

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE GODLY:
THE EVOLUTION OF THE PASTOR IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

By

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For my father, my favorite pastor

The LORD is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.

Exodus 15:2

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Note: In keeping with the style of the English Standard Version (and most other English translations), pronouns referring to God will not be capitalized. This merely conveys the desire for consistency in style, not a lack of respect for God. Some quoted texts differ in the application of this convention, instead capitalizing these pronouns. These instances are retained when quoted.

ABSTRACT

The pastor remains a prevalent figure within American life and literature, revealing a dynamic avenue toward understanding the cultural conscience of the United States throughout its history. Most research regarding pastors focuses primarily upon the health and opinions of current pastors, favoring empirical data to trace trends as American culture continues to shift. Many of these studies demonstrate an increasing level of pastoral burnout and a decreasing level of public trust toward the clergy, yet little energy is given to exploring the qualitative nature behind these phenomena. This study involves a survey of major American literature over three centuries to investigate how the figure of the pastor has evolved throughout United States history. The portrayal of the literary pastor informs and represents our country's perception of Christian clergy. The surveyed literature presents a cohesive understanding of the pastor, illuminating a consistent perspective of his separation from congregants, hypocrisy of a double life, approaching ministry as a means of attaining significance, and the necessity of being fully known. The literary narrative grows pessimistic as America becomes increasingly secular. The pastor simultaneously evolves with his culture and retains essential aspects of his identity, lending both novelty and cohesion to the study.

PREFACE

In an era of ever-decreasing trust in the Christian church in America, the cultural landscape of a once-majority Christian nation continues to shift. A 2017 poll suggests pastoral unreliability as a key reason behind this dwindling level of trust. Those polled rated clergy's trustworthiness as forty-two percent, down from sixty-five percent in 1985 (Gallup). Fifty-seven percent of total Americans consider pastors "definitely" or "somewhat trustworthy sources of wisdom," while only twenty-two percent of non-Christians agree (Barna). Pastor burnout and turnover continues at high rates, with the two greatest reasons being "the overall stress of the job" and the "feelings of loneliness and isolation" (Barna). While neither of these factors is unique to pastors, our cultural perceptions of the role bolster these feelings of frustration and hopelessness distinctly. These Christian ministers, theoretically setting out to serve God in leadership positions, experience a vast range of cultural opinions. Their profession is often one of polarization, yet they still possess a prominent level of respect in American society. Further, pastors benefit from a rare kind of influence: spiritual authority. The pastor has a unique ability to make claims about the soul, eternity, and the divine in such a way that distinguishes the vocation from many others. Thus, we should not be surprised by the enduring prevalence of the figure in American culture and literature, nor should we be amazed by the breadth of opinions directed at pastors.

Even in a "post-Christian" world, the United States retains explicit Christian influence from deeply sown religious roots and continued Christian identification. There are over 1,500 American "megachurches" with over 2,000 attendees each week, ninety of which host more than 10,000 each week (Hartford Institute for Religion). Even if someone does not identify as a Christian, most Americans know someone who does. Further, the prevalence of these large-scale congregations lends itself to

media promotion, especially when their pastors are forced to resign due to abuse or impropriety (major examples from the last decade include popular voices like Mark Driscoll¹ of Mars Hill Church and Carl Lentz² of Hillsong Church, New York City). Thus, most Americans have some exposure to Protestant pastors, regardless of their religious affiliation which underscores the ubiquitous nature of the role within American culture. Ultimately, people from all belief systems and backgrounds may benefit from this analysis of literature and culture because of its prevailing relevance to America today.

American Christianity is not necessarily a sum of its parts. Studies cannot capture the spirit of religious experience. This has not stopped scholars from attempting to do so, however. A summary of social science provides a general framework for studies regarding American Christianity. Stephen Cox says,

Most social-scientific theories describe American Christianity as a class phenomenon (“the middle class and its religion”) that developed in response to the social and economic insecurities that afflict the middle class or to its growing prosperity and confidence—either explanation will do, or both at once ...Therefore, to most social scientists who address the issue, the history of American Christianity isn’t the story of a perennially productive field or an island gradually losing its ecological health; it’s the story of the great social storms that blow across the American heartland. (12)

While even a cursory understanding of theories regarding the development of American Christianity may help inform the progression of pastoral characters, Cox himself argues that there is a power that supersedes the impact of even large-scale movements. He understands that one of the major factors of Christianity’s prevailing influence in America is that of the individual:

American Christianity survives not by theories or systematic theologies. It survives by what transcends them all: life, individual experience, the way things actually happen, and the means by which they are made to happen, means that are strange, diverse, generally unpredictable, seldom sensible, often inspiring, and just as often annoying or unsettling, but remarkably informative about the American people. (31)

Through Cox’s lens, we understand how the individual religious experience within the context of American Christianity may transcend theoretical classification. If American Christianity is best understood by the individuals who practice it, then the office of pastor will similarly be best understood

¹ Driscoll became a leading evangelical voice in the 1990s, gaining prominence from his intense preaching style, internet savviness, and hyper-masculine teaching. After years of abuse, forty-one elders and pastors from the Mars Hill megachurch network raised concerns, prompting an investigation into Driscoll’s domineering and authoritarian leadership style. Driscoll eventually resigned in 2014, Mars Hill imploding almost immediately. In 2016, he founded The Trinity Church, a new megachurch in Scottsdale, Arizona. *Christianity Today* produced an excellent, albeit saddening, podcast series about this story entitled *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill*. Connecting to the literature, Driscoll shares many traits with Sinclair Lewis’ Elmer Gantry.

