hope of the world" to Twain and what he saw happening in the nineteenth-century society of the United States in such realms as politics and religion caused him to be apprehensive about the future of the world.¹¹ He was aware that America was not the

⁹Robert Taylor, Jr., "Sounding the Trumpets of Defiance: Mark Twain and Norman Mailer," The Mark Twain Journal, 16, No. 3 (Winter 1972), 9.

¹⁰Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel (New York: American Book Company, 1951), p. 622.

¹¹Gladys C. Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), p. 25.

paradisiacal land of freedom and innocence it was once hoped to be, but he would not accept its failure as final. Perhaps his hopes were impossible to attain; he was an idealist and "great idealists ask too much of mankind, too much of themselves; their vision of what life might be is so high that the thought of what it is becomes unendurable."¹² Twain contemplated such wrongs suffered by mankind as depressed wages, unsafe and unreasonable working conditions, widespread unemployment, and fraudulent dealings by big businesses and politicians; he was a sensitive man in whom burned "hatred of cruelty and injustice, a deep sense of human evil, and a recurrent accusation of himself."¹³ Frequently in his writings, Twain portrays life as despicable and not worth living and man as contemptible and not worth caring about. This bitter view of life was not just a result of the extreme personal sorrows which Twain suffered in the latter part of his life; the difficulties of life troubled him from youth and the "idea of death as a welcome release from life" is found as early as 1873 in

¹²Edward Charles Wagenknecht, Mark Twain: The Man and His Work (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967). p. 212.

¹³Bernard DeVoto, ed., The Portable Mark Twain (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), p. 14.

The Gilded Age.¹⁴ Although his personal disasters could have deepened the pessimism in his later writings, passages of rebellious social satire are found throughout his canon. The intensity of cynicism in Twain's later writings can also be attributed to his disgust for the moral decadence of American society in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Twain's official biographer did not condemn Twain as a raging misanthrope on the basis of the bitter later writings because in his opinion it was Twain's "observation and his logic that led him to write those things that, even in their bitterness, somehow convey the spirit of human sympathy which is so closely linked to hope."¹⁵ His life-long tenderness, idealism, and sympathetic imagination caused him to feel deeply the sorrows and also the joys of mankind. Knowledge and experience, he believed, favor the growth of pessimism in everyone, but, as Twain himself stated, "Pessimists are born not made; optimists are born not made; but no man is born either pessimist wholly or optimist wholly, perhaps; he is pessimistic along certain lines and optimistic along certain others. That is my case."¹⁶ A humanitarian and reformer, Twain tried to help

¹⁴Bellamy, p. 301.

¹⁵Wagenknecht, p. 202.

¹⁶Wagenknecht, p. 206.

mankind by creating an awareness of superstition, sham, oppression, hypocrisy, and all manifestations of evil.

In order to expose many forms of evil without deadening the sensibilities of his audience by hammering constantly at one thing, Twain consciously flitted from one evil to another; he did not expend his energies exclusively on one reform movement because, as he once wrote, "I am not a bee, I am a lightning-bug."¹⁷ He sought to help mankind in the same way he had the Yankee help the people of King Arthur's kingdom: "to gnaw a little at this and that and the other superstition, and so prepare the way gradually for a better order of things."¹⁸ Many of the wrongs mankind suffers at the hands of evil institutions are kept alive by man himself, so Twain sought to bring about changes in social conditions by reforming man's tendency to accept beliefs secondhand and to follow leaders blindly. He hoped that by reforming those aspects of mankind, evil institutions could no longer exist or form. Twain also realized that humor could be an effective tool in his general condemnation of humanity's weaknesses and his attempt to correct them because he knew

¹⁷Wagenknecht, p. 244.

¹⁸Mark Twain, The Writings of Mark Twain, Stormfield edition (37 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929), XIV, 79. Subsequent references to this volume will be cited parenthetically in the text by the roman numeral XIV and the page number.

"that men will often accept in a jest what they will evade or ignore in a serious medium."¹⁹ By lecturing and preaching in the guise of humorous essays and tales such as "The Fable of the Yellow Terror" and Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven, his message would reach a larger number of people and obtain speedier results. Satire was used continuously by Twain throughout his career not only as a tool for awakening mankind to hypocrisy and oppression, but also as a weapon against abuse itself. Although supplication and argumentation may effect some change in abusive actions, ridicule and laughter are praised in The Mysterious Stranger as the only effective weapons our race has against abuse that "can blow it to rags and atoms at a blast."²⁰

An independent who did not cling to traditional religious dogmas but conceived for himself a realistic state of the world, Twain championed "freedom for everybody; freedom to say what a man had on his mind, or to print it;

¹⁹Bellamy, pp. 56-57.

²⁰Mark Twain, The Writings of Mark Twain, Stormfield edition (37 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929), XXVII, 132. Subsequent references to this volume will be cited parenthetically in the text by the roman numeral XXVII and the page number.

freedom to worship God in any way or not at all"²¹; freedom to think independently and act on those thoughts without fear of reproach from church or state. Practicing what he preached, Twain spoke out early in his career against such evils as police dishonesty and the indifference of the press to the abuses of racialism, and continued this habit of speaking out in later writings such as The Gilded Age, which contains an attack on governmental corruption, and in Huckleberry Finn, which censures the practices of separating the families of slaves and the continuance of feuds when no one can even remember the initial dispute. As his career continued, he became more and more outspoken, especially in writings which reveal what he considered inconsistencies between Christian beliefs and actions. Regarding moral laws and standards as relative and received from man, not God, Twain desired to change them as practical experience dictated in order to make man's life more tolerable.²² He conceded the moral weakness of men and their need of common goals and conventions by which to live; however, he could not accept the vast differences between the humane, just values and ideas he was certain men held privately, and the

²¹Jerry Allen, The Adventures of Mark Twain (Boston: Little, Brown, 1954), p. 245.

²²Robert A. Wiggins, Mark Twain: Jackleg Novelist (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), pp. 94-95.

inhumane, unjust values and ideas they docilely supported publicly in the name of loyalty to church and state. Twain was radical in his religious attitudes, but he was not a raging misanthrope nor an atheist; an examination of his writings reveals his lifelong effort to provoke all men to question and examine their own hearts and the laws, rules, and customs under which they live, and thereby cause them to assert their true manhood by casting aside false values to follow the true Christian ethic of love and the Golden Rule.

II. HATRED OF RELIGIOUS AND SOCIETAL HYPOCRISY

Twain hated hypocrisy in any form, but he especially detested the sham he found in self-righteous Christian society and in organized religion. Throughout his life he "found it impossible to reconcile the stated objectives of Christianity with the weakness of practicing Christians"¹ who frequently used religious piety as a mask to hide or excuse their ignorance, hypocrisy, prejudice, and greed.

A. Illusory Goodness

Both Twain and his contemporary W. D. Howells saw that many men no longer seemed to know any inner, personal meaning of religious experience but had only a faith in faith itself. Twain was concerned that men felt a need for creating for themselves an elaborate illusion of religious faith; he viewed that need as evidence of "man's pathetic inability to survive self-knowledge."² In "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," the honesty of the Richardses and the

¹Wendy A. Bie, "Mark Twain's Bitter Duality," The Mark Twain Journal, 16, No. 2 (Summer 1972), 15.

²Thomas Blues, Mark Twain and the Community (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1970), p. 77.

other townspeople is not the real focus of the story; the real issue "at stake in the pathetic story of the Richardses is the necessity of illusion to survival."³

As long as they retained a belief in their ability to be forever honest, the Richardses, though old and poor, remained contented. When temptation came and they fell, as did the other "incorruptible" townspeople, their illusion of goodness was destroyed and they were never again happy. Their belief in their illusory, untested incorruptibility was a vital necessity to their psyches; their self-confidence and desire to live crumbled when the illusion was shaken. The Richardses and the other villagers were really selfish, inhospitable, cowardly people, but they could overlook those factors and still view themselves as good Christian people because they had built for themselves the illusion that honesty was the only important virtue and they felt secure and comfortable with their affected uprightness. Twain feared that men leaned on religious doctrines in the same way. If they could find and join a religion which adhered to beliefs that suited their personalities and would give them the title "Christian," then, Twain felt, they would fail to consider the quality of their decisions, believing their new title would automatically impart goodness on their

³Blues, p. 75.

thoughts and actions. Twain wanted men to rely on themselves and scorned those who used their religion as an excuse to keep from examining or acting upon the feelings in their own hearts and minds in the decision-making process.

In The Mysterious Stranger, priests were blamed for the villagers' ignorance and dependence upon the Church. They trained everyone to revere the Virgin, the saints, and the Church, but did not train them in critical thinking because they believed that "knowledge was not good for the common people, and could make them discontented with the lot which God had appointed for them" (XXVII, 4). Twain ridiculed those who allowed themselves to be deluded into believing that all a good Christian must do is follow a few simple rules such as refraining from cussing, stealing, smoking, and lying, and taking care to always keep clean, wear shoes, and pray for spiritual gifts.⁴ Twain sought to expose the hypocrisy especially of those pillars of the business community who prided themselves on their adherence to the rules of Christian behavior while actually they advocated elsewhere the materialistic civilization which, as the Mad Philosopher told Eve, "dethroned God and set up a shekel in

⁴Leslie Fiedler, "As Free as Any Cretur," in Mark Twain: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Henry Nash Smith (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 135.

His place."⁵

In a notebook entry, Twain observed that both the love of money and the lack of it may foment evil:

Saturday, January 3, 1903: The offspring of riches: Pride, vanity, ostentation, arrogance, tyranny.

Sunday, January 4, 1903: The offspring of poverty: Greed, sordidness, envy, hate, malice, cruelty, meanness, lying, shirking, cheating, stealing, murder.⁶

Twain approved of the Puritan and Calvinistic teaching that "devotion to business, accumulation of estates, [and] acquisition of houses and lands . . . were the duties of Christians,"⁷ but he did not approve of those who used their false piety in order to make commercial gains. As a child, after praying for a classmate's gingerbread for several days, Twain confessed to his mother that "I had ceased to be a Christian . . . because I had found out that I was a Christian for revenue only."⁸ In her attempts to comfort him, she implied that he was not the only Christian of that

⁵Mark Twain, Letters from the Earth, ed. Bernard DeVoto (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 98. Subsequent references to this work will hereinafter be cited parenthetically in the text as LE followed by the page number.

⁶Wagenknecht, p. 135.

⁷Perry Miller, The New England Mind: From Colony to Province (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 52.

⁸Mark Twain, The Autobiography of Mark Twain, ed. Charles Neider (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), p. 33.

type.⁹ Later in life, Twain discovered a glaring example of the truth in his mother's words; he recognized that, while "our public motto is 'In God we trust' . . . our private one is, 'When the Anglo-Saxon wants a thing he just takes it.'"¹⁰ Twain conceded that not all Christians are hypocrites who keep one set of morals privately that are real and keep another set publicly that are pretense, but he pointed out that many members of the clergy, who should be outstanding Christians, were guilty of hypocrisy and a love of money when he suggested that they would not come "fill empty pulpits in the West because of large-scale speculations carried on in the East."¹¹ Deacon Billson, a respected leader of the church in "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," plotted and lied out of greed as shamelessly as those "incorruptibles" who were not in high positions in the church.

Notable in America was the sharp contrast between professed creeds and practiced ones. Americans tried to project the image of being deeply religious, but that image was false. In India, however, where social stratification, ugliness,

⁹Twain, Autobiography, ed. Neider, p. 33.

¹⁰Twain, Autobiography, ed. Neider, p. 347.

¹¹Bellamy, p. 105.

murder, suffering, and misery openly abound, Twain discovered an amazing religious faith which permeated the lives of all the people of India. Although he in no way endorsed the practices he saw in India, he marveled at the sort of faith that "impels the widow to consecrate her body on the burning pyre of the suttee, serene in the belief that by this act she unites her soul to her husband's" and the power of a faith that "brings pilgrims to bathe in the waters of the Ganges, sustained by the belief that they will be cleansed of sin by these holy waters."¹² They suffered misery and death for their religious beliefs and did not just mouth religion as did many Christians. Frequently Twain found that a Christian was like the patriot who "did not know just how or when or where he got his opinions, neither did he care, so long as he was with what seemed the majority-- which was the main thing, the safe thing, the comfortable thing."¹³ Many people were church members "not so much because of a theological or ideological commitment but more for very practical or mundane reasons"¹⁴; they joined

¹² Bellamy, p. 233.

¹³ Mark Twain, A Pen Warmed-Up in Hell: Mark Twain in Protest, ed. Frederick Anderson (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 29.

¹⁴ C. Dwight Dorrough, The Bible Belt Mystique (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 22.

a church in order to appear respectable in the eyes of the community, to restrict their social circle to those of like interests, and to enlarge their opportunities for attending social gatherings. Artificial Christians angered Twain; both "those who quoted the Bible in the hope of gaining something for themselves"¹⁵ enraged him and those who unhesitatingly accepted and followed whatever behavior their church prescribed also infuriated him. He spoke in a letter of the "self-abnegation," and "fidelity to a cause" of the early Jesuit missionaries to the savages in Canada, noting that "in endurance & performance they were gods; in credulity, & in obedience to their ecclesiastical chiefs, they were swine" (LL, 206). Religion is not the only motivation that can move men to endure such miseries as those that missionaries suffer; Twain contended that "the love of money, hatred of an enemy, affection for a child, a wife, a betrothed, can make men do & suffer--yes, infatuation for a filthy prostitute can make a man rival the Jesuit missionaries at their grandest & finest" (LL, 206). Even though at times he uttered such scathing words as those, Twain recognized man's need of faith and maintained that whatever religious beliefs a man might have should be respected if they were gained by sincere and heartfelt means and

¹⁵Allison Ensor, Mark Twain and the Bible (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1969), p. 78.

served to comfort the holder.¹⁶

B. Religious Tolerance

He was tolerant of many different religions because "upon a great religious or political question, the opinion of the dullest head in the world is worth the same as the opinion of the brightest head in the world--a brass farthing."¹⁷ The narrator in "Three Thousand Years among the Microbes" reaches a similar conclusion after a discussion about beliefs; he concludes that "each of us knows it all, and knows he knows it all--the rest, to a man, are fools and deluded."¹⁸ Twain attempted to avoid that aspect of human nature and tried to be open-minded and thoroughly examine questions before rendering verdicts. Although he disliked Catholicism, he recognized its good points as well as its bad ones. In A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, the Protestant Yankee admits that many of the parish priests were truly good men who toiled to improve

¹⁶Wagenknecht, p. 196.

