

Ordination & Livings

IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND



- **Ordination:** *The rite of consecration (essentially the blessing) by which a person becomes a Christian minister.*
- **Living (or Benefice):** *An ecclesiastical office in which the incumbent is required to perform certain duties or conditions of a spiritual kind while being supported by the revenues attached to the office. A patron was a person or institution with the right to grant a benefice to a member of the clergy.*
- **Deacon:** *The lowest level of ordained clergyman who could perform some but not all ministerial functions.*
- **Priest:** *A clergyman who has undergone a second level of ordination and can perform most ecclesiastical functions, such as Eucharist and absolution of sins.*

Primary Sources : *Victorian Religion: Faith and Life in Britain* by Julie Melnyk (2008) & *Jane Austen: The Parson's Daughter* by Irene Collins (1998)

1

CURATE

Often hired by an incumbent clergyman to assist him with the duties of a parish.

2

RECTOR

The priest of a church in a parish that was self-supporting.

3

VICAR

The priest of a church in a parish that was not self-supporting.



Thirty-Nine Articles

Central defining statement of Anglican doctrine.



Glebe

An area of land donated to the church by parishioners for the benefit of the incumbent.



Tithe

The right of the clergy to receive a tenth of the annual gross product of all cultivated land in the parish.

Mansfield Park Discussion Questions

1. At Sotherton, Edmund, Fanny, and Fanny discuss the role of the clergy and religion in daily life extensively (pp. 86-88, 101-105). While Edmund defends the clergy as having the necessary “guardianship of religion and morals” (p.86) and religion in general as serving an important social function, he doesn’t persuade Mary or Fanny to feel exactly as he does. According to critic Colin Jager (*The Book of God: Secularization and Design in the Romantic Era*), Fanny and Mary want a different type of religious experience than Edmund is offering as seen in their different responses to Sotherton Chapel (pp. 80-82). On one hand, Fanny desires a more solemn, awe-inspiring space and a time when the whole family would assemble for prayer whereas Mary believes individuals should be left to their own devices on such subjects. For Jager, Fanny’s desire for a deeply felt religion and Mary’s wish that individuals be given the license to desire freely goes beyond Edmund’s understanding of religion. Do you agree or disagree with Jager’s reading? How do these three characters’ differing views on religion reflect their different personalities?
2. To Henry Crawford, Edmund insists that he has “no idea but of residence” (i.e. he will live full-time in his parish) (p. 228). Since it was not uncommon for clergy to hold multiple livings, nonresidency became an important social issue and was even debated in Parliament (leading to the passage of the Pluralities Acts of 1838 and 1850, which tightened the restrictions



on holding multiple clerical positions, termed “pluralism”). What then do we make of Sir Bertram’s strong speech about residency (p. 228-229)? Is Austen critiquing nonresident clergymen here? Or is the issue not so clear cut?

3. In another exchange with Henry, Edmund seems to lament the lack of professionalization among the clergy, particularly in the “art of reading” (p. 314). Based upon Edmund and Henry’s conversation, is the ability to read and deliver sermons with “distinctness and energy” derived from natural talent or something that is garnered through practice or training (pp. 314-316)? How does their conversation illuminate the type of religious training available to clergymen in the nineteenth century? Does Henry speak “lightly, irreverently” on this subject (as he suspects Fanny condemns him for)? Does his consideration of religious practice seem surprising in light of his behavior throughout the novel (p. 316)?

EVANGELICALISM: INFLUENCE ON JANE AUSTEN & MANSFIELD PARK

As a movement, Evangelicalism can be defined by these four characteristics: (1) **biblicism**: a particular regard for the Bible (i.e.. all essential spiritual truth is to be found in its pages); (2) **crucicentrism**: a focus on the atoning work of Christ on the cross; (3) **conversionism**: the belief that human beings need to be converted; and (4) **activism**, the belief that the gospel needs to be expressed in effort.

-David Bebbington’s *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*

In regards to the popular evangelical novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1808), Austen quipped: “My disinclination for the novel before was affected, but now it is real; I do not like the Evangelicals. Of course, I shall be delighted when I read it, like other people, but till I do, I dislike it.” Austen was no doubt aware of the influence and popularity of evangelical fiction during the early nineteenth century. On her own religious convictions, Austen would later observe that, “I am by no means convinced that we ought not all to be Evangelicals, & am at least persuaded that they who are so from Reason & Feeling, must be happiest & safest.” Drawing from this letter and evidence found in *Mansfield Park*, such as the novel’s reference to the slave trade (a practice condemned by evangelicals), Fanny’s religious convictions (such as the importance of consistency in character), and the novel’s more serious tone, critics have suggested that Austen was sympathetic to Evangelicalism, a movement that permeated not only the Anglican church but also nineteenth-century society as a whole.

Should we then classify *Mansfield Park* as an “evangelical” novel? Does Mary Crawford’s reaction to her brother’s elopement with Maria (it is “folly” but not “sin”) seem to be a type of watering down or secularization of immoral behavior that evangelicals so abhorred (pp. 421-426)? Furthermore, do Mary’s final words to Edmund that she will next hear of him “as a celebrated preacher in some great society of Methodists” (Methodism, which was deeply rooted in Evangelicalism, was noted for censoring the laxity and worldliness of the Anglican church) suggest that even she sees Edmund as an evangelical (p. 425)?