² Lentz, a charismatic Pentecostal preacher, earned a reputation through his closeness to celebrities such as Justin Bieber. He was ousted in 2020 by the Australia-based church network after six-month extramarital affair was exposed. In April of 2023, Tulsa’s Transformation Church added Lentz to its staff, marking his first position since the scandal.

by analyzing individuals who serve in that capacity. This project analyzes eleven different pastors in their individual literary contexts, ten of which are fictional, to illuminate how the perception of the role has changed throughout American history.

The precedent of giving specific attention to key Christian leaders has existed for multiple millennia, most prominently by Christ himself. Jesus' ministry illustrated his heart for the individuals who would become the first Christian leaders and pastors. Christ himself paid special attention to the importance of the individual, as explained by Robert E. Coleman in *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Coleman notes how Jesus "staked his whole ministry" upon twelve central disciples (31). Indeed, Jesus' "concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes, but with men whom the multitudes would follow" (27). The individual Christian leader holds spiritual weight, not just in the eyes of his followers, but also in God's sight. This is not to perpetuate the hyper-individualistic Christianity so commonly perceived in the United States. Christianity is not a religion of Stoic individuals—Christians are called to know God personally, but not in such a way that negates involvement in the Body of Christ. Instead, this illuminates Christ's own precedent of attending directly to the leaders who lead his Church, lending greater validity to this project's central premise.

One of the primary goals in my research has been to delineate the ways in which we come to understand a pastor. Do we get to know him primarily behind the pulpit? Or does a minister divulge his inner life through his relationships (or lack thereof)? More broadly, do the portrayals of Protestant ministers in American literature provide a comprehensive portrait of our cultural understanding of what makes a pastor? Or is there little unity between differing portrayals of these characters (suggesting that literary pastors operate as a convenient occupation for authors' imaginations)? I have sought to delineate both the *cohesion* and *evolution* of successive pastoral characters. By *cohesion* I mean concepts which relate to most, if not all, of the literary pastors. By *evolution* I mean meaningful departures or distinctiveness which can either distinguish a character from his predecessors *or* can serve as another avenue for retroactively analyzing them. These two, cohesion and evolution, are grounded within the framework of a colonial-era preacher's most famous sermon. I discovered a shocking level of consistency between the eight primary works despite over two-and-a-half centuries' worth of distance. A high priority was to ensure a diverse range of authorial beliefs and identities. Only two texts come from writers who identify as born-again Christians (Edwards and Robinson). The other six texts involve a variety of opinions regarding Christianity, some feeling neutral (Hawthorne, Melville, and Baldwin) and others hostile (Lewis and Miller). This range of time periods, identities, and belief systems provided necessary breadth for analyzing whether the literary conscience of Americans in general revealed a coherent composition of the figure of the pastor. I found that, while belief systems inform authorial biases, they do not overshadow the unity of these characters' experience. Subsequent works' innovations bolster previous readings rather than disqualifying them. Through this lens, I have sought to illuminate how both the unity and progression of the pastor in American literature provide a unique entrance into understanding his cultural significance.

This project is not intended to serve as an *explanation*, but rather an *exploration* of our cultural views toward pastors. Since none of the fictional works were penned by pastors, we are provided a clear narrative of pastoral progression through the eyes of non-pastors. This collection thus naturally lends

itself to analysis from an external positionality. As such, we read these characters with eyes from outside the pastorate, providing a higher focus upon how American beliefs about the pastorate. I will posit that much of the literature emphasizes foundations of pastoral difficulties, but I will refrain from suggesting whether literature *forms* or merely *represents* the culture during the time of writing.

For the sake of simplicity, I will apply the general terms *pastor* and *minister* to eleven characters in a typological sense, ultimately creating our understanding of the figure in American literature. Not every character holds the explicit title of “pastor,”—one is a revivalist, another a preaching deacon. In these cases, I will use the most specific language to their individual titles (“chaplain,” “preacher,” “minister”) without disqualifying their contribution to the overall portrait of the pastor in American literature. Even though a character like Sharon Falconer in *Elmer Gantry* never holds the direct role of “pastor,” her work mirrors that of her literary peers. She certainly contributes to the American literary perception of the office, thus warranting her inclusion. We begin our journey of understanding the American pastor by hearing from the historical figure of Jonathan Edwards in 1741 Enfield, Connecticut.

SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD

Jonathan Edwards was a primary player in the First Great Awakening, between the 1730s and 1750s. Because of his enduring status as a writer, theologian, and spiritual leader, he has maintained a reputation as one of the preeminent pastors in American history and the first to warrant attention in this project. He remains a cultural figurehead in America and is still largely revered by evangelical Christians (especially those who tend toward Calvinist theology). Edwards’ itinerant preaching, along with other revivalists such as George Whitefield, transformed the pastor into a celebrity in the northern colonies. In him, we see a real example of a man whose traits and actions set a clear archetype for what a pastor was to believe and preach. Though not himself a Puritan, Edwards illustrates the next step in the evolution of Puritan beliefs through his special focus on God’s sovereignty and man’s sin. These are both categorically biblical topics; neither Edwards nor Calvin created them. However, the emphasis and intensity in which these topics are prioritized illustrate a culture’s gospel sensitivities—that is, what they are most likely to *exposit* about the Bible; that is, clearly explain doctrine found in scripture. Through preaching, pastors offer a lens into a culture’s gospel emphases from the very people who guide the religious and moral zeitgeist. In this case, Jonathan Edwards.

Edwards’ influence on theology and pastoring provides an apt place to begin our reading of American clerical literature. Despite being a historical figure, categorically divorced from the fictional characters we shall subsequently explore, Jonathan Edwards provides a necessary link to understanding the relationship between pastor, preaching, culture, and fear. Edwards illustrates the bridge between the true-to-life office of the Christian minister in his most famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” first preached for his own congregation in 1741 and then to many other New England communities. This sermon comes at the middle of the First Great Awakening, a period in which many thousands of Americans were doubting their salvation, some coming to the front of their respective churches to “accept Jesus” for consecutive weeks because they feared the possibility of insincere conversion. Here, in 1741, Edwards brought America to the height of the First Great Awakening,

focusing on man's depravity and God's sovereignty. Most famously, Edwards preached the message in Enfield, Connecticut, where dozens of people ran to the altar in hysterics to accept Christ before the sermon was even concluded. Edwards himself was a reserved man with a philosophical mind and emotional disposition. To clearly see Edward's affections, here is an excerpt from his "Personal Narrative" of his conversion at eighteen:

The first instance that I remember of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things that I have lived much in since, was on reading those words (1 Timothy 1:17) "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever, Amen." As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from any thing I ever experienced before. Never any words of scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought with myself, how excellent a Being that was, and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be rapt up in him in heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in him forever! I kept saying, and as it were singing over these words of scripture to myself; and went to pray to God that I might enjoy him, and prayed in a manner quite different from what I used to do; with a new sort of affection. But it never came into my thought, that there was anything spiritual, or of a saving nature in this.

From about that time, I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by him. An inward, sweet sense of these things, at times, came into my heart; and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them. And my mind was greatly engaged to spend my time in reading and meditation on Christ, on the beauty and excellency of his person, and the lovely way of salvation by free grace in him...there came into my mind so sweet a sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God, that I know not how to express. (792-793)

A key to understanding Edwards' preaching is his gentle reflection on the beauty of his own conversion. Emotions are heavily emphasized and utilized in Edwards' work, which lays the groundwork for his most famous book, *Religious Affections*, written in 1746. The First Great Awakening occurred in a world where public emotional outbursts were the main evidence that someone had truly been "converted." These public displays of repentance were exceedingly common during this season of religious revival in the mid-eighteenth century. As a result, American evangelicalism had a primary focus on emotional reactions to God; this underscores the profound impact of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."

Analyzing Edwards' rhetoric and mission underscores repeated themes found in most of the texts we will subsequently use to build an understanding of the fictional American pastor. There is no better place to start than in the pews of Enfield, Connecticut in 1741. His legacy has left a clear archetype of the quasi-Puritan intellectual and revivalist, combining both the commanding rhetoric of charismatic preachers and the academic precision of scholarly pastors. In Edwards, the scholar and revivalist coexist in one man—one man whose hellfire and brimstone sermon carved a path for both the Christian revival growing out of the Great Awakening and American literature as a whole. Leigh Gallagher goes so far as to claim that "there will never be an American literature without 'Sinners in the

Hands of an Angry God” (202). The sermon’s significance, both literary and social, is clear, even if its content provokes discomfort. Through Edwards’ incendiary sermon concerning God’s wrath and man’s evil, we see an unfamiliar sight to modern readers, regardless of religiosity.

Rather than love, the cardinal virtue of the Christian life and Christ’s character (and what is most commonly preached in modern pulpits), Edwards places his focus upon God’s wrath against sin. In doing so, man’s depravity becomes immediately apparent in the sermon, effectively eschewing any semblance of security for the audience. He does this by a logical formal progression, beginning the sermon by arguing ten points which all emphasize the inability for man to escape God’s judgment. In fact, Edwards claims, the only reason that people are not currently suffering in hell is God’s conscious mercy to keep them from sliding into it while they still live, saying, “the only reason why they are not fallen already . . . is only that God’s appointed time is not come . . . God will not hold them up in these slippery places any longer, but will let them go” (4). Edwards immediately asserts man’s complete incapacity to effect any change regarding his eternal standing with God. If this continues, he claims that the unbelieving person will surely spend an eternity in torment. This argument builds through ten sub-claims, each of them possessing a sharp focus on man’s wickedness, Satan’s hostility, or God’s omnipotence. In a Christian context, Edwards leaves no space for listeners to object on the grounds of their own moral “goodness” or wisdom. In point nine he says,

The greater part of those who heretofore have lived under the same means of grace, and are now dead, are undoubtedly gone to hell; and it was not because they were not as wise as those who are now alive: it was not because they did not lay out matters as well for themselves to secure their own escape (8).