¹⁷Mark Twain, The Writings of Mark Twain, Stormfield edition (37 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929), XXV, 33. Subsequent references to this volume will be cited parenthetically in the text by the roman numeral XXV and the page number.

¹⁸Mark Twain, Which Was the Dream? and other Symbolic Writings of the Later Years, ed. John S. Tuckey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 493.

the lives of the common people, and, in The Prince and the Pauper, the priest who teaches Tom Canty is a praiseworthy character.¹⁹ Twain even encouraged his daughter Jean in her interest in Catholicism, hoping that in that religion she could find peace and rest, although he could find none there himself. In his quest for belief, Twain became interested in faith healing and the idea that the mind had absolute power over the body. In an account to Livy of his visit to a "mind curist," Twain stated that he had had a cough following a recent cold and had been taking powders for it which had relieved but not removed the problem, before, he wrote, "I tried the mind-cure out of curiosity. That was yesterday. I have coughed only two or three times since. Maybe it was the mind-cure, maybe it was the powders" (LL, 285). He was also interested in Christian Science and, "although he opens Christian Science with violent humor about faith cures, he is not on the whole hostile to the idea of curing illness in this way, and distinctly praises the placidity and calmness of mind that seem to result from an acceptance of Christian Science tenents."²⁰ He wrote to his daughter Susy from Calcutta

¹⁹Wagenknecht, p. 197.

²⁰Frank Baldanza, Mark Twain: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961), p. 131.

in February of 1896 that he was certain if she were with him to apply it, her mental science could relieve him of the "exasperating colds and carbuncles" he had been suffering which he believed were the result of a diseased mind. He told her of his joy that she was a convert "to that rational and noble philosophy" and counseled her to "stick to it" because its healing principle of life and love could remove from her all cares and miseries of the mind and give her peace and contentment (LL, 316). He always held the theory that most of the problems of mankind result from psychosomatic troubles and ailments. Although Twain recognized the value of the healing principle of Christian Science, he could not join its church because he objected to the manner in which it was organized and controlled.

Twain favored a practical use of the ethical and humanitarian teachings of the Christian ethic. He believed that faith is not a matter of affirming particular theological doctrines and that religious organizations, which are likely to succumb to divisive superstitions and useless dogmas, are dangerous. Twain's goal was to live "to the best of his ability in accordance with enlightened man-made ethics."²¹ What Is Man?, Twain's "gospel," explains, as do all religions and gospels, how the human mechanism can be

²¹Cowie, p. 635.

trained to be virtuous. It contributes candidness by acknowledging that the primary reason we are virtuous is not caused by religious beliefs and training, but by our personal Interior Master who, at times, chooses to be virtuous.²²

"The \$30,000 Bequest" exemplifies Twain's belief that it is dangerous to build one's life around a hope or a dream; Aleck and Sally gradually lose all sense of reality as they continue to build castles of air until they are forced to recognize the erroneousness of their dreams and to reflect upon the liars, thieves, and Sabbath-breakers they have allowed themselves to become. Twain objected to the religious fancy that no one who drank, used profanity, or lied could be a good, right-hearted Christian. The doctor in "Was It Heaven? Or Hell?" is a drinking, lying, swearing Christian who follows the spirit of Christianity, even though he does not follow the letter of it, on those occasions in which he lies to a patient and forces others to lie also when telling the truth could cause serious harm.

C. Institutionalism

Opposed to religious institutionalism, Twain was also against it in general. In Huckleberry Finn "both Tom and

²²Alexander E. Jones, "Mark Twain and the Determinism of What Is Man?" American Literature, 29, No. 1 (March 1957), 16-17.

Jim are in bondage to institutionalism. Tom can't do anything against the rules of his books; Jim can't do anything against the rules of his taboos, his voodoo fears and charms and superstitions. Only Huck is free . . . to be guided by the voice within himself."²³ A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court displays Twain's indignation against the institutions of monarchy and aristocracy but focuses especially upon the evils of an established church. Yankee is "an attack on thirteen centuries of reputed Christian civilization that under pretense of serving God has enslaved and despoiled the children of God" which reveals "a meaningless succession of foolish and futile generations, wandering in fogs of their own brewing, hagridden by superstitions, deceived and exploited by priest and noble, with no will to be free."²⁴ The Yankee places the blame for the degradation of mankind squarely on the Roman Catholic Church, stating that prior to the time of

the Church's supremacy in the world, men were men, and held their heads up, and had a man's pride and spirit and independence; and what of greatness and position a person got, he got mainly by achievement, not by birth. But then the Church . . . invented "divine right of things," and propped it all around, brick

²³Bellamy, p. 340.

²⁴Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought: Volume Three: The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), p. 97.

by brick, with the Beatitudes . . . preached (to the commoner) humility, obedience to superiors, the beauty of self-sacrifice . . . preached (to the commoner) meekness under insult; preached (still to the commoner, always to the commoner) patience, meanness of spirit, nonresistance under oppression; and she introduced heritable ranks and aristocracies, and taught all the Christian populations of the earth to bow down to them and worship them.

(XIV, 65)

Twain was opposed to all organized, formal religions, both Protestant and Catholic. Twain's Yankee does not want everyone to belong to one church of any kind because he "was afraid of a united church; it makes a mighty power, the mightiest conceivable, and then when it by and by gets into selfish hands, as it is always bound to do, it means death to human liberty and paralysis to human thought" (XIV, 77). Like Voltaire, he believed it would be better if there were many free religious sects which could check and balance one another.

Established churches are criticized for perpetuating superstitions in The Innocents Abroad. In the chapters about Italy he conveys his impression that "the revoltingly low standard of living seemed to prove that the Roman Catholic Church also had a depressing, if not downright hostile, influence on social progress."²⁵ He visited several churches in various countries which were richly

²⁵ Louis J. Budd, Mark Twain: Social Philosopher (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), p. 27.

decorated with jewels and gold and silver, and were surrounded by throngs of starving people who could barely keep body and soul together. He was joined in his objection to this phenomenon by James Fenimore Cooper and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Twain notes that "all the churches in an ordinary American city put together could hardly buy the jeweled frippery in one of [Italy's] hundred cathedrals. And for every beggar in America, Italy can show a hundred--and rags and vermin to match."²⁶ While viewing the magnificent Duomo of Florence, which was still not completed, Twain reports being filled with awe, "but when the filthy beggars swarmed around me the contrast was too striking, too suggestive, and I said, 'Oh, sons of classic Italy . . . why don't you rob your church?'" (I, 266). Twain was also disgusted by the manner in which the churches so easily placated the disease-ridden poor by praising the Creator from their pulpits as "The Friend of the Poor," when actually "the vast bulk of the Creator's affliction-inventions are specially designed for the persecution of the poor," and by giving the Father in Heaven the credit whenever the poor's real friend, his fellow man, discovered a way to relieve some of their

²⁶Mark Twain, The Writings of Mark Twain, Stormfield edition (37 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929), I, 266. Subsequent references to this volume will be cited parenthetically in the text by the roman numeral I and the page number.

distresses (LE, 32).

Suspicious of religious tenets, Twain argued that the "truth" of any statement depends on time, place, and who is speaking. He once complained to his friend Howells "about people who pretend that they still hold at fifty the same beliefs about the Bible they had as younger people and even as children."²⁷ He also wrote an essay, "Consistency," that questions the practice of lifelong religious loyalty. In that essay, Twain declares that "no man remains the same sort of Presbyterian he was at first--the thing is impossible; time and various influences modify his Presbyterianism; it narrows or it broadens, grows deeper or shallower, but does not stand still . . . [sometimes] it grows so far beyond itself, upward or downward, that nothing is really left of it but the name, and perhaps an inconsequential rag of the original substance, the bulk being now Baptist or Buddhist or something."²⁸ Man must choose between being quietly loyal to an empty name or suffering the title "traitor" when he forsakes his former religion and follows new convictions. According to Twain, man should examine and

²⁷ Ensor, p. 75.

²⁸ Mark Twain, The Complete Essays of Mark Twain, ed. Charles Neider (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1963), p. 578. Subsequent references to this work will hereinafter be cited parenthetically in the text as CE followed by the page number.

be loyal to "his own conscience first and foremost, and let all other loyalties go" because the idea of "unchanging allegiance . . . has lowered the manhood of the whole nation . . . and dragged it in the mud" (CE, 578, 580).

To Twain, devotion to sham and hypocrisy resulted in debasement and direct action had to be taken to challenge "any agency that repressed or coerced the human spirit."²⁹ He wanted men to stand up proudly and assert their independence by not allowing any organization to dictate their thoughts and beliefs.

D. Fanaticism

Ridiculing people who have allowed themselves to become fanatic about religious loyalty, Twain characterized man as "the only animal that has the True Religion--several of them" and as "the only animal that loves his neighbor as himself, and cuts his throat if his theology isn't straight" (LE, 227). Neither the savage beasts nor such "savage" people as the Comanches have an organized religion, so they have no reason to reform their brothers by killing them as Twain notes the French did in the St. Bartholomew's massacre. In his mockery of the fanatically religious, Twain comments that "the Frenchman is nothing if not pious

²⁹Budd, p. 116.

. . . he requires his neighbor to be pious also--otherwise he will kill him and make him so . . . if that neighbor declines to lead a holy life, he will take an ax and convert him" (LE, 185). The religiosity of the French was not the only overzealousness to arouse his anger; he "undercut a genial talk about our Puritan fathers by recalling their harshness toward the Quakers and their passion for 'liberty to worship as they required us to worship.'" ³⁰ He observed several instances in which the church worked at cross-purposes to its professed ideals. He noted the effects of the New York excise law prohibiting liquor sales on Sunday on the morals of Hoboken. He discovered that "it is a great thing for the morals of New York, but it . . . inflicts twenty thousand beer-swillers upon Hoboken every Sabbath . . . [because the sanctimonious churchgoers of New York] found that beer drinkers were debauching . . . morals, and so . . . concluded to turn them over to [the] neighbors." ³¹ Twain also mocked the Christian charity exhibited by the Rev. Mr. Sabine who objected to solemnizing the funeral of George Holland, a famous theatrical performer, at his church because he did not approve of theatres. Twain reported the insult and admonished all

³⁰Budd, p. 78.

³¹Bellamy, p. 166.

readers of his February 1871 "Memoranda" in The Galaxy to note the following:

It is almost fair and just to aver (although it is profanity) that nine-tenths of all the kindness and forbearance and Christian charity and generosity in the hearts of the American people to-day, got there by being filtered down from their fountain-head, the gospel of Christ, through dramas and tragedies and comedies on the stage, and through the despised novel and the Christmas story, and through the thousand and one lessons, suggestions, and narratives of generous deeds that stir the pulses, and exalt and augment the nobility of the nation day by day from the teeming columns of ten thousand newspapers, and NOT from the drowsy pulpit!³²

In addition to exposing their failure to work toward their professed Christian goal of making each and every man a better person, Twain also exposed the attempts made by many church leaders to "cut down denominations with rival beliefs in order to win control and power in the community."³³ When the wave of spiritualism and wildcat religions and the resulting fanatic insanity swept San Francisco in the mid-1860s, Twain felt that the prejudice against them held by established religions was unfair even though he too disliked the wildcats. He pointedly ridiculed one established religion which he considered bigoted. Satirizing the complacent indifference of the "slow" Presbyterian service

³²Mark Twain, Contributions to The Galaxy 1868-1871, ed. Bruce R. McElderry, Jr. (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1961), p. 128.

³³Dorough, pp. 186-187.

he knew as a boy and claiming that it was so sterile that no insanity could ever come of it, he held it up as a "model" for the wildcat religions:

Notice us, and you will see how we do. We get up of a Sunday morning, and put on the best harness we have got and trip cheerfully down town; we subside into solemnity and enter the church . . . [where] we sit silent and grave while the minister is preaching, and count the . . . bonnets furtively, and catch flies; we grab our hats and bonnets when the benediction is begun; when it is finished, we shove. . . . No frenzy--no fanaticism . . . everything perfectly serene. You never see any of us Presbyterians getting in a sweat about religion. . . . Let us all be content with the . . . safe old regular religions, and take no chances on the wildcat.³⁴

Although he acknowledged that any good business, secular or religious, will claim its product or its rules for a godly life to be superior to that of its competitor and will enter into disagreements with the competitor, Twain found it curious that disagreements occurred on such questions as the amount of training a preacher needs, the proper mode of baptism, and the status of those entitled to receive Communion, within single religious faiths. The interpretation of a religion's rules seemed to depend more upon the wishes of the various individual denominations within that religion than upon the original scriptural authority on which the rules were based. He also found that agreement could not be reached on a moral issue within one sect;

³⁴Bellamy, p. 106,

"the Cardinal Archbishop cast-ironly forbids priests to go to theatres, whereas in Spanish countries priests are the main support of the hellish bullring" (N, 324).

Agreements could not be reached on the theological and moral questions in which religious groups are normally interested, nor could agreements be reached on legislative and financial questions in which Twain felt churches should not be involved. Twain thought churches had become bureaucratic and were using their members as pawns in efforts to organize and systematize for the purpose of wielding influence in society. Fanatics were not content to be left alone to believe as they pleased and to have the freedom to encourage others to become Christians; they were insistent that the church must influence all society. Twain opposed the attempts made by religious citizens to legislate morality because there were basic differences between important bodies of citizens living in the same society on what constitutes a "sin" or a crime. He was concerned with the source of laws and felt that general customs of the majority, which change when people change their minds, and not the Bible or religious leaders should decide what is right and what is best for the common good. Twain deemed it grossly unfair that churches alone rather than all members of society benefit from the practice in which "no church property is taxed and so the infidel and the atheist and the man

without religion are taxed to make up the deficit in the public income thus caused" (N, 223). He also disliked the practice whereby religion obstructed and fought progress until it arrived, and then took credit for it (N, 313). Concerning slavery, Twain notes that his mother "had never heard it assailed in any pulpit, but had heard it defended and sanctified in a thousand; her ears were familiar with Bible texts that approved it, but if there were any that disapproved it they had not been quoted by her pastors; as far as her experience went, the wise and the good and the holy were unanimous in the conviction that slavery was right, righteous, sacred, the peculiar pet of the Deity, and a condition which the slave himself ought to be daily and nightly thankful for."³⁵ The church held on as long as possible to that position before custom changed and slavery was abolished. In "Bible Teaching and Religious Practice" Twain traces the way the world, not the church, which joins only at the end and claims credit for the correction, corrects the Bible and rises against firmly held wrongs such as the practice of slavery. He illustrates his theory in that essay by noting: "the slave trade had to go--and went.

³⁵Mark Twain, The Writings of Mark Twain, Stormfield edition (37 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929), XXXVI, 123. Subsequent references to this volume will be cited parenthetically in the text by the roman numeral XXXVI and the page number.

The Biblical authorization remained, but the practice changed. . . . Then it was discovered that there was no such thing as witches, and never had been. One does not know whether to laugh or to cry. . . . The witch text remains; only the practice has changed. . . . More than two hundred death penalties are gone from the law books, but the texts that authorized them remain" (CE, 570, 571, 572).

E. Commercialism

Churches have also interpreted or reinterpreted Biblical authorization in whatever way would bring about the greatest commercial satisfaction. The tax of tithes was not levied "upon the rich alone . . . [because] the rich couldn't be forced to pay it and the poor could" (N, 191). Another illustration of the self-serving business mind of some religious organizations is revealed in Twain's comment that "instead of giving the people decent wages, Church and gentry and nobility made them work for them for nothing, pauperized them, then fed them with alms and persuaded themselves that alms-giving was the holiest work of God, and the giver sure to go to heaven" (N, 200). Twain also criticizes the shrewd business acumen and the rationalization skills possessed by many religious organizers. Repelled by the exploitation, Twain, like Melville in Clarel, remarks in The Innocents Abroad that

we owe a great debt to the Catholics for their work of locating and preserving many localities which were "made holy" by various Scriptural events and "even for the happy rascality of hewing out these bogus grottoes in the rock; for it is infinitely more satisfactory to look at a grotto, where people have faithfully believed for centuries that the Virgin once lived, than to have to imagine a dwelling-place for her somewhere, anywhere, nowhere, loose and at large all over this town of Nazareth."³⁶ He mockingly praises the preservation of religious relics, too, commenting in particular on the story that made kind St. Veronica famous. In The Innocents Abroad he explains that "when she wiped [His] perspiration away, the print of the Saviour's face remained upon the handkerchief, a perfect portrait, and so remains unto this day. We know this, because we saw this handkerchief in a cathedral in Paris, in another in Spain, and in two others in Italy. In the Milan cathedral it costs five francs to see it, and at St. Peter's, at Rome, it is almost impossible to see it at any price. No tradition is so amply verified as this of St. Veronica and her handkerchief" (II, 318).

³⁶Mark Twain, The Writings of Mark Twain, Stormfield edition (37 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929), II, 264. Subsequent references to this volume will be cited parenthetically in the text by the roman numeral II and the page number.

Throughout his lifetime Twain observed numerous examples of quick-witted executive ability in members of religious groups, but the abilities of Mrs. Eddy, the founder of the Christian Science Church, caught and held his interest, which developed into antagonism as he learned more about her. He thought she was a "self-seeking" person whose "chief purpose was self-aggrandizement, power, and financial increase" and his indignation was stirred by "the apparent tyranny of Mrs. Eddy and the hierarchy of which she was the head."³⁷ He maintained that Mrs. Eddy did not invent or discover spiritual healing; she only organized the force "which has been lying idle in every member of the human race since time began . . . and backed the business with capital, and concentrated it at Boston headquarters in the hands of a small and very competent Trust" (XXV, 63). Twain felt Mrs. Eddy deserved credit for organizing the force and also for the "splendid sagacity [with which] she hitched it to the shirt-tail of a religion--the surest of all ways to secure friends for it, and support."³⁸ However, he could not credit her with the authorship of Science and

³⁷ Albert B. Paine, "Introduction," The Writings of Mark Twain, Stormfield edition (37 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929), XXV, viii-ix.

³⁸ Mark Twain, The Portable Mark Twain, ed. Bernard DeVoto (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), p. 786.

Health because the "immense contrast between the legitimate English of Science and Health and the bastard English of Mrs. Eddy's miscellaneous work, and between the maturity of the one diction and the juvenility of the other" led him to believe that "she has from the very beginning been claiming as her own another person's book, and . . . that he has not protested . . . because his work was not exposed to print until after he was safely dead" (XXV, 88, 213).

Twain discovered other discrepancies in Mrs. Eddy's business practices such as his observance that "from end to end of the Christian-Science literature not a single (material) thing in the world is conceded to be real, except the Dollar . . . [which] is hunted down in all sorts of ways; the Christian-Science Mother Church and Bargain-Center in Boston peddles all kinds of spiritual wares to the faithful, and always on the one condition--cash, cash in advance"(XXV, 51). Mrs. Eddy carefully arranged for the income of the Trust; everything is for sale and nothing is given away, with "no expenses to be taken out of it; no taxes to pay, and no charities to support . . . nor even to contribute to. One searches in vain the Trust's advertisements and the utterances of its organs for any suggestion that it spends a penny on orphans, widows, discharged prisoners, hospitals . . . old people's homes, or any other object that appeals to a human being's purse

through his heart" (XXV, 55).

In addition to her business talent, Twain learned that she had a keen knowledge of human nature. She did not invite and welcome a person into her faith with open arms; she first snubbed him and then went "through the motions of reluctantly granting admission to the applicant as a favor to him" (XXV, 129). As her organization developed successfully under her guidance, Mrs. Eddy sought and obtained power and glory in addition to wealth. Powers are distributed in such a way that her control over the Supreme Church and all Branch Churches is absolute; "in her Manual, she has provided a prodigality of ways and forms whereby she can rid herself of any functionary in the government whenever she wants to. The officials are all shadows, save herself; she is the only reality. She allows no one to hold office more than a year--no one gets a chance to become over-popular or over-useful, and dangerous" (XXV, 253).

Drawing from her history and By-laws, Twain described Mrs. Eddy as "grasping, sordid, penurious, famishing for everything she sees--money, power, glory--vain, untruthful, jealous, despotic, arrogant, insolent, pitiless where thinkers and hypnotists are concerned, illiterate, shallow, incapable of reasoning outside of commercial lines, immeasurably selfish" (XXV, 208), but her followers hold an opposite view of her. They do not see what she has

taken from them; they only see that Mrs. Eddy has

delivered to them a religion which has revolutionized their lives, banished the glooms that shadowed them, and filled them and flooded them with sunshine and gladness and peace . . . [and turned] the night of life into day, its terrors into myths, its lamentations into songs of emancipation and rejoicing.

(XXV, 209)

While he remained hostile toward Mrs. Eddy and her methods until his death, his letter to J. Wylie Smith in 1909 states that his "view of the matter has not changed . . . that Christian Science is valuable; that it has just the same value now that it had when Mrs. Eddy stole it from Quimby; that its healing principle (its most valuable asset) possesses the same force now that it possessed a million years before Quimby was born."³⁹ Therefore, although he condemned Mrs. Eddy, he acknowledged that her work, organizing and making valuable "a healing principle that for two thousand years has never been employed except as the merest kind of guesswork,"⁴⁰ was a boon to humanity.

F. Maintenance of Status Quo

The methods used by Mrs. Eddy in spreading the benefits of her faith were often less than admirable, but Twain

³⁹Twain, The Portable Mark Twain, p. 786.

⁴⁰Paine, "Introduction," The Writings of Mark Twain, XXV, x.

could find even less to admire in the methods of more orthodox Christian leaders who were also dictators who wanted to maintain the status quo and repress any changes in beliefs. Issued from numerous pulpits were warnings that the ways of God must never be doubted and that hardships and problems must be endured and not cursed because they are God's way of strengthening man. Churches resisted the acceptance of new scientific knowledge which had been gained in astronomy in the 1800s. In Twain's Letters from the Earth, Satan writes that "for three hundred years, now, the Christian astronomer has known that his Deity didn't make the stars in those tremendous six days; but the Christian astronomer does not enlarge upon that detail. . . . [Also] Sunday school still teaches the child that Arcturus [a giant fixed star that is fifty thousand times as large as the earth's sun] was created to help light this earth, and the child grows up and continues to believe it long after he has found out that the probabilities are against its being so" (LE, 16). Twain thought the Bible, which people claimed to revere, was a "major object of pretense."⁴¹ He was dismayed that people pretended to believe that God would take care of them, and gave God the title of Father despite his feeling that "we know quite well that we should

⁴¹ Ensor, p. 10.

hang His style of father . . . [because] He proves every day that He takes no interest in man, nor in the other animals, further than to torture them, slay them."⁴²

The deliverance from the pulpit of secondhand ideas of God's love and mercy to congregations which accepted them without examination aroused Twain. He demonstrated the critical process he desired men to use in an examination of the idea of God's moral law. In his analysis of that law he noted the following: "The pulpit assures us that wherever we see suffering and sorrow which we can relieve and do not do it, we sin, heavily. There was never yet a case of suffering or sorrow which God could not relieve. Does He sin, then? If He is the Source of Morals He does."⁴³ Twain declares man is guilty of duplicity in his praise of God and His works, and bluntly states: "we approve all His works, we praise all His works, with a fervant enthusiasm--of words; and in the same moment we kill a fly, which is as much one of His works as is any other, and has been included and

⁴²Mark Twain, "Reflections on Religion," ed. Charles Neider, Hudson Review, 16 (Autumn 1963), 348-349. Subsequent references to this work will hereinafter be cited parenthetically in the text as "R" followed by the page number.

⁴³Mark Twain, Fables of Man by Mark Twain, ed. John S. Tuckey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 114. Subsequent references to this work will hereinafter be cited parenthetically in the text as F followed by the page number.

complimented in our sweeping eulogy" (LE, 221).

Man is also mocked for believing that God will answer prayers. Twain based his conclusion that that belief must be pretense on his discovery that many prayers asked for rain, renewed health to dying people, or other such phenomena which, if answered, would disrupt the established order of nature and would, therefore, "bring not blessings but disaster to the community" (F, 69). Twain heard ministers contend that prayers for things such as rain are not proper prayers. When faced by innocents quoting Bible passages which indicate that whatever a true Christian prays for will be given, they answered that "God reserves the privilege of exercising His own judgment as to which things prayed for He will grant" (N, 262). Therefore, Twain maintained, prayers really change nothing and are unnecessary. Twain demonstrated in Tom Sawyer and "The Story of the Bad Little Boy" the dispensibility of being genuinely good in order to prosper, thereby refuting traditional Sunday school teachings of the naughty boy whose actions are always found out and punished in some way. In "Letter from the Recording Angel," Twain satirizes the great joy that Sunday schools proclaim abounds in heaven whenever a wandering soul comes or returns to the Christian fold. The letter tells the story of a wealthy miser who always left a nickle in the contribution plate on Sundays and who had given \$2 to a widowed relative

at a time when he was worth only \$100,000, sent the same woman \$6 in answer to her appeal when her youngest child died several years later, and, still later, when he was making a clear profit of \$70,000 a month, sent her \$15 when she asked for \$50 which would enable her to travel with her two children to a distant town in which she could teach. The miser is praised by all the heavenly host because "the strain of [doing such deeds] . . . had been heavier and bitterer than the strain it costs ten thousand martyrs to yield up their lives at the fiery stake; and all said, 'What is the giving up of life, to a noble soul, or to ten thousand noble souls, compared with the giving up of fifteen dollars out of the greedy grip of the meanest white man that ever lived on the face of the earth?'" (LE, 121-122). Referring to those organizations and teachings he had examined, Twain deemed the Christian religion to be not only hypocritical, empty, and hollow, but also "bad, bloody, merciless, money-grabbing and predatory" ("R," 338).

G. Foreign Involvement

Detesting "the forcible Christianizing of the heathen,"⁴⁴ Twain joined Melville in holding strong opinions about

⁴⁴Coleman O. Parsons, "The Devil and Samuel Clemens," in Mark Twain's The Mysterious Stranger and the Critics, ed. John S. Tuckey (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1968), p. 165.

missionaries and their work. Lamenting the successful civilizing of the Polynesians by missionaries, he remembered the contented state of the natives before the missionaries came and told them about hell and about "how beautiful and blissful a place heaven is, and how nearly impossible it is to get there."⁴⁵ He observed that the natives were innocent and clean-minded until made to wear clothes and thus learn about indecency, noted that their "instincts have been perverted by artificial social codes," and said, "Behold what religion and civilization have wrought."⁴⁶ He also remarked: "in all history . . . no nation has ever changed its religion by persuasion, but only by compulsion" (N, 277). He therefore doubted the usefulness of missionaries and questioned their practice of using as a "license: 'Go ye into all the world,' and [of ignoring] the Golden Rule which would restrain [them] from entering China and one or two other countries where [they are] not wanted and [are] not welcome" (N, 394). Twain reasoned that missionaries were not welcome in part because there were then "210 varieties of Christians in the world, each with a name of its own . . . and each believing itself to be the nearest

⁴⁵William C. Spengemann, Mark Twain and the Backwoods Angel: The Matter of Innocence in the Works of Samuel L. Clemens (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1966, p. 24.

⁴⁶Spengemann, p. 25.

right of all of them . . . [so the savage, having] no doubts concerning his own religion . . . naturally hesitates to go groping among 210 kinds of doubt" (N, 290-291).

Although in the early days Twain acknowledged that missionaries had accomplished some improvements in Hawaii such as instituting marriage and educating the natives, he later denounced missionaries for allowing themselves to be used "as tools of imperialist aggression."⁴⁷ He issued warnings about the danger of forcing civilization and Christianity on other nations in "The Fable of the Yellow Terror" and in his late dictations of his thoughts on religion. "The Fable of the Yellow Terror" is the story of the wondrous Butterflies whose civilization they pridefully imposed upon other nations whenever possible or profitable. Butterflies knew the art of making honey then and also had a sting which they used scientifically to kill and conquer more markets for honey. Finally, their conquest was complete with the exception of the empire of the simple, hard-working, honest Bees who warned the Butterflies that they were happy as they were and desired no help. The Butterflies would not accept that and said that "a nation that had a chance to get civilization and buy honey and didn't take it was a block in the way of progress and enlightenment and the

⁴⁷Wagenknecht, p. 176.

yearning desires of God, and must be made to accept the boon and bless the booner; so they set about working up a moral-plated pretext, and soon they found a good one. . . . They said that those fat and diligent and contented Bees . . . ignorant of . . . rapacity and treachery and robbery and murder and prayer and one thing and another . . . were a Yellow Peril" (F, 427). The phrase incited fear and the Yellow Peril had to be conquered "so each of the different tribes of Butterflies sent in a two-hundred-dollar missionary with the private purpose of getting him massacred and collecting a million dollars cash damages on him, along with a couple of provinces and such other things as might be lying around; and when the Bees resisted, civilization had its chance!" (F, 428). The Bees began to enjoy honey and one tribe learned how to make it and then learned the other great art of killing scientifically with the sting. The advanced tribe of Bees and the Butterflies clashed one day while both were land-grabbing and a wise Grasshopper observed that the one tribe of Bees would teach the other tribes what it had learned and said they would soon get the vast market of their side of the world and "starve [you Butterflies] out, and make you stay at home, where they used to beg you to stay. . . . It may be that you will lose your stings and your honey-art by and by, from lack of practice, and be and remain merely elegant and ornamental.