Edwards desires that his listeners feel the weight of their unworthy excuse spanning millennia, fully aware that their *modern and rational* knowledge of the world cannot separate their souls from the same fate of those damned thousands of years prior. Edwards assumes the voice of a man in hell to mock the idea that anyone can delude himself into security, saying, “Death outwitted me: God’s wrath was too quick for me. Oh, my cursed foolishness! I was flattering myself . . . I was saying, Peace and safety, then suddenly destruction came upon me” (9). “Sinners” has built a theologically precise and emotionally overwhelming tension through its construction. Its lean lists instigate a great deal of fear. Halfway through the sermon, there has been no good news, only miserable declarations of hell’s certainty to those outside of Christ. Through this first half, we see a key notion in understanding the role of the American pastor in literature. He becomes a mouthpiece of fear. Not fear in itself, but fear with direction and purpose. In “Sinners,” Edwards is employing the fear of eternal insecurity *ad nauseam* through the feeling of a case being built against the listeners. The list of charges only increases. There seems to be no hope: God’s divine hand will surely prevail against man’s self-righteousness.

“Sinners” provides a glimpse into how the pastor has a unique role in plumbing the depths of man’s anxieties. Furthermore, the pastor utilizes the knowledge of these anxieties for a unique purpose. The minister has authority over the people he preaches to and perceived power through his knowledge of God and the Scriptures (“perceived” in the sense that a pastor has no greater standing or influence with God than any other Christian according to the Bible, but congregants can easily feel the opposite). In fact, the minister holds what I would call the deepest kind of authority over his flock: spiritual

authority. This cuts to the core of man's soul, the place where the most profound joys and fears reside. When a pastor speaks clearly about condemnation and hell, listeners quickly gain a sense that the pastor himself has power over people's souls (albeit untrue and unbiblical). Being an arbiter of eternity gives a great deal of power to a preacher. Even if parishioners successfully keep pastor and God distinct, the pastor still possesses great spiritual power and authority. He retains confidence in his salvation, knowing where he stands with God. From behind the pulpit, Edwards seems the only secure person in the room.

Even in his presentation of such an "awful subject" as he would call it (10), however, Edwards does so with purpose. The fear stoked in "Sinners," as well as any anxieties in clerical literature are presented constructively. Edwards says his sermon "may be for awakening unconverted persons in this congregation" and to replace God's wrath with his loving salvation (10, 17). Interestingly, the indictment brought against sinners throughout the text also includes the same elements that can provide security upon conversion, namely God's sovereignty and grace. He has asserted that "were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you one moment" (11), yet this sovereign pleasure now provides an invitation to respond. He notes the religious and cultural climate of the Great Awakening in putting forth the offer of salvation, saying, "many that were very lately in the same miserable condition that you are in, are no in a happy state, with their hearts filled with love to him who has loved them...are not your souls as precious as [theirs]?" (18-19). Edwards' goal is to use the fear from his rhetoric to stir his listeners to a point of decision, to be saved from God's wrath and instead enjoy security of the soul.

Eternal security and the pastor's unique place to preach of it establishes a clear framework for understanding the prevailing literary association between pastors and fear. The pastor maintains a sort of distance from his congregation behind the pulpit. Through this, he can speak from a place of security while using the listeners' insecurity to profound effect. Fear and insecurity become a primary subject in the literature, with the Christian pastor as a mouthpiece for it. Although Edwards' sermon may feel outdated in its rhetoric and emphases, "Sinners" demonstrates the power a pastor can have over congregants, and the impact one man can have on an entire region through the written word. Nathaniel Hawthorne created two Puritan ministers with similar traits to Jonathan Edwards. These characters, Reverends Hooper and Dimmesdale, serve as our first two character studies.

THE MINISTER'S BLACK VEIL

Nathaniel Hawthorne, a direct descendant of New England Puritans, authored his short story "The Minister's Black Veil" in 1836. The work is set in the late seventeenth century Milford, Massachusetts, a Puritan town. "The Minister's Black Veil" is notable for introducing themes further explored in *The Scarlet Letter*, especially the distance between pastor and parishioner, the schism between person and parson, and the results of Puritanism. The work relates the "parable," as Hawthorne subtitled it, of Milford's Reverend Hooper who wears a black veil over his face until his death. The piece of fabric leaves only his mouth exposed. Even in death, the black veil covers Hooper's

skull. The veil serves to separate Hooper from Milford, inspiring fear within his parishioners who fear to allow him into the truth of their sinfulness. Hooper surpasses Jonathan Edwards in the ability to inspire fear—his very presence imparts dread, as well as his words, whereas Edwards' *sermon*, not his *presence*, instilled fear into New Englanders in the Great Awakening. Hooper allows the veil to even separate him from his wife, Elizabeth, who begs to see his face just one more time before she accepts his isolation. Despite this, the veil makes Hooper a more effective pastor as his power and influence increase through his eccentricity. One of the main reasons for the veil's effectiveness is the seeming lack of reason behind its presence. Hooper maintains the mystery behind the veil throughout the entire text; he shares no specific impetus regarding his decision to first wear the veil, amplifying its unsettling effect on Milford's populace. Hawthorne includes a historical footnote on the first page of his short story, grounding the symbolism into the real scenario of a New England clergyman from the eighteenth century:

Mr. Joseph Moody of York, Maine, who died about eighty years since, made himself remarkable by the same eccentricity that his here related of the Reverend Mr. Hooper. In his case, however, the symbol had a different import. In early life he had accidentally killed a beloved friend; and from that day till the hour of his own death, he hid his face from men. (285)

Hawthorne's inclusion of this historical source bridges the gap between parable and reality, further suggesting the nearness of this fictional character to the world we live in.

The narrator quickly illustrates the fear that Rev. Hooper's veil causes. There is immediate and visceral anxiety that arises from looking at the pastor. Upon Hooper's first veiled entrance, a congregant asks her friend, "Are you sure it is our parson?" (285). Another exclaims, "Our parson has gone mad!" (286). The veil instantly changes Hooper's significance and identity which conveyed by an old woman's comment: "he has changed himself into something awful, only by hiding his face." Despite being a small piece of fabric, the veil effectively transforms the "gentlemanly person" Rev. Hooper into something else—*something* instead of *someone*. The narrator explains that the veil "entirely concealed his features, except for the mouth and chin." Congregants only relate to the part of Hooper they can see. In this case, Hooper's mouth becomes the sole connection between himself and his flock, effectively reducing him to a symbolic mouthpiece. The person of Rev. Hooper being reduced to his mouth suggests a symbolic reading of the pastor in which parishioners esteem him merely for his words. As a mouthpiece, he can deliver sermons and wisdom, but nothing more. This allegorical reduction of a man into merely one of his facial features presents a larger theme explored in later texts; a common belief in this literature is that a pastor is little more than what he says behind the pulpit. His words become his identity—the only part of him left exposed to the world. One of his congregants comments, "the black veil, though it covers only our pastor's face, throws its influence over his whole person" (289). The "influence" becomes a ubiquitous, impenetrable barrier between Hooper and Milford, illustrating the repeated theme of distance between pastor and parishioner.

The narrator presents a straightforward explanation of the divide between Hooper and his flock, demonstrating a prevailing belief for modern Americans. Hooper is the initiator of the fear and separation of his congregants. The weight of this distance rests on Hooper for inspiring the "feeling of dread, neither plainly confessed nor carefully concealed" (291). The Reverend understands the implications of the veil and still chooses to wear it. In fact, he *desires* to be distanced from his flock,

citing his own personal convictions from God, tinged with self-destructive guilt. He tells his wife Elizabeth, “this dismal shade must separate me from the world” (293). The absolutism in his voice is clear; his declaration is unequivocal, even if it separates him from his beloved. When Elizabeth probes at the deeper reason of the veil (and its absurdity), Hooper clarifies its intention. He asks, “and if I cover [my face] for secret sin, what mortal might not do the same?” Hooper’s veil becomes, at least partially, a means of self-atonement for some kind of “secret sin.” In turn, Hooper believes his sin to be so great that he must punish himself through isolation for the rest of his life, regardless of how that affects others. Hooper’s eccentricity is selfish and hyperbolic, but an apt demonstration of the universal experience of how failure, guilt, or shame can cause someone to withdraw from the community. The failure of Hooper’s withdrawal rests solely on him. Unfortunately, its dreadful implications extend to everyone in Milford: himself, Elizabeth, and his flock.

Hooper’s mysterious decision to wear the veil arises from within; however, he readily becomes a passive character after first donning the piece of fabric. This is especially clear through how easily he forsakes the pursuit of meaningful relationships with his parishioners. Hooper merely fulfills his duties, nothing more. Parson Hooper submits to the veil’s power, living in fear that he will see his own reflection in the mirror (295). His actions suggest that he is too horrible, too far removed to receive people’s love or affection. In distancing himself, Hooper empties himself as a *person* to become merely a *parson*. This emptying is manifested in Hooper’s complete focus on work, his value to the community being defined solely by what he accomplishes. Viewing Rev. Hooper as a worker before a person is not the church’s fault—Hooper has established this distant relationship through his own hiddenness, impossible for anyone to bridge. In this way, the narrator introduces the complexity of the situation. Despite Rev. Hooper’s relationships now defined by what he *does* rather than who he *is*, “the black veil had one desirable effect, of making its wearer a very efficient clergymen . . . he became a man of awful power, over souls that were in agony for sin . . . “[the veil’s] gloom, indeed, enabled him to sympathize with all dark afflictions.” The congregation tolerates, even celebrates, the chasm fixed by the minister’s black veil once they understand its effectiveness. The pastor’s work is elevated above his own health or well-being, a precedent that has prevailed until modern times. If a minister is more effective as an island, should we condone the divide altogether? Should Christians expect to live far-removed from their spiritual shepherds—that the separation may be for the flock’s best? The answer to both questions is a resounding “no” in Hawthorne’s parable. Hooper’s isolation is not noble, but a form of self-hatred. The narrator says, “From beneath the black veil, there rolled a cloud into the sunshine...so that love or sympathy could never reach him” (295). The distance is final. The distance has wrought havoc on his inner self. Hooper’s increased effectiveness and “power” over souls do not justify his reduction from man to his job title. He was “shunned in their health and joy, but ever summoned to their aid in mortal anguish” (296). We see that the veil has an overall negative effect, despite the caveat of making Hooper’s work well-suited to the dark places of the soul. In its extreme form (such as “The Minister’s Black Veil”), the relational schism between the pulpit and the pew leads to lifeless relationships where the pastor is slowly emptied of his humanity. Further, congregants lose out on the life-giving nurturance from their parson. Parishioners thus seek a false comfort arising from the impenetrable gap between themselves and their pastor. All this fear and hiddenness stem from another recurring theme in clerical literature: secret sin.