Maybe you ought to have let the Yellow Peril alone, as long as there wasn't any. Yet you ought to be proud, for in creating a something out of a nothing, you have done what was never done before, save by the Creator of all things" (F, 429). Twain further denounced the expansion of Christendom in his dictations of June 1906 in which he made the following comment:

There are no peaceful nations now except those unhappy ones whose borders havenot been invaded by the Gospel of Peace. All Christendom is a soldier-camp. During all the past generation the Christian poor have been taxed almost to starvation-point to support the giant armaments which the Christian Governments have built up, each to protect itself from the rest of the brotherhood and, incidentally, to snatch any patch of real estate left exposed by its savage owner.
("R," 340)

Earlier, in 1901, Twain published "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," a bitter piece in which he "denounces various iniquitous things: Germany's barbarous conduct in China at the time of the Boxer Rebellion, England's brutality and cupidity in the Boer War, Russia's unwarranted seizure of Port Arthur, America's bloody hand in the affairs of the Philippines and Cuba, and other activities carried on under the 'Blessings-of-Civilization' banner."⁴⁸ In that essay, he reveals that the Reverend Ament, an American missionary, collected exorbitant reparations from the poor peasants

⁴⁸Cowie, p. 634.

after the Boxer Rebellion, "thus condemning them and their women and innocent little children to inevitable starvation and lingering death, in order that the blood money so acquired might be 'used for the propagation of the Gospel'" (CE, 285). Twain continued his essay, asking, "Would Germany charge America two hundred thousand dollars for two missionaries . . . and send soldiers, and say: 'Seize twelve miles of territory, and make those peasants build a monument to the missionaries, and a costly Christian church to remember them by?' And later would Germany say to her soldiers: 'March through America . . . and slay, slay, slay, carving a road for our offended religion through its heart and bowels?' Would Germany do like this to America, to England, to France, to Russia? Or only to China, the helpless" (CE, 289). Although Twain's comment on the greed of the supposedly Christian Reverend Ament was a small issue in his larger goal of indicting imperialism, he was attacked for mistakenly maintaining, due to a cable error, that Ament collected reparations thirteen times larger than the original value, when actually Ament collected only one-third more. Twain answered the journalists and churchmen who attacked him with the essay "To My Missionary Critics" in which, after pointing out that they had missed the major point of his earlier essay, he asserted that there is "no moral difference between a big filch and a

little filch, but only a legal one. . . . The Commandment merely says, 'Thou shalt not steal,' and stops there. It doesn't recognize any difference between stealing a third and stealing thirteenfold" (CE, 307).

The same spirit of bitterness led Twain to pen the following New Year's greeting from the Nineteenth Century to the Twentieth Century in December of 1900:

I bring you the stately nation named Christendom, returning bedraggled, besmirched, and dishonored from pirate raids in Kiao-Chou, Manchuria, South Africa, and the Philippines, with her soul full of meanness, her pocket full of boodle, and her mouth full of pious hypocrisies. Give her soap and a towel, but hide the looking-glass.⁴⁹

In 1901 Twain prepared "The Stupendous Procession" which outlines a parade that moves "across the world" beginning with The Twentieth Century, "a fair young creature, drunk and disorderly, borne in the arms of Satan," on whose banner is the motto: "Get what you can, keep what you get." Monarchs, Presidents, Burglars, Land-Thieves, and Convicts are members of her Honor Guard. Next comes Christendom, "a majestic matron" wearing "flowing robes drenched with blood" and "a golden crown of thorns" which has "impaled on its spines, the bleeding heads of patriots who died for their countries--Boers, Boxers, Filipinos." In one hand is "a slung-shot, in the other a Bible, open at the text,

⁴⁹Bellamy, p. 179.

'Do unto others.'" A bottle protruding from her pocket is labeled "We bring you the Blessings of Civilization." Her two supporters are Slaughter and Hypocrisy. Her banner bears the motto: "Love your Neighbor's Goods as Yourself" and her ensign is the Black Flag. Her Guard of Honor is composed of "Missionaries, and German, French, Russian and British soldiers laden with loot" (F, 405-406).

H. Societal Wickedness

Horried at the realism of his "Procession," Twain nevertheless knew that, as he once pointed out, "usage . . . can accustom the human race to anything . . . [for] a crime persevered in a thousand centuries ceases to be a crime, and becomes a virtue. This is the law of custom, and custom supersedes all other forms of law."⁵⁰ He also pointed out, in "The Secret History of Eddypus," that "it was the intention of the Americans to erect a stately Democracy in their land, upon a basis of freedom and equality before the law for all; this Democracy was to be the friend of all oppressed weak peoples, never their oppressor; it was never to steal a weak land nor its liberties; it was never to crush or betray struggling republics, but aid and encourage them with its sympathy. . . . [The Democracy grew strong

⁵⁰Bellamy, p. 178.

and in time human nature overcame the Declaration's attempt at goodness and] the government thenceforth made the sly and treacherous betrayal of weak republics its amusement, and the stealing of their lands and the assassination of their liberties its trade" (F, 329). Twain hoped to teach each individual that speaking by and for himself is a necessity and deciding for himself alone what is right and wrong "is a solemn and weighty responsibility . . . not lightly to be flung aside at the bullying of pulpit . . . government, or the empty catch-phrases of politicians" (LE, 109). He could find little patriotism other than that of the pocket, and had decided that even at its very best, patriotism erects barriers against the brotherhood of man.⁵¹ Twain explains the impossibility of being both "a Christian and a patriot . . . [because a] Christian must forgive his brother man all crimes he can imagine and commit, and all insults he can conceive and utter . . . [while patriotism] commands that the brother over the border shall be sharply watched and brought to book every time he does us a hurt or offends us with an insult. . . . The spirit of patriotism being in its nature jealous and selfish . . . comes naturally to him . . . but the spirit of Christianity is not in its entirety possible to him" (N, 332-333).

⁵¹Budd, p. 189.

Missionaries and politicians who used their apparent Christianity to overcome unsuspecting people were but a few of the Christians Twain found who pretended to be good, honest, God-fearing Christians but were not in numerous ways. In his early works, he noted such instances of unchristian behavior as the habit of the American "pilgrims," described in The Innocents Abroad, who felt they must get all possible souvenir specimens from the Holy Land even if it meant they must profane or damage sacred rugs, altars, and other religious articles. Several pilgrims exhibited a distorted idea of the Savior's religion in an incident concerning keeping the Sabbath day. Twain reports that during the blistering summer "a three days' journey to Damascus . . . [had to be made] in less than two . . . because our three pilgrims would not travel on the Sabbath day. . . . Men might die; horses might die, but they must enter upon holy soil . . . with no Sabbath-breaking stain upon them. Thus they were willing to commit a sin against the spirit of religious law, in order that they might preserve the letter of it" (II, 171-172).

In 1870 Twain told a thought-provoking anecdote in the Buffalo Express about the confused child of a clergyman. In preparing his sermon, a clergyman paused at times to review his work and to erase portions of it. He "was accosted by his little son [who asked,] 'Father, does God

tell you what to preach?' 'Certainly, my child.' 'Then what makes you scratch it out?'"⁵² An element of derisive laughter is also present in his mock lament for the great changes that took place between the time the barbarians pitted Christians against wild animals in the arena of the Coliseum "to teach people to abhor and fear the new doctrine the followers of Christ were teaching," and the time of the Inquisition in which the Church did everything possible to persuade the barbarians to love and honor the Redeemer by "twisting their thumbs out of joint with a screw . . . nipping their flesh with pincers--red-hot ones . . . the most comfortable in cold weather; then by skinning them alive a little, and finally by roasting them in public" (I, 285-286).

Unchristian behavior was also reported by Twain through fictional characters such as the Yankee, who sees the results of brutal laws "on every hand: the wretches tortured, dying, going mad in Morgan le Fay's dungeon for trivial offenses; the woman dying alone in the smallpox hut for blaspheming the Church; and the young mother hanged for stealing in order to feed her child."⁵³ Twain felt that

⁵²Mark Twain, The Forgotten Writings of Mark Twain, ed. Henry Duski (New York: Philosophical Library, 1963), p. 299.

⁵³Roger B. Salomon, Twain and the Image of History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 110.

injustices occur, not because men are hard-hearted, but because they suppress their goodness and follow various leaders in order to be part of the crowd and to avoid the risk of rejection. Huckleberry Finn witnesses and divulges several contemptible acts of the "damned human race" including that of denying the basic humanity of Jim and making Huck's humane act of friendship toward Jim seem sinful.⁵⁴ Huck also witnesses the cold-blooded shooting of drunken Boggs by the aristocratic Colonel Sherburn, both of whom are surrounded by onlookers. The lynch mob formed to deal with Sherburn is easily dispersed when he ridicules the leader of the herd-like villagers and causes him to change his mind. Another example of man's cruelty to man is the story found in The Mysterious Stranger of an old woman who, though innocent, confesses to being a witch. She explains to Theodor Fischer that she is old and poor and must work for her living, so "there was no way but to confess . . . [or] they might have set me free . . . [which] would ruin me, for no one would forget that I had been suspected of being a witch, and so I would get no more work, and wherever I went they would set the dogs on me. In a little while I would starve. The fire is best; it is soon over" (XXVII, 61).

⁵⁴Spengemann, p. 80.

Nineteenth-century progress was Twain's topic in a letter written to Twichell in 1905. He noted that progress has been made in materialities and that "money is the supreme ideal. . . . Money-lust . . . has rotted [all Europe and all America]; it has made them hard, sordid, ungentle, dishonest, oppressive."⁵⁵ A symbolic story written in Twain's later years about the senseless madness aroused by money, "An Adventure in Remote Seas," tells of a lost ship arriving at a strange island on which is found a huge hoard of gold. The captain and his men weigh, count, and argue about the money, forgetting about their ship, until "the one chance of salvation, the ship, is finally lost, leaving the men abandoned in a nameless ocean with only a meaningless wealth for consolation."⁵⁶ The pious, honest couple in "The \$30,000 Bequest" have not even wealth for consolation at the end of their story. They eagerly awaited, mentally invested, and became very wealthy on a \$30,000 legacy promised them by a seventy-year-old bachelor uncle, Tilbury Foster, who, unbeknownst to them, was really penniless. In addition to such offenses as breaking the

⁵⁵Wagenknecht, p. 108.

⁵⁶Tony Tanner, "The Lost America--The Despair of Henry Adams and Mark Twain," in Mark Twain: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Henry Nash Smith (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 169.

Sabbath and stealing, they prayed fervently for years for Tilbury's death. Out of Christian habit, they tried to lie to themselves and conceal their sincere disappointment when they repeatedly found no report of his demise, by going through the motions and saying, "Let us be humbly thankful that he has been spared."⁵⁷ Another indictment of such unchristian behavior appears in "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" in which "every leading citizen of the town follows his own self-interest, knowing all along what would be the right thing to do, but doing the wrong"⁵⁸ by claiming to deserve the money that in fact belongs to none of them. "Was It Heaven? Or Hell?" also deals with lying. Hannah and Hester Gray, very righteous maiden aunts caring for their niece Margaret Lester, who is fatally ill, and for her daughter, Helen Lester, who also becomes fatally ill, endanger both of their charges when they insist that Helen go to her sick mother and admit telling a lie. The doctor in charge rebukes them severely, declaring,

You are like all the rest of the moral moles; you lie from morning till night, but because you don't do it with your mouths, but only with your

⁵⁷Mark Twain, The Writings of Mark Twain, Stormfield edition (37 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929), XXIV, 12. Subsequent references to this volume will be cited parenthetically in the text by the roman numeral XXIV and the page number.

⁵⁸Baldanza, p. 137.

lying eyes, your lying inflections, your deceptively misplaced emphasis, and your misleading gestures, you turn up your complacent noses and parade before God and the world as saintly and unsmirched Truth-Speakers . . . [and] humbug yourselves with that foolish notion that no lie is a lie except a spoken one.

(XXIV, 79)

Ursula, Marget's servant in The Mysterious Stranger, also finds "she could tell every-day lies fast enough and without taking any precautions against fire and brimstone on their account," but she must watch a coin being dropped and then walk along and pretend to "find" it in order to keep her story to Marget of discovering it in the road "from being a lie and damning her soul" (XXVII, 40).

Many of Twain's works are studies of the "flimsy pretensions," corrupt inner recesses, and "pitiful frailties" of the human soul, but "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" is "one of the most scathing sermons on self-righteousness ever preached."⁵⁹ As both the citizens of Hadleyburg and the biblical Adam yielded to temptation, "the conversion of Adamic Hadleyburg from a state of innocence to a community relentlessly made conscious of its depravity parallels and symbolizes the fall of Adam and the fall of man."⁶⁰ The story of Hadleyburg, the town with a "motto

⁵⁹Albert B. Paine, "Introduction," The Writings of Mark Twain, Stormfield edition (37 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929), XXIII, x.

⁶⁰Thomas Werge, "Mark Twain and the Fall of Adam," The Mark Twain Journal, 15, No. 2 (Summer 1970), 11.

that is the prayer of every Christian, suggests that the Christian creation itself is a gigantic hoax . . . [and] that innocence is merely a worthless pose."⁶¹ Mrs. Richards' statement, "honesty shielded, from the very cradle, against every possible temptation . . . is an artificial honesty, and weak as water when temptation comes,"⁶² exhibits her early awareness of the truth of the stranger's declaration that "the weakest of all weak things is a virtue which has not been tested in the fire" (XXIII, 52-53). It is evident then, that Twain agrees with Milton that a "fugitive and cloistered virtue" is not praiseworthy.⁶³ Although he did not belittle all Christians and their apparent virtues, Twain severely mocked and criticized those Christians who were truly hypocrites hiding behind the title "Christian," or the group labeling itself "Christian," in order to provoke them to examine their personal Christianity, learn from their own insights, and follow the Golden Rule.