The first sermon that Hooper preaches after donning the veil indicted secret sin and people's lack of vulnerability; this combined with Hooper's later comment to Elizabeth about secret sin suggests a connection between veil and guilty conscience. However, the final pages of the short story provide the clearest depiction of why Hooper wore the black veil for his remaining years. Hawthorne's parable concludes with a confrontation between the bedridden Rev. Hooper and a young minister who attempts to persuade the dying parson to remove the black veil. Hooper exclaims,

"Why do you tremble at me alone...tremble also at each other! Have men avoided me, and women shown no pity, and children screamed and fled, only for my black veil? What, but the mystery which it obscurely typifies, has made this piece of crape so awful? When the friend shows his inmost heart to his friend; the lover to his best beloved; when man does not vainly shrink from the eye of his Creator, loathsomely treasuring up the secret of his sin; then deem me a monster, for the symbol beneath which I have lived, and die! I look around me, and lo! on every visage a Black Veil!"

While his auditors shrank back from one another, in mutual affright, Father Hooper fell back upon his pillow, a veiled corpse, with a faint smile lingering on his lips. (298)

Hooper portrays himself as a martyr in his final monologue by implying that he has righteously held back judgment toward everyone's hidden sin for decades, somehow bearing the weight of their sins by himself. The pastor suggests that his veil is merely an outward expression of the state of all sinners' hearts. There has been a message behind his eccentricity all along: everyone is guilty. Hooper believes himself to be the only person in Milford who outwardly accepts his guilty status before God. As we discovered with Jonathan Edwards, the pastor has an established connection between God and man, possessing social power over conversations relating to eternity. Hooper's final words indict everyone's cowardice and comfort, reminding us of pastors' power to stoke purposeful fear. Like Edwards, Hooper's words evoke terror in the hearers. They cut to the soul. The reverend dies as he reveals the extent to which all people are marred by secret sin, especially in a society where the *appearance* of holiness is valued above truth (such as "when the friend shows his inmost heart to his friend"). Hooper declares that everyone is hidden, guilty, fearful, and ashamed. Rev. Hooper, a man who inspired fear throughout his life, now cements dread in his death. However, the anxiety he produces is more explicit in his final moments. Instead of a general dread caused by his appearance, Hooper's words convey the people's anxiety of being exposed to the truth about themselves. Through this, we comprehend more clearly why the townspeople seek comfort in distance from their pastor—they have understood, at some basic level, that Hooper knew the depth of their sin. In his first sermon with the veil, many "felt as if the preacher had crept upon them, behind his awful veil, and discovered their hoarded iniquity of deed or thought" (287). Hooper's final words go beyond *suggesting* secret sin, now they *knowingly condemn* the "hoarded iniquity" that causes congregants to hide from each other (and their pastor). No wonder Hooper's final words, a clear indictment of everyone around him, are so dreadful to the hearers. He has known the truth about Milford's people all along—yet only now does Hooper bring a charge against them. Hawthorne uses Rev. Hooper to demonstrate this truth that hiding behind a veil, literal or figurative, cannot heal the broken places of the soul. Furthermore, Hawthorne suggests an explicit reason behind the distance between shepherd and flock in clerical literature arises from a silent acknowledgment of

each other's sin, causing people to pursue comfort through distance rather than show the truth about themselves.

"The Minister's Black Veil" provides a final element necessary to this project by exploring implications of Puritan culture. Puritanism is commonly remembered for its lack of moral ambiguity. Black-and-white thinking is apparent: someone is either guilty or innocent; with us or against us; right or wrong. This preoccupation for binary thinking has prevailed in the United States, even if postmodernism has eroded some of its power. To be clear, truth exists; I do not mean to suggest otherwise. Rather, I would argue that the rigidity of Puritanism produced a dangerous culture in which complexity is shirked. Understanding an opposing viewpoint is seen as treacherous or submitting to falsehood. Appearances are more valued than authenticity. Our country is still wracked with polarization in almost every area, many of which only have two sides clearly presented: "for" or "against." For example, our country is one of the only developed societies with a two-party system. These are mere glimpses into the implications of the lasting influence of Puritanism's influence. In "The Minister's Black Veil," Hooper is the complication to Puritan ideology. His character is revered, his holiness affirmed, and his ministry lauded. Still, he becomes a figure of dread and discomfort to all of Milford. Hooper does not conform to a tidy description of either "good" or "bad." He is complex, always veiled to his congregants and the reader. Yet, as he casts guilt upon everyone in his dying breath, Rev. Hooper dies by communicating that Puritanism has become a veil to truth—secret sin is tolerated, while honest confession is not. Hooper sees the truth behind people's proverbial veils: they are sinful, yet ashamed. They are broken, yet too proud to ask for help. They are desperate, yet isolated. The Puritans of Milford are more concerned with seeming holy than seeking freedom of their souls, ultimately submitting to the suffocating impact of their figurative veils. Hawthorne demonstrates through a clergyman, the person elevated above all others in a highly religious society, that people's actions are more complex than Puritanism's monochromatic worldview accepts. Even so, Puritanism's vestigial impact prevails, taking further shape in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Crucible*. Hawthorne develops the idea of Puritan hiddenness in his later novel while also giving a clear exhortation designed to counter the power of secret sin.