⁶¹Pascal Covici, Mark Twain's Humor: The Image of a World (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1962), pp. 197, 199.

⁶²Mark Twain, The Writings of Mark Twain, Stormfield edition (37 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929), XXIII, 15. Subsequent references to this volume will be cited parenthetically in the text by the roman numeral XXIII and the page number.

⁶³Clinton S. Burhans, Jr., "The Sober Affirmation of Mark Twain's Hadleyburg," American Literature, 34, No. 3 (November 1962), 384.

III. TWAIN'S INABILITY TO ACCEPT ORTHODOX RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

After Twain's "mental development carried him beyond the beliefs of [the childlike religious faith of the slaves with whom he spent his childhood] . . . he [felt] that he had outgrown all religion and was consequently unable to bring himself to accept any orthodox pattern of it."¹ Twain's personal religious beliefs, which exhibit deistic leanings, were summarized in his own words in the early 1880s and, according to his biographer, remained essentially his lifelong creed:

I believe in God the Almighty.

I do not believe He has ever sent a message to man by anybody, or delivered one to him by word of mouth, or made Himself visible to mortal eyes at any time in any place.

I believe that the Old and New Testaments were imagined and written by man, and that no line in them was authorized by God, much less inspired by Him. . . .

I do not believe in special providences. I believe that the universe is governed by strict and immutable laws. If one man's family is swept away by a pestilence and another man's spared it is only the law working: God is not interfering in that small matter, either against the one man or in favor of the other. . . .

¹Bellamy, p. 299.

I believe that the world's moral laws are the outcome of the world's experience. It needed no God to come down out of heaven to tell men that murder and theft and the other immoralities were bad, both for the individual who commits them and for society which suffers from them.

If I break all these moral laws I cannot see how I injure God by it, for He is beyond the reach of injury from me--I could as easily injure a planet by throwing mud at it. It seems to me that my misconduct could only injure me and other men. I cannot benefit God by obeying these moral laws--I could as easily benefit the planet by withholding my mud. . . . Consequently I do not see why I should be either punished or rewarded hereafter for the deeds I do here.²

A. God

Twain did not resist the idea of God, but he rebelled as did others of the 1800s against what he considered to be the tyranny of the Old Testament concept of God. In a paper written about 1870, he tried to explain the differences he saw between the God of the Bible and the true God he envisioned. In that paper, he contended that the Bible's God is "an irascible, vindictive, fierce, and ever fickle and changeful master" who pets his creatures one day and lashes them the next, while the true God is "a Being who has uttered no promises, but whose beneficent, exact, and

²Mark Twain, The Writings of Mark Twain, Stormfield edition (37 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929), XXXIII, 1583-1584. Subsequent references to this volume will be cited parenthetically in the text by the roman numeral XXXIII and the page number.

changeless ordering of the machinery of his colossal universe is proof that he is at least steadfast to his purposes" (F, 116). Twain also was "quite certain . . . that God has no special consideration for man's welfare or comfort, or He wouldn't have created . . . things [such as the rattlesnake, typhus germ, and house-fly] to disturb and destroy him. The human conception of pity and morality must be entirely unknown to that Infinite God" (F, 111).

A God who has no pity for man or any living creature is necessarily an impersonal deity with whom there can be no bond. Nevertheless, Twain's "belief in God, the Creator, was absolute; but it was a God . . . of colossal proportions--so vast, indeed, that the constellated stars were but molecules in His veins--a God as big as space itself."³ Twain's great respect for the Creator is evident in his 1898 attempt to set down his feelings:

The Being who to me is the real God is the One who created this majestic universe and rules it. He is the only Originator, the only originator of thoughts; thoughts suggested from within not from without; the originator of colors and of all their possible combinations; of forces and the laws that govern them; of forms and shapes of all forms. . . .

He is the perfect artisan, the perfect artist. Everything which he has made is fine, everything which he has made is beautiful; nothing coarse,

³Albert B. Paine, ed., The Writings of Mark Twain, Stormfield edition (37 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929), XXXIII, 1582.

nothing ugly has ever come from His hand. Even His materials are all delicate, none of them is coarse.

(N, 360-361)

Later writings indicate that Twain moved beyond his concept of God as one who does nothing for the specific benefit of man to his conclusion in 1906 that, "in the case of each creature, big or little, He made it an unchanging law that that creature should suffer wanton and unnecessary pains and miseries every day of its life-- that by that law these pains and miseries could not be avoided by any diplomacy exercisable by the creature" ("R," 346-347). God is depicted with increasing frequency in Twain's last works as a malevolent deity who is alone responsible for all evil. Indeed, both What Is Man? and The Mysterious Stranger contain deterministic arguments that man is helpless to escape "the determined wickedness of the universe for which God must be responsible."⁴ In What Is Man?, the Old Man credits God with all blame as well as with all praise. At the end of The Mysterious Stranger Satan speaks to Theodor of the nature of

a God who could make good children as easily as bad, yet preferred to make bad ones; who could have made every one of them happy, yet never made a single happy one; who made them prize

⁴Henry S. Canby, Turn West, Turn East: Mark Twain and Henry James (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1951), p. 246.

their bitter life, yet stingily cut it short; who gave his angels eternal happiness unearned, yet required his other children to earn it; who gave his angels painless lives, yet cursed his other children with biting miseries and maladies of mind and body; who mouths justice and invented hell--mouths mercy and invented hell--mouths Golden Rules, and forgiveness multiplied by seventy times seven, and invented hell; who mouths morals to other people and has none himself; who frowns upon crimes, yet commits them all; who created man without invitation, then tries to shuffle the responsibility for man's acts upon man, instead of honorably placing it where it belongs, upon himself; and finally, with altogether divine obtuseness, invites this poor, abused slave to worship him!

[(XXVII, 139)]

"The Synod of Praise" satirically describes God in much the same way and, after making note of God's expectation of praise and worship from all his afflicted creatures, ends with the following words of thanksgiving: "My praise is that we have not two of him" (F, 143).

In his 1906 dictations about religion Twain is very eloquent in his criticism of what he deems to be the Old Testament God's cruel nature. Twain points out that "He is always punishing--punishing trifling misdeeds with thousandfold severity; punishing innocent children for the misdeeds of their parents; punishing unoffending populations for the misdeeds of their rulers; even descending to wreak bloody vengeance upon harmless calves and lambs and sheep and bullocks as punishment for inconsequential trespasses committed by their proprietors" ("R," 332). Twain especially

concentrates upon God's treatment of Adam and Eve; he points out the cruelty of forbidding the fruit of a certain tree and informing Adam that disobedience would result in death. Twain felt that "if the Adam child had been warned that if he ate of the apples he would be transformed into a meridian of longitude, that threat would have been the equivalent of the other, since neither of them could mean anything to him" ("R," 332). In "The Refuge of the Derelicts" the Admiral despairs of God's treatment of Adam, noting that Adam did not know the word "die" and "didn't understand. . . . Why didn't he ask what 'surely die' meant? Wouldn't he, if he had felt scared? If he had understood those awful words he would have been scared deaf and dumb and paralysed [sic], wouldn't he? . . . Very well, it shows that he didn't suppose it was anything serious. The same with Eve. Just two heedless children, you see. They supposed it was some little ordinary punishment--they hadn't ever had any other kind; they didn't know there was any other kind. And so it was easy for Satan to get around them and persuade them to disobey" (F, 209). Satan tells Eve about the Moral Sense in "That Day In Eden" and informs her that she is not responsible for her thoughts or actions because one can do no wrong unless he knows the difference between right and wrong" (CE, 671). In another essay, "Eve Speaks," Eve states that she and

Adam did not mean any harm; they did not know about right and wrong until after they were given the Moral Sense. She continues to complain, calling the treatment unkind and the punishment unfair, because it is not justifiable for God "to say to us poor ignorant children words which we could not understand, and then punish us because we did not do as we were told" (CE, 622). In his own voice in his 1906 dictations Twain further railed against God and also against His worshippers:

It was decreed that all of Adam's descendants, to the latest day, should be punished for the baby's trespass against a law of his nursery fulminated against him before he was out of his diapers. For thousands and thousands of years his posterity, individual by individual, has been unceasingly hunted and harried with afflictions in punishment of the juvenile misdemeanor which is grandiloquently called Adam's Sin. And during all that vast lapse of time there has been no lack of rabbins and popes and bishops and priests and parsons and lay slaves eager to applaud this infamy, maintain the unassailable justice and righteousness of it, and praise its Author in terms of flattery so gross and extravagant that none but a God could listen to it and not hide His face in disgust and embarrassment.
("R," 332-333)

Outraged by the death of innocent people, Twain could not treat God as the Father of Mercy. The Beatitudes, guides given by God and gratefully believed by men, horrified him because "the mouth that uttered these immense sarcasms, these giant hypocrisies, is the very same that ordered the wholesale massacre of the Midianitish men and babies and cattle; the wholesale destruction of house and

city; the wholesale banishment of the virgins into a filthy and unspeakable slavery. This is the same person who brought upon the Midianites the fiendish cruelties which were repeated by the red Indians, detail by detail, in Minnesota eighteen centuries later. The Midianite episode filled him with joy. So did the Minnesota one, or he would have prevented it" (LE, 54-55). Although he had never known a clergyman to do so, Twain felt "the Beatitudes and the chapters from Numbers and Deuteronomy ought always to be read from the pulpit together" (LE, 55) in order to give the congregation a complete view of Our Most Merciful Father. Twain relates a tale in Letters from the Earth about the concept of the Father's character gleaned from the Bible by a man who had recently become religious and was advised by his priest to learn to be like God in order to be worthy of his new estate. The convert diligently studied God's character in his Bible and then tricked his wife into having a bad fall, inoculated his sons with hookworms, sleeping sickness, and gonorrhea, gave one daughter scarlet fever which left her deaf, dumb, and blind, and closed his doors against another daughter after assisting a rascal in her seduction. When the man told his priest all he had done, the priest said that "that was no way to imitate his Father in Heaven. The convert asked wherein he had failed, but the priest changed the subject and inquired what

kind of weather he was having, up his way" (LE, 36).

Twain disdained "that God which the old-fashioned biblical religion had led men to create,"⁵ especially after he had become a friend of Robert Ingersoll, the prominent freethinker, and had become interested in "higher criticism" of the Bible in the early 1880s. He listed the attributes of the sort of God he would construct. His God would not stoop to ask for praise and flattery and would certainly not demand them; He would not offer to trade eternity's joys for worship; He would not require, desire, or expect verbal prayers for forgiveness of wrongs done if a man repented in his heart. In the Bible of Twain's God, there would be no unforgivable sin and God would recognize that He is responsible for all sin. This God would not be jealous, nor boastful, nor vengeful; instead, He would be completely preoccupied for some eternities with an effort to forgive Himself for creating unhappiness rather than happiness and for the rest of His eternities with the study of astronomy (N, 301-302).

Having observed that there must be a Master Mind because the universe is too perfectly regulated to be the result of mere chance, Twain designated as "The Great Law" those "unseen forces of creation, those immutable laws

⁵Canby, p. 248.

holding the planets to their courses and bringing the seasons with their miracles of diversity and beauty."⁶

In his dictations of 1906 he stated that "when we examine the myriad wonders . . . of this infinite universe . . . and perceive that there is not a detail of it . . . that is not the slave of a system of exact and inflexible law, we seem to know--not suppose nor conjecture, but know--that the God that brought this stupendous fabric into being with a flash of thought and framed its laws with another flash of thought is endowed with limitless power. . . . We also seem to know that when He flashed the universe into being He foresaw everything that would happen in it from that moment until the end of time." ("R," 344). Therefore, Twain believes that God foresaw that Adam and Eve would eat the forbidden fruit; that their descendants would be unbearable and have to be drowned; that Noah's descendants would also be unbearable, and that He would have to come down from heaven and be crucified in order to save the human race (LE, 43). He contended "that no such thing as an accident existed,"⁷ regardless of the evident unimportance of the event. Back of the pattern of the universe "there is always direction . . . and often it seems to him that of a malign power."⁸

⁶Long, pp. 358-359.

⁷Long, p. 383.

⁸Bellamy, p. 62.

B. Creation

Sensing a dark corruption in Nature, Twain "often saw Nature as aligned against man in an interminable struggle, signs of which are found everywhere. . . . Only one-fifth of the world's area is suited to his enterprises; yet man . . . thinks Nature regards him as the favorite member of her family. . . . [It] would be difficult to show just which branch of Nature's family is her 'favorite'; for . . . the dark malignancy of Nature extends also to the helpless animals and insects."⁹ In addition to observing and describing Nature's caking the eyes of fish with parasites and leaving them helpless, Twain remarks upon "the malign intent of Nature toward the caterpillar when she set a death-trap for him while he was carrying out the laws inflicted upon him by Nature herself" in the case of a caterpillar which, in the process of entrenching itself in preparation for transformation into a moth, became food and bed for an airborne fungus whose roots grew down into the caterpillar's body, which, after a slow death, turned into wood.¹⁰ Some creatures are better treated, however; Twain discovered that flies are especially well treated and regarded by the

⁹Bellamy, p. 187.

¹⁰Bellamy, p. 187.

Creator. In Letters from the Earth it is noted that aboard the Ark flies "must not be killed, they must not be injured, they were sacred, their origin was divine, they were the special pets of the Creator, his darlings. . . . [Unlike the other creatures, the fly] is of no nationality; all the climates are his home, all the globe is his province, all creatures that breathe are his prey, and unto them all he is a scourge and a hell" (LE, 31). Various flies were chosen by God to be special agents in breeding sorrow for other creatures. Twain develops that idea by explaining that the tsetse fly, having command of the Zambezi region, stings cattle and horses to death and causes that region to be uninhabitable by man, and a relative of the tsetse fly deposits the microbe that produces sleeping sickness (LE, 35). The view that such predation is the universal condition of life at all levels is expressed in both a fable entitled "The Victims" and in "Three Thousand Years Among the Microbes." In the latter story, a Cholera-germ speaking about a Yellow-fever germ who did not suspect that he was preying upon a fellow-creature, remarks that the Yellow-fever germ's ignorance "hints at the possibility that the procession of known and listed devourers and persecutors is not complete."¹¹ Twain could not love and

¹¹Twain, Which Was the Dream?, p. 454.

worship "a master and maker who has so ordered things that each creature must live by murdering a fellow creature" (F, 133).

Letters from the Earth contains a suggestion that jealousy is the reason God runs the world as He does. According to Twain's theory, God's jealousy was so aroused by the thought that Adam and Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit would enable them to "be as gods," that His reason was unrecoverably shocked and He was possessed by vengefulness (LE, 28). Twain wrote to Howells on April 2, 1899, that he felt that there is no dignity in human life and that man is "a poor joke--the poorest that was ever contrived--an April-fool joke, played by a malicious Creator with nothing better to waste his time upon."¹² He believed the Creator labored carefully on man, however, because "the human being is . . . an automatic machine . . . composed of thousands of complex and delicate mechanisms, which perform their functions harmoniously and perfectly, in accordance with laws devised for their governance, and over which the man himself has no authority, no mastership, no control . . . [and] for each one of these thousands of mechanisms the Creator has planned an enemy,

¹²Mark Twain, Selected Mark Twain-Howells Letters 1872-1910, ed. Frederick Anderson, William M. Gibson, Henry Nash Smith (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 329.

whose office is to harass it, pester it, persecute it, damage it, afflict it with pains, and miseries, and ultimate destruction" (LE, 28).

Man has no control over his traits, either, and yet is praised or condemned for his possession of them. Letters from the Earth records the answer the Divine One gave when asked by the angels what He planned to do with His creation "man":

Put into each individual, in differing shades and degrees, all the various Moral Qualities, in mass, that have been distributed, a single distinguishing characteristic at a time, among the non-speaking animal world--courage, cowardice, ferocity, gentleness, fairness, justice, cunning, treachery, magnanimity, cruelty, malice, malignity, lust, mercy, pity, purity, selfishness, sweetness, honor, love, hate, baseness, nobility, loyalty, falsity, veracity, untruthfulness--each human being shall have all of these in him, and they will constitute his nature. In some, there will be high and fine characteristics which will submerge the evil ones, and those will be called good men; in others the evil characteristics will have dominion and those will be called bad men.

(LE, 6)

The traits given each type of non-speaking animal "are an experiment in Morals and Conduct," the Divine One had earlier told the angels who had seen that the various animals created were killing one another; He had also told them that the animals are not culpable for their murders because they act according to the law of their nature which is the Law of God (LE, 5). Twain wrote about the possibility of man's culpability in stories which have as

the title character a curious child named Little Bessie. Little Bessie asked her mother if the killing of a Mr. Smith by a Mr. Jones would be murder and if it would be punishable. Upon receiving an affirmative answer, Little Bessie continues:

But mamma, suppose Jones has by birth such a violent temper that he can't control himself?

He must control himself. God requires it.

But he doesn't make his own temper, mamma, he is born with it, like the rabbit and the tiger; and so, why should he be held responsible?

Because God says he is responsible and must control his temper.

But he can't, mamma; and so, don't you think it is God that does the killing and is responsible, because it was He that gave him the temper which he couldn't control?

(F, 39)

Further condemning God for the way He made and runs the world is the following conversation between Little Bessie and a Mr. Hollister. They have been talking about how a cat is not culpable for torturing a mouse because it is his nature and he did not make his nature. They have also decided that Frankenstein was right in feeling responsible for the actions of the monster he created. Mamma is present for the conclusion of their conversation:

H[ollister]. God made man, without man's consent, and made his nature, too; made it vicious instead of angelic, and then said, Be angelic, or I will punish you and destroy you. But no matter, God is responsible for everything man does, all the same; He can't get around that fact. There is only one Criminal, and it is not man.

Mamma. This is atrocious! it is wicked, blasphemous, irreverent, horrible!

Bessie. Yes'm, but it's true. And I'm not going to make a cat. I would be above making a cat if I couldn't make a good one.

(F, 38)

C. Christ

Twain once referred to the God of the Old and New Testaments as "the Jekyll and Hyde of sacred romance" (N, 392), but his views of the Jesus Christ half changed considerably during his lifetime in much the same way that Melville, who was also a skeptic from an early age, changed his views of Christ from that of approval in 1850 to one of estrangement in 1851. He spoke of Christ with reverence in early letters to Livy and to Mrs. Fairbanks and exclaimed in an essay of 1871 that "all that is great and good in our particular civilization came straight from the hand of Jesus Christ."¹³ He "objected to what he considered the irreverent attitude toward Christ expressed" in a manuscript which his brother Orion sent to him in 1878¹⁴ and wrote in a letter to Orion that he did not believe in "the divinity of the Savior, but . . . the Savior is none the less a sacred Personage, and a man should have no desire or disposition to refer to him lightly, profanely, or otherwise than with the

¹³Twain, Contributions to the Galaxy, p. 128.

¹⁴Wagenknecht, p. 191.

profoundest reverence."¹⁵ As seen in his dictations of 1906 and Letters from the Earth, by his last years Twain's thinking about Christ had changed drastically. He registers amazement at finding that it is believed that when God assumed the name Jesús Christ and descended to earth, He became sweet, gentle, merciful, and filled with love for the human race, since it was, after all, in the role of Jesus Christ that He devised and proclaimed hell (LE, 45). This line of thought is also found in Twain's dictations of 1906 in which he states:

Apparently we deduce this [gentle] character not by examining facts but by diligently declining to search them, measure them and weigh them. The earthly half [of God] requires us to be merciful and sets us an example by inventing a lake of fire and brimstone in which all of us who fail to recognize and worship Him as God are to be burned through all eternity. And not only we, who are offered these terms, are to be thus burned if we neglect them, but also the earlier billions of human beings are to suffer this awful fate, although they all lived and died without ever having heard of Him or the terms at all. This exhibition of mercifulness may be called gorgeous. We have nothing approaching it among human savages, nor among the wild beasts of the jungle. . . . Nothing in all history--nor even His massed history combined--remotely approaches in atrocity the invention of Hell.

("R," 333-334, 335)

The stories of miracles supposedly performed by Christ were also attacked by Twain and were exhibited by him as

¹⁵Mark Twain, The Writings of Mark Twain, Stormfield edition (37 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929), XXXIV, 323.

further examples of Christ's cruelty. Twain could not praise Christ for His miracles because, although He could remove all forms of suffering at any time, Christ restores the sight of only a few blind persons rather than totally eradicating blindness, cures only a few cripples rather than curing all of them, furnishes a meal to five thousand persons rather than relieving worldwide hunger, and brings several dead persons back to life as a kindness to them and yet does not bring every loved one back to life ("R," 334). The notion that Christ should be praised for giving His life to save our race also presented a difficulty for Twain. He reasoned that "for man to risk his life (and lose it) for the sake of a friend . . . a country, is no large matter . . . [for] it is done every day by firemen and by soldiers at \$8 a month (1898). For a God to take three days on a cross out of a life of eternal happiness and mastership of the universe is a service which the least among us would be glad to do upon the like terms" (N, 364). He also made the observation that "it is ludicrous to see the Church make something fine out of the only instance of [the giving of a life for the sake of another person] where nothing was risked that was of consequence, for nothing was involved but a few hours of pain . . . [and] to endure several hours' pain is nothing heroic in God, in any case" (N, 290). As for the teachings of Christ, especially the Golden Rule and

the injunction to love one's neighbor, Twain thought them excellent and declared that he was filled with regret at the lip-service so often paid to those teachings.¹⁶

D. Satan

Although it is doubtful that Twain shared the belief, held by many of his contemporaries as a result of the wave of Spiritualism begun in the 1850s, in the existence of Satan as a spiritual being, he was very much interested in the idea of Satan, regarding him "more as the principle of rebellion than as the principle of evil."¹⁷ In Letters from the Earth, the archangel Satan's visit to earth partially discharged the day-long banishment from heaven which was his punishment for being naughtily sarcastic (LE, 6-7). In Twain's autobiography is an account of an incident in which Satan, whose side is never heard although religions have spoken frequently against him, is pitied by Twain's mother as being unfairly treated. According to Mrs. Clemens, prayers for sinners "go up daily out of all the churches in Christendom. . . . But who prays for Satan? Who . . . has had the common humanity to pray for the one sinner . . . among us all who had the highest and clearest right to

¹⁶Long, p. 358.

¹⁷Wagenknecht, p. 193.

every Christian's daily and nightly prayers, for the plain and unassailable reason that his was the first and greatest need, he being among sinners the supremest?" (XXXVI, 117). Twain also felt that Satan's executive abilities and powers of influence are not given enough respect considering that he has for centuries "maintained the imposing position of spiritual head of 4/5 of the human race. . . . [and] hasn't a single salaried helper; [while] the Opposition employ a million" (N, 343) and has through "the fear of Satan and Hell made 99 Christians where love of God and Heaven landed one."¹⁸

Due to Twain's "animosity against God . . . his support of the underdog Satan may lead to the transfer of some of the Creator's attributes to the great rebel."¹⁹ By depicting Satan creating miniature people and then crushing them in a detached manner in The Mysterious Stranger, Satan's power is shown to be complete as any God's and his attitude toward his creations and toward humanity as callous as a God's.²⁰ Depicting Satan as a Godlike creator, Twain "is enabled to hold forth simultaneously on the paltry and

¹⁸Mark Twain, Mark Twain and the Three R's: Race, Religion, Revolution--and Related Matters, ed. Maxwell Geismar (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1973), p. 118.

¹⁹Parsons, p. 161.

²⁰Covici, p. 233.

debased nature of man and the indifference or malignity of the deity--two chief items in the 'abuse' he was . . . anxious to load onto this fictional vehicle."²¹ Satan is not God, though, he is an angel and "angels are exempt from loss and pain and all mortal suffering, they are exempt from guilt and conscience and self-condemnation also, and temptation has no meaning for them and they have no moral sense, and neither humiliation nor death nor the suffering of anyone affects them in the least."²² Satan as Twain portrays him in The Mysterious Stranger is "Theodor's projection . . . and is also a projection of the human conscience," both destructive conscience, when he "satirizes the human race unmercifully," and beneficial conscience, when he "explains the way of the world, and . . . encourages Theodor to think more accurately and to measure up to a kindlier view of human nature [such as the view that, although they will stone a person as part of a mob, the majority of people are secretly kind and do not like to inflict pain] than the maliciously punitive part

²¹Edwin S. Fussell, "The Structural Problem in The Mysterious Stranger," in Mark Twain's The Mysterious Stranger and the Critics, ed. John S. Tuckey (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1968), p. 79.

²²Bernard DeVoto, "The Symbols of Despair," in Mark Twain: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Henry Nash Smith (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 155.

of Satan could ever admit exists."²³

E. Bible

According to his personal creed written in the early 1880s, Twain did not believe in the orthodox notion of the divine inspiration of the Bible, but, nevertheless, he exhibited a lifelong interest in it. As a result of his inability to accept the Bible as "a guide to spiritual salvation," Twain refused to continue the Bible readings which Livy insisted upon during the early days of their marriage, declaring that the fables and myths "contradicted his reason."²⁴ He knew the Bible very well though, and used Biblical allusions in many of his works. Twain not only quotes the Bible, "he burlesques it; he takes the reader's knowledge of it absolutely for granted; he derives from it in every conceivable way."²⁵ Some of his works, such as Adam's Diary, Eve's Diary, "Papers of the Adam Family," and "The Turning-Point of My Life," contain "mild contradictions of the Bible" which are basically nothing more than "rather innocent toying with biblical

²³Covici, pp. 235, 239, 240.

²⁴Long, p. 356.

²⁵Wagenknecht, p. 62.

themes"; however, "much more specific challenges to biblical facts and doctrines came in the writings which have appeared since his death."²⁶

In the series of letters written by Satan from the earth there is "humor, but not humor for its own sake; Twain was bringing his biggest guns to bear on the Bible and Christian religion."²⁷ He wanted to point out what readers could find in the Bible if they would stop pretending to revere it as a sacred and inspired book and examine what is really in it.²⁸ In his effort to awaken biblical literalists, Twain wrote in 1909 that the Bible "is full of interest. It has noble poetry in it; and some clever fables; and some blood-drenched history; and some good morals; and a wealth of obscenity; and upwards of a thousand lies" (LE, 14). In both the dictations of 1906 and the writings of 1909, Twain's knowledge of the findings of "higher criticism" is evidenced when he comments upon the "almost pathetic poverty of invention [which] characterizes [Bibles]" ("R," 335). He contends that the Christian Bible "is built mainly out of the fragments of older Bibles that had their day and crumbled to ruin. . . . Its

²⁶Ensor, p. 53.

²⁷Ensor, p. 60.

²⁸Ensor, p. 71.

three or four most imposing and impressive events all happened in earlier Bibles; all its best precepts and rules of conduct came also from those Bibles" (LE, 14).

The Bible received harsh criticism for what Twain felt is its pernicious influence on children. Twain agreed with Joseph Lewis, freethinker and Bible critic, in believing

there has never been a Protestant boy or a Protestant girl whose mind the Bible has not soiled. No Protestant child ever comes clean from association with the Bible. This association cannot be prevented. Sometimes the parents try to prevent it by not allowing the children to have access to the Bible's awful obscenities, but this only whets the child's desire to taste that forbidden fruit, and it does taste it-- seeks it out secretly and devours it with a strong and grateful appetite. The Bible does its baleful work in the propagation of vice among children, and vicious and unclean ideas, daily and constantly, in every Protestant family in Christendom. It does more of this deadly work than all the other unclean books in Christendom put together; and not only more, but a thousandfold more. It is easy to protect the young from those other books, and they are protected from them. But they have no protection against the deadly Bible.

("R," 342)

Part of the history of the progress of civilization which Satan shows the boys in The Mysterious Stranger illustrates some of the lessons a child may learn from the Bible.

Satan's presentation includes scenes of Cain's murder of Abel, Noah overcome with wine, the search for respectable people in Sodom and Gomorrah, the incest between Lot and his daughters, the Hebraic wars in which the young girls were saved and distributed, and Jael's murder of her guest

Sisera (XXVII, 108-109).