THE SCARLET LETTER

Thus far, we have observed how the pastor serves as God's mouthpiece to his people. In his position behind the pulpit, pastors possess a profound power extending into eternity. Edwards and Hooper together forge an idea of a pastor as the mouthpiece for purposeful fear. Further, Hooper introduces the idea of how a pastor distances himself from his congregation, and the self-perpetuating effect of that separation. Often, as in the case of Rev. Hooper, secret sin lies at the crux of the division between the pastor and his flock. Even so, a pastor can still be ministerially effective despite the relational chasm fixed between himself and his parishioners. This effectiveness, at the cost of the minister's well-being, creates an internal schism between person and parson. In further discussions of this concept, I will employ person-parson terminology to pastors as a whole, not limited to those characters directly labeled "parsons" like Rev. Hooper.

The Scarlet Letter, written in 1850, provides specificity to the portrait of the American pastor in “The Minister’s Black Veil” and supplies thematic consistency for American clerical literature, first expounded upon in Hawthorne’s short story. Rev. Hooper intimated that all people veil their secret sin; Arthur Dimmesdale provides the premier example of the internal duress caused by sin festering behind a veil of secrecy. Rev. Dimmesdale suffers from the same distance of pastor and parishioner that Hooper experiences, made more pointed because of the explicit explanation of his immorality. A nameless custom-house clerk from the mid-nineteenth century narrates *The Scarlet Letter*, a story set from 1642 to 1649 in Puritan Boston. The novel follows two protagonists: Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale, as they separately reap the consequences of engaging in an extramarital affair. Their sexual relationship leads to Hester’s pregnancy with Pearl—unavoidable evidence of her sin. Dimmesdale’s part in the affair remains shrouded by his ambivalent secrecy. The Puritans publicly shame Prynne as an adulteress while Dimmesdale hides the truth about his transgression. As the text progresses, Hester’s despair gradually fades. Dimmesdale’s guilt only grows, causing his health to increasingly deteriorate. Worse, Hester’s estranged husband, Roger Chillingworth, takes it upon himself to secretly torment Dimmesdale as revenge for the affair. After seven years of hiding his sin, Dimmesdale declares his sin to the town, holding his Pearl’s hand on the scaffold where Hester was first branded a sinner. Dimmesdale then dies, finally at peace.

The narrator describes Dimmesdale in similar terms to Jonathan Edwards: he is a “young divine, whose scholar-like renown still lived in Oxford” and “was considered by his more fervent admirers as little less than a heaven-ordained apostle” (102). His voice is tremulous, his demeanor meek. He is simultaneously esteemed for his holiness and his intelligence. Even Chillingworth, one of the few non-Christians in the text, appreciates Dimmesdale’s rational faith and thirst for scientific knowledge. Dimmesdale possesses “an intellectual cultivation...together with a range and freedom of ideas,” a rare quality in Puritans, especially Puritan pastors. Taken together, these features present a picture of a pastor unable to err. He seems morally upright and intellectually seasoned. His ministerial work is lauded. Only his health gives cause for concern, some townspeople suggesting that his illness may reveal spiritual suffering. Dimmesdale is a rare Puritan pastor who extends mercy before judgment, likely because of his own thirst to receive grace from his flock.

The *external* portrait of Dimmesdale illustrates a pastor who fulfills every requirement and expectation that a pastor should aspire to, in both character and competencies. This is why the *internal* secret sin of sexual immorality perniciously destroys his soul. The Bible explains that sexual immorality is the only kind of sin pointed against God, another person, *and* oneself (see 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Dimmesdale explains his and Hester’s sexual relationship as “when we forgot our God—when we violated our reverence for the other’s soul” (220). There is an intimate quality involved within sexual expression that cuts to the core of a person because sex provides the opportunity to be fully known by another. Hawthorne understands the profound damage that sexual sin wreaks upon the soul, especially for a pastor, who will “be judged more severely” (James 3:1). Turning the ambiguous “secret sin” from “The Minister’s Black Veil” into a pointed example of adultery in *The Scarlet Letter* conveys two lessons. First, pastors failing due to sexual impropriety is not a new development, yet it must be closely observed in the literature because of its recurring presence in subsequent texts like *Elmer Gantry* and *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Second, sexual sin reveals clear hypocrisy within a minister’s life, regardless of his overall

character. The profundity of adultery's power in the soul shows to the pastor and the reader that he is without excuse. He has fallen short. The saintly clergyman understands his own need for grace, providing redemptive opportunity in his story. Most ministers (including Dimmesdale), however, choose to hide rather than confess. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the pastor's sexual sin separates him from fellowship. Townspeople elevate Dimmesdale to an unreasonable degree in their veneration of him. Ironically, this appreciation for his "holiness" causes Dimmesdale to isolate himself further into self-loathing. The chasm between his understanding of his hypocrisy and the people's perception of his "spotlessness" illustrates how sexual sin directly creates the distance between Dimmesdale and his flock.