In his effort to reveal what he felt is the Bible's foolishness and evil influence, Twain focused almost exclusively on those stories which show the worst sides of God and men and on those passages which lend themselves to ridicule or to attack.²⁹ The accuracy or inaccuracy of the stories and the context of the passages were of little importance to Twain because, in the words of one of Satan's letters from earth, "if we believe, with these [Christians], that their God invented [and inspired the writing of] these cruel things, we slander him; if we believe that these people invented them themselves, we slander them" (LE, 14). Twain was attracted by the ludicrousness of Bible stories if taken literally. Envisioning the events that would have had to occur for the stories to be true filled him with alternating fits of amusement and outrage.³⁰

Amused by the story of Noah and the Ark, Twain noted many details which tend to discredit the literal truth of the biblical version. The ill-equipped Ark "was to be at sea eleven months, and would need fresh water enough to fill two Arks of its size--yet the additional Ark was not provided. Water from outside could not be utilized: half

²⁹Ensor, p. 101.

³⁰Ensor, p. 101.

of it would be salt water, and men and land animals could not drink it" (LE, 22). Since no single Ark could hold samples of every living creature, it must be assumed that Noah gathered only as many creatures as he could accommodate (LE, 22-23). The presence in the world today of creatures not mentioned as among Noah's passengers can possibly be explained by Twain's idea that many creatures had "long ago wandered to a side of this world which [Noah] had never seen and with whose affairs he was not acquainted. . . . They only escaped by an accident. There was not water enough to go around. Only enough was provided to flood one small corner of the globe--the rest of the globe was not then known, and was supposed to be nonexistent" (LE, 23). Twain also developed a theory about why there are no dinosaurs today. Noah learned from a stranger that all the various types of dinosaurs were coming to be saved from the flood and were "not coming in pairs, they were all coming: they did not know the passengers were restricted to pairs, the man said, and wouldn't care a rap for the regulations, anyway--they would sail in that Ark or know the reason why" (LE, 24). Noah got away as soon as he could before the prodigious beasts arrived because the Ark would not hold many of them and they would be hungry when they arrived and would probably eat everything including the family. Twain noted that "the whole thing is hushed up [in

the Bible] It shows you that when people have left a reproachful vacancy in a contract they can be as shady about it in Bibles as elsewhere" (LE, 24).

A maxim written by Twain states: "there is nothing more awe-inspiring than a miracle except the credulity that can take it at par" (N, 393). The credulity that could take any biblical story of a Virgin Birth at par outraged Twain. Mr. Hollister tells Bessie in one of the "Little Bessie" dialogues that all of the various religions throughout time claim their gods were born of virgins and no virgin is safe when a god is around (F, 44). The absurdity Twain saw in the Virgin Birth story is also pointed out in "The Second Advent," a story about a new Christ born in Arkansas, which Twain wrote in 1881. A jury is given the task of determining the virginity of Nancy Hopkins and the divinity of her child. The jury, composed entirely of church members, delivers an affirmative verdict on both counts and is addressed by Mr. Horace Greeley, a member of the editors' party. Mr. Greeley delivers the editors' opinion:

Where an individual's life is at stake, hearsay evidence is not received in courts; how, then, shall we venture to receive hearsay evidence in this case, where the eternal life of whole nations is at stake? We have hearsay evidence that an angel appeared; none has seen that angel but one individual, and she an interested person. We have hearsay evidence that the angel delivered a

certain message; whether it has come to us untampered with or not, we can never know, there being none to convey it to us but a party interested in having it take a certain form. We have the evidence of dreams and other hearsay evidence--and still, as before, from interested parties--that God is the father of this child, and that its mother remains a virgin: the first a statement which never has been and never will be possible of verification, and the last a statement which could only have been verified before the child's birth, but not having been done then can never hereafter be done. Silly dreams, and the unverifiable twaddle of a family of nobodies who are interested in covering up a young girl's accident and shielding her from disgrace--such is the "evidence!" "Evidence" like this could not affect even a dog's case, in any court in Christendom. It is rubbish, it is foolishness. No court would listen to it; it would be an insult to judge and jury to offer it.

(F, 61)

The Bible interested Twain throughout his lifetime, but the bad points he found outweighed its good ones.³¹ He viewed the Bible as a book of outmoded myths and fables created by an ancient people to explain the world around them and help them cope with their daily problems. Twain echoing Ingersoll sought to lead others to leave behind the Old and New Testaments and discover the truths plainly written "in His real Bible, which is Nature and her history; we read it every day, and we could understand it and trust in it if we would burn the spurious one and dig the remains of our insignificant reasoning faculties out of the grave where that and other man-made Bibles have buried

³¹Ensor, p. 73.

them for 2000 years and more" (N, 362).

F. Eternity

Still another orthodox belief, that which concerns life after death, was not accepted by Twain but interested him greatly. His personal creed states his position on the matter:

I cannot see how eternal punishment hereafter could accomplish any good end, therefore I am not able to believe in it. To chasten a man in order to perfect him might be reasonable enough; to annihilate him when he shall have proved himself incapable of reaching perfection might be reasonable enough; but to roast him forever for the mere satisfaction of seeing him roast would not be reasonable--even the atrocious God imagined by the Jews would tire of the spectacle eventually.

There may be a hereafter and there may not be. I am wholly indifferent about it. If I am appointed to live again I feel sure it will be for some more sane and useful purpose than to flounder about for ages in a lake of fire and brimstone for having violated a confusion of ill-defined and contradictory rules said (but not evidenced) to be of divine institution. If annihilation is to follow death I shall not be aware of the annihilation, and therefore shall not care a straw about it.

(XXXIII, 1583)

The Bible Twain felt he could trust, the Bible of Nature, contains no promises nor any indications of a future life; it tells only about this present life (N, 362). His dictations of 1906 include derision of the "naïve and confiding and illogical human rabbit [who] looks for a Heaven of eternal bliss, which is to be his reward for

patiently enduring the want and sufferings inflicted upon him here below . . . [because] there is no evidence that there is to be a Heaven hereafter. . . . [The Bible's] Heaven exists solely upon hearsay evidence--evidence furnished by unknown persons; persons who did not prove that they had ever been there" ("R," 349). Twain deduced that a heaven hereafter is unlikely, for he deemed it illogical to expect the same gods who constantly persecute men and animals during their earthly life, to provide an eternity of bliss for those same creatures after their earthly life ("R," 350).

The sort of heaven man has imagined for himself is explicitly ridiculed in Letters from the Earth, Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven, and other works. In the second of his letters from earth, Satan reports details of the heaven man hopes to enter and is certain he will enjoy. According to Satan, man's heaven contains "each and every imaginable thing that is repulsive to a man, and not a single thing he likes!" (LE, 13). Sexual intercourse, peace and quiet, and all exercises for the intellect are left out entirely and are replaced by totally integrated church services which are unending and are complete with the deafening sound of millions of voices screaming a monotonous hymn and accompanied by millions of harps (LE, 9-13). Twain also used a gloss of humor in

conveying his feelings about the absurdity of man's heaven in two maxims he wrote shortly before he died:

Leave your dog outside. Heaven goes by favor. If it went by merit, you would stay out and the dog would go in.

You will be wanting to slip down at night and smuggle water to those poor little chaps (the infant damned), but don't you try it. You would be caught, and nobody in heaven would respect you after that.³²

Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven, written in about 1868 and suppressed for forty years, is "a satiric attack on the conventional notion of heaven."³³ The Captain uses the interpretation of heaven he had learned in Sunday school as a guide and realizes, as he progresses through the story, that his "authorities" are inaccurate.³⁴ According to the story, Captain Stormfield, an old navigator, travels a million miles a second and yet takes thirty years to get to heaven, which is incalculably immense in order to accommodate all those who have died throughout time. The gates are not tended by St. Peter and no indication is given of who gets in and who does not. New arrivals are issued wings, halos, harps, and palm branches, but they

³²Bernard Augustine DeVoto, Mark Twain's America (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1932), p. 297.

³³Andrews, p. 70.

³⁴Spengemann, p. 27.

drop them by the wayside within a few days when they tire of sitting around singing and decide to go back to some sort of work which they had enjoyed on earth. Not everyone chooses to be young; many choose the age of their optimum intelligence. Most prefer to reside in that area of heaven which corresponds to the area in which they lived on earth, but modern Americans find this difficult because the Indian souls still outnumber the white-skinned souls in the American area. Captain Stormfield also discovers that heaven is an aristocratic state in which even the angels consider themselves quite lucky to even glimpse an archangel once in a thousand years and where Abraham's shoulder is not available to be wept upon by pious newcomers who wish to commune with all the prophets and patriarchs throughout eternity. Justice is perfect in heaven, though; each person is permitted to attempt and succeed at the job he secretly wanted to do on earth but could not for various reasons.³⁵ Sandy, Captain Stormfield's informant, tells him about several people who "warn't rewarded according to their deserts, on earth, but here they get their rightful rank. That tailor Billings, from Tennessee, wrote poetry that Homer and Shakespeare couldn't begin to come up to; but nobody would

³⁵Baldanza, p. 130.

print it, nobody read it but his neighbors, an ignorant lot, and they laughed at it" (XXVII, 262-263). In heaven, Billings is a poet who is respected and honored by everyone, including Homer and Shakespeare. Sandy also informs the Captain that "there ain't a thing you can mention that is happiness in its own self--it's only by contrast with the other thing. And so, as soon as the novelty is over and the force of the contrast dulled, it ain't happiness any longer, and you have to get something fresh. Well, there's plenty of pain and suffering in heaven--consequently there's plenty of contrasts, and just no end of happiness" (XXVII, 242). Twain did not believe in the possibility of heaven, but he was certain that, should a heaven exist, it would be unquestionably different from what the average Christian conceptualized.

Together with many of his contemporaries, Twain was concerned with the question of personal immortality and generally saw no hope for it, but in late September of 1903, when Livy was very ill, he desired for her the consolation many found in a belief in a life after death. Sorry that he had long ago destroyed her faith, he wrote to Livy, saying, "I have been thinking & examining, & searching & analyzing, for many days, & am vexed to find that I more believe in the immortality of the soul than misbelieve in it. . . . Not that I object to being immortal,

but that I do not know how to accommodate the thought. . . . It at least cannot appal me, for I will not allow myself to believe that there is disaster connected with it. In fact, no one, at bottom, believes that; not even the priests that preach it" (LL, 344-345). A clue to his actual conviction is found in a notation he had made a few months earlier which states: "one of the proofs of the immortality of the soul is that myriads have believed it. They also believed the world was flat" (N, 379). Another clue that his profession of faith was a lie told to soothe and comfort his wife is found in a note penciled by Twain on the back of the envelope containing Livy's answering letter: "In the bitterness of death it was G. W.'s chiefest solace that he had never told a lie except this one" (LL, 345).

Although Twain himself did not accept many orthodox religious beliefs, he recognized man's need of a religious faith, especially in times of trouble or illness. He exposed those beliefs which he determined to be false and foolish and sought to initiate a new "religious faith" which has "for its base God and man as they are, and not as the elaborately masked and disguised artificialities they are represented to be in most philosophies and in all religions" (N, 376).

IV. CONCLUSION

Outspoken like his contemporaries in his criticism of nineteenth-century progress in such areas as the spread of democracy and Christianity and the growth of great industrial centers and personal fortunes at the expense of other values, Twain was perhaps "the most outspoken in his reactions to the religious tensions of the times."¹ Three major factors in the nineteenth century, the fragmentation of mutually intolerant sects, the "higher criticism" of the Bible, and the many new discoveries in science, brought about momentous changes in the field of religion² and had always captured Twain's interest. The fragmentation of religious sects included the 1825 emergence and rapid growth of Unitarianism which opposed the Calvinistic doctrines of total depravity and predestination, the organization in 1830 of the Mormon Church, the rifts in both the Quaker and Presbyterian orders, the rapid expansion of Universalism which preached the doctrine of

¹John T. Frederick, The Darkened Sky: Nineteenth-Century American Novelists and Religion (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), p. 123.

²Frederick, p. 114.

universal salvation, and the later appearance of the sect of Christian Science. Two other events occurring in the nineteenth century were the enormous influx of immigrants who brought with them their own religious faiths and the swift growth in the West of the Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, and other evangelical denominations which attempted to satisfy the enthusiasm and spiritual cravings of people who were tired of the bitter arguments and dissension between denominational groups.

Growing scientific and historical knowledge incited the recognition and challenge of the scientific misconceptions and historical inconsistencies of the Bible. Great was the impact on American thought of Darwin's theory of biological evolution, especially after Huxley's lecture visits in America, and of the new findings of the 1800s in astronomy and geology.³ A major cause of the religious tension of the period was the increase of interest in the study of "higher criticism." Studies of biblical writings were done to determine their literary history and the purpose and meaning of the authors. Such works of "higher criticism" of the Bible as D. F. Strauss's Das Leben Jesu, translated in about 1846 by George Eliot, which argued against "the naturalistic explanation of Gospel miracles"

³Frederick, p. 185.

and asserted that "the Gospels were not written by the apostolic community, but by naïve disciples dominated by a mythological outlook,"⁴ were widely read. Oort's The Bible for Learners, a detailed, documented, and often sarcastic treatment of the findings of the "higher criticism" published in three volumes in 1878,⁵ also shocked orthodoxy.

Nineteenth-century religious radicals whose influence was widely felt included such humanists and philosophers as Comte, Marx, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard. Comte postulated the theory called positivism which "essentially holds that there are no beings or structures (gods or heavens or hells) that exist apart from the universe we experience through the senses."⁶ For Marx and his followers, religion is an illusion, a "projection of the values and the self-interest of the ruling classes, who then use the threats and promises of religion to keep the working classes in subjection to them."⁷ Nietzsche proclaimed that God, as "a projection of society's ideals and self-interests . . . an idol that hung

⁴Jerry Wayne Brown, The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870 (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), pp. 141, 143.

⁵Frederick, pp. 153-154.

⁶John Charles Cooper, The Roots of the Radical Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), p. 24.

⁷Cooper, p. 28.

over men as an invisible threat" is dead.⁸ He called for the birth of another master--reasoning, assertive man. Kierkegaard called for a love relationship with God. He despised the way of the church, and "called for a stress on following Jesus, upon becoming a disciple, upon renunciation of comfort and success in this world."⁹

Twain's reactions to the complex religious turmoil which surrounded him are clearly evident in his writings which reveal a lifelong search for truth, a hatred of hypocrisy in all forms, and a rejection of many orthodox beliefs. His curiosity and concern led him to ask many probing questions and to bitterly denounce many diverse activities, but his primary focus remained always centered on man.

Deeply affected when mankind behaved contemptibly, Twain still felt that "even a contemptible creature must be cared for when he is in need."¹⁰ He was determined to better the human condition. In the early 1900s Twain explored the possibilities of "the brotherhood of man" since he could find no evidence of a benevolent God who

⁸Cooper, p. 29.

⁹Cooper, p. 40.

¹⁰Wagenknecht, p. 118.

would assist man,¹¹ but military action in China, South Africa, Cuba, and the Philippines, and the Russo-Japanese War, which had inspired such previously discussed pieces as "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" and "To My Missionary Critics" (1901), and "Defense of General Funston" (1902), "The Tsar's Soliloquy" (1904), and "Leopold's Soliloquy" (1905), led Twain to lose faith in that solution. Although such events illustrated the greed, callousness, and cruelty which the race at large possesses, and served to heighten his sense of man's irrationality, Twain retained his faith in the individual and continued the improvement efforts he had begun long ago in his California writings.¹² Both Twain and Henry James "hated most of all treachery, and self-seeking, and loved most of all loyalty, kindness, integrity, and intellectual courage";¹³ they were joined by other contemporaries, Melville and Howells, in their feelings of dismay concerning the "get-rich-quick" world of vast technology and increasing commercial competition which bred the outrageously corrupt political period

¹¹Tuckey, "Introduction," Fables of Man, p. 8.

¹²Edgar Marquess Branch, The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1950), p. 157.

¹³Canby, p. 294.

of the 1870s, the violent labor strikes for better working conditions in 1886, and the widespread suffering of the depression of 1893. Although a few noble individuals appeared at times throughout the ages to advance the rest of humanity, the human race at large seemed never to improve; "individual crime and mass murder through war persisted in spite of science and enlightenment. Intellectual progress was only perverted to wicked use for material gain and selfish power through exploitation."¹⁴

When Twain poured out his feelings of disgust for man he was referring to the human race in general. He frequently incorporated into his writings his thoughts on man and "how he is constructed, & what a shabby poor ridiculous thing he is, & how mistaken he is in his estimate of his character & powers & qualities & his place among the animals"¹⁵ for he was certain that man is the least admirable member of the animal kingdom. Indeed he opined in 1884 that man was probably not made intentionally at all, but worked himself up out of the originally created form of life to the surprise and sorrow of the Creator.¹⁶

¹⁴Long, p. 262.

¹⁵Twain, Selected Mark Twain-Howells Letters, p. 336.

¹⁶Allen, pp. 294-295.

According to Macfarlane, a boarding-house friend in 1856 with whom Twain agreed, life had evolved progressively until man entered the cycle and broke down the progression by being "the only animal capable of feeling malice, envy, vindictiveness, revengefulness, hatred, selfishness."¹⁷

Twain also criticized human beings for improving the mentality inherited from reptile ancestors, but declining from the possession of the blemishless morality inherited to the possession of an artificial moral sense which generally leads them to prefer wrong.¹⁸ In "The Damned Human Race," a sketch written during his last years, Twain reports that as the result of his study of the traits and dispositions of both the so-called "lower animals" and of man, his "allegiance to the Darwinian theory of the Ascent of Man from the Lower Animals" must be renounced and replaced by the new and truer theory "to be named the Descent of Man from the Higher Animals" (LE, 223). Twain found it amazing that, although man really belongs at the bottom of the heap, he still blandly sets himself up as the "Most Sublime Existence in all the range of Non-Divine Being, the Chief Love and Delight of God."¹⁹

¹⁷Twain, Autobiography, ed. Neider, p. 97.

¹⁸Bellamy, p. 307.

¹⁹Twain, Mark Twain and the Three R's, p. 122.

The idea that man really holds an humble place of insignificance in the universe is fortified in What Is Man? by the concept that human life is externally determined, a concept that Twain had gleaned as early as 1869 from his popular science readings.²⁰ He concluded that man and all animals are nothing but machines and that "whatsoever a man is, is due to his make, and to the influences brought to bear upon it by his heredities, his habitat, his associations. He is moved, directed, COMMANDED, by exterior influences--solely" (CE, 337). The Young Man of the essay finds this low opinion of man odious, but Twain found echoes of the idea in the works of such diarists and historians as Pepys, Saint-Simon, and Lecky. Another of Twain's ideas clearly stated in Lecky's History of European Morals is that the desire to obtain happiness and avoid pain provides man his motivation.²¹ Among Twain's notations is found the comment: "no man that ever lived has ever done a thing to please God--primarily. It was done to please himself, then God next" (N, 364). Man's chief impulse is that of securing his own approval; sometimes satisfaction comes from the approval of neighbors or from a break from custom, but whatever will give self-approval at any given

²⁰Frederick, p. 169.

²¹Long, p. 383.

time, regardless of the consequences, is what man will do.²² His heredity and habitat determine whether man's drive for self-approval can be satisfied by good or evil, by helping or by victimizing his neighbor. In the story of Hadleyburg, the Richards's self-approval is derived from their knowledge that their neighbors think they are honest, until they are dying and their conscience, that Interior Master which is their desire for self-approval, demands they confess their dishonesty in order to obtain the essence of honesty rather than just its reputation.²³ That Mr. Richards failed earlier to save Burgess from undeserved disgrace because doing so would lessen his neighbors' regard for him, but frees himself of guilt by confessing this cowardice on his deathbed, illustrates Twain's law that "from his cradle to his grave a man never does a single thing which has any first and foremost object but one--to secure peace of mind, spiritual comfort, for himself" (CE, 343-344).

The Young Man of What Is Man?, who represents orthodox readers, is disgusted by such notions of man's motivations. He questions the reason the Old Man is taking the time to explain man to him and asks why the Old Man or himself or anyone should ever bother to consider his motivations and

²²Covici, p. 224.

²³Burhans, pp. 382-383.

actions since it seems nothing can be done about them. Twain, through the Old Man, indicates that although man is frequently not virtuous, he is an animal with possibilities of improvement;²⁴ because man is composed of both inclinations to do good and to do evil, training can move him either way. The Interior Master is composed, first, of temperament, which is inherited and is not alterable but which man can control to the extent that if he has a tendency toward being hot-tempered, he can refuse to misbehave when aroused to anger, and, second, of associations, which include such things as a man's family, friends, and reading materials which man can select to some extent.²⁵ Therefore, although all impulses are selfish and all actions are determined by exterior forces, some training is possible and so, as suggested in "Which Was It?" "what a body needs to do, is to train himself to prefer high selfishnesses, not low ones."²⁶

In What Is Man? Twain formulated a system of training

²⁴Darrel Abel, A Simplified Approach to Mark Twain (Great Neck, New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1964), p. 106.

²⁵Spengemann, p. 130.

²⁶Twain, Which Was the Dream?, p. 308.

for general social betterment²⁷ condensed thusly into an admonition delivered by the Old Man: "Diligently train your ideals upward and still upward toward a summit where you will find your chiefest pleasure in conduct which, while contenting you, will be sure to confer benefits upon your neighbor and the community" (CE, 367). The man himself will necessarily get an advantage out of leading a virtuous life or he would not be able to do it, and the neighbors get an advantage out of his virtues in that he is not a peril or a damage to them (CE, 363). It remains true, however, that man gets no personal credit for conducting himself in socially desirable ways because, although the end results of training confer benefits on others secondarily, man is still following the law of his make by contenting his own spirit first. Twain persisted throughout his lifetime to hold the opinion that man can and should live a right and good life without deceiving himself about his motivations. Twain always retained some of his faith in humanity and tried to avoid raging at man and blaming him; instead, he attempted to sympathize and exert his influence in whatever ways were necessary to help man have the best life possible under the circumstances.

²⁷F. C. Flowers, "Mark Twain's Theories of Morality," The Mark Twain Quarterly, 8, No. 2 (Summer-Fall 1948), 10.

Many of Twain's major and minor works dwell upon the unfortunate circumstance that every man is a coward who has an inborn instinct to imitate and has an aversion to being on the unpopular side of any question because he might be shunned.²⁸ He sought to induce people to realize their cowardly natures and examine themselves by relating examples of moral cowardice. In The Mysterious Stranger is found an episode in which sixty-eight people stone a woman although sixty-three of them secretly do not wish to participate. Noting the incident, Satan scoffs at men and says they are like sheep because

the vast majority of the race, whether savage or civilized, are secretly kind-hearted and shrink from inflicting pain, but in the presence of the aggressive and pitiless minority they don't dare to assert themselves. . . . Monarchies, aristocracies, and religions are all based upon . . . the individual's distrust of his neighbor, and his desire, for safety's or comfort's sake, to stand well in his neighbor's eye. These institutions will always remain, and always flourish, and always oppress you, affront you, and degrade you, because you will always be and remain slaves of minorities. There was never a country where the majority of the people were in their secret hearts loyal to any of these institutions.

(XXVII, 118-119)

Through Satan, Twain, as a moralist who wants to make the world a better place in which to live, challenges men to heed their own secret feelings and learn from their personal experiences when judging morals. He desired to move every

²⁸Twain, A Pen Warmed-Up in Hell, p. 154.

man to ask the question: "does the moral principle achieve good or bad results?"²⁹ In "Bible Teaching and Religious Practice" he congratulated man for driving his "annihilating pen" through such texts and laws as those concerning the practices of slavery and witch-hunting, and promoted further advancement in the direction of enlightenment (CE, 571) in the hope that moral laws may, in the end, attain his ideal for civilization which included social justice and universal humanitarianism. He also stressed man's responsibility to correct morals himself because the present dogmatic religious institutions and conceptions of morality are not adequate to solve present social problems. He hoped that all would understand the need expressed in the thought of one of Tom Sawyer's "nonnamous letters" which stated: "I . . . have got religgion and wish to quit it and lead an honest life again"³⁰ and would apply Christian principles to the promotion of realistic ethical conduct. In his lifelong effort to influence people to look, not to institutions, but to themselves for guidance in their task of daily living, Twain repeatedly showed in his stories "false piety being punctured by realistic irreverence or else contrasted with what he considered genuine religion--obedience to the golden

²⁹Wiggins, p. 93.

³⁰Ensor, p. 40.

rule and the command to love one's neighbor."³¹ According to Twain and such contemporaries as Howells and James, the best means of exhibiting one's humanitarian character is using one's life for the promotion of happiness and goodness and growth in oneself and other human beings.

Twain, Howells, and James shared the belief that, while a heavenly salvation is a dubious hope, man can achieve an earthly salvation by seeing the world as it really is without the help of God, reconciling oneself personally to that world, and charting a meaningful, realistic course of his life and his place within society.³² They had come to the realization that, as postulated by Bonhoeffer, the modern world demands men live as if there were no God. Twain especially tried to convey the message that we must realize that no God will help us, that we must live always as men who can manage without Him. Man must be independent and demonstrate his independence by relying entirely upon himself, using his own feelings as a guide. He must recognize that he has been deceived about what is or is not virtuous for, according to Satan in The Mysterious Stranger, the human race has "duped itself from cradle to grave with

³¹Ensor, p. 96.

³²Kenneth Andersen, "Mark Twain, W. D. Howells, and Henry James: Three Agnostics in Search of Salvation," The Mark Twain Journal, 15, No. 1 (Winter 1970), 13.

shams and delusions which it mistook for realities, and this made its entire life a sham" (XXVII, 131). Many of Twain's works, especially the later ones, are attempts to expose "the outworn but still confining myths of an exploded, prescientific view of man and the universe, from which man's imagination needed to be freed."³³ It has always been necessary to reevaluate religious conceptions periodically because, in the words of one of Twain's notations, "the altar cloth of one aeon is the doormat of the next" (N, 346). He knew there had been thousands of religions before Christianity which had died and been replaced by other equally sacred religions and that an exception would not be made for the already outmoded Christian religion. Twain and many of his contemporaries wanted to "clear away the superstitious fogs in which men have floundered and suffered hitherto . . . [and assert the fact that] the one sacred duty laid on every rational being is the duty of rebellion against sham."³⁴ Among Twain's notes concerning the writing of A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court in the statement: "the first thing I want to teach is disloyalty, till they get used to disusing that word loyalty as representing a virtue. This will beget independence-- which is loyalty to one's best self and principles, and

³³Tuckey, "Introduction," Fables of Man, p. 3.

³⁴Parrington, p. 95.

this is often disloyalty to the general idols and fetishes" (N, 199). He urged the practice of irreverence, "the champion of liberty and its only sure defense" (N, 195), for he knew the truth of his notion that "no god and no religion can survive ridicule. No church, no nobility, no royalty or other fraud, can face ridicule in a fair field and live" (N, 198).

With the weapon of laughter man can free himself from false institutions and can also, with relatively little pain, recognize the discrepancy between what he thinks he is and what he is in truth.³⁵ The laughter that leads to self-awareness provides the objective vision with which man can see himself and his world clearly.³⁶ Beneath the humor or taunting of many of Twain's works lies his real purpose of desiring that wrongs be known, remembered, and never repeated.³⁷ He sought to spread his radical idea that man, not history, is at fault for the present state of existence because, as an imitator, he has enslaved himself to religious and moral dogma.³⁸ The human race must examine its past

³⁵Covici, p. 214.

³⁶Covici, p. 213.

³⁷Allen, p. 296.

³⁸Ellwood Johnson, "Mark Twain's Dream Self in the Nightmare of History," The Mark Twain Journal, 15, No. 1 (Winter 1970), 11.

performances, learn from them, forgive itself for them, and go on to create from within a better, more realistic life ethic. When mankind has succeeded in freeing itself through self-knowledge, it can "dream other dreams, and better" (XXVII, 138) and look to the future with hope.

As evidenced by Twain's life and writings, he was a firm believer in his "law" of human nature which states: "spiritual wants and instincts are as various in the human family as are physical appetites, complexions, and features, and a man is only at his best, morally, when he is equipped with the religious garment whose color and shape and size most nicely accommodate themselves to the spiritual complexion, angularities, and stature of the individual who wears it" (XIV, 77). Twain was eloquent and stubborn in his unending battle for truth and the betterment of mankind, for he held as a supreme ideal the knowledge that all men, even though their religious outlooks may differ, can join together and create a better world by sharing a practical faith in truth, knowledge, freedom, and brotherly love.

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