"The Minister's Black Veil" introduced the idea of a gap between pastor and parishioner, and Hawthorne expands upon this notion in *The Scarlet Letter* through Dimmesdale's gradual withdrawal from his flock. External pressure leading to Dimmesdale's distance arises from his congregants. Parishioners etherealize him, saying that his preaching affects them "like the speech of an angel" (58). While he languishes in guilt—and his health consistently wanes—parishioners approach worshiping him for his "spotless" character. They understand the failure of his health through this lens, never considering that Dimmesdale's hidden sin is the true reason for his suffering:

By those best acquainted with his habits, the paleness of the young minister's cheek was accounted for by his too earnest devotion of study, his scrupulous fulfilment of parochial duty, and, more than all, by the fasts and vigils of which he made a frequent practice, in order to keep the grossness of this earthly state from clogging and obscuring his spiritual lamp. Some declared, that, if Mr. Dimmesdale were really going to die, it was cause enough, that the world was not worthy to be any longer trodden by his feet. (102)

Dimmesdale, however, emphasizes his unworthiness in response to their romanticized claims. Even so, congregants perceive all his actions through such a lens. To Dimmesdale, there seems to be no possibility of parishioners seeing him accurately; in truth, he is a broken man. He cannot bear their quasi-worship. He has grown sick of discrepancy between his self-hatred and their exaltation of him, the narrator claiming, "this public veneration tortured him" (122). Dimmesdale sees two paths forward: he could either distance himself from their praise, deeming it false and unjustified, or he could explicitly confess his adultery to the congregation. He takes the middle road. Dimmesdale intimates his sin in a sermon, saying, "he was altogether vile, a viler companion of the vilest, the worst of sinners, an abomination, a thing of unimaginable iniquity" (123). Yet, his half-confession stirs their affection for him more deeply than before. Because of his public image as a heavenly emissary, unable to err, hearers "little guessed what deadly purport lurked in those self-condemning words," instead calling him "saint on earth" and "godly youth." Dimmesdale takes the wide path. He chooses to withdraw. While Rev. Hooper initiated the distance between himself and his flock, Dimmesdale becomes a passive victim of it. He still possesses a degree of agency, always retaining the ability to confess, yet he opts to suffer in silence instead by accepting the "momentary relief of being self-deceived."

Hawthorne advances two arguments from the congregation's myopia and Dimmesdale's withdrawal: firstly, even when a pastor is humble, there is significant risk in praising him to the point of quasi-worship. Man is not designed to be worshiped. While their praise does not cause Dimmesdale to grow prideful (unlike many other pastors who receive such praise), it *does* cause him to feel hopeless

and misunderstood. This produces the sentiment that he *must* separate from them to escape from their naïve affirmation which reminds him of his hypocrisy. Only Dimmesdale understands the falsehood behind their commendation. He is separated from the crowds. His hypocrisy remains unknown, yet his guilt burns all the hotter each passing day. Without an understanding of Dimmesdale's fallibility and personal need for the gospel, the congregation unwittingly perpetuates his isolation, self-hatred, and illness. Hawthorne tempers our perceptions of the pastor, reminding us that even the best of men struggle with sin in their own lives. Hawthorne does not justify Dimmesdale, but instead underscores his humanity. To close our ears to the cries of spiritual leaders yields deeper hiddenness and thus a larger gap between pastor and congregant. While this distance may feel comfortable for congregants, *The Scarlet Letter* exposes the damage it does to the pastor's spirit. When a church's comfort outweighs a leader's health, serious repercussions follow.

The Scarlet Letter evokes a new development in how pastors communicate fear. Jonathan Edwards stoked parishioners' anxiety for eternal damnation through the rhetoric in his preaching. Hooper incited dread for secret sin through his symbolic black veil. Hawthorne combines the fears of insecurity and secret sin through Dimmesdale's guilt-ridden conscience; the clergyman's inner self becomes the vehicle of communicating terror. Hawthorne invokes the doubts from "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" by suggesting that pastors, too, may share a lack of security. Dimmesdale never doubts his salvation, but constantly worries that he will be exposed as a hypocrite. He lives in fear. The pastor's anxiety surrounding being exposed explains the cognitive dissonance arising from the praise he receives and his own self-condemnation. While Hooper abruptly distanced himself from his congregation, Dimmesdale slowly submits to passivity. There is a pernicious quality to Dimmesdale's belief that he can maintain his holy façade. He can be "father" to many in Boston, yet he cannot allow his own daughter to call him by that name. The narrator explains, "Trusting no man as his friend, he could not recognize the enemy" (111). How can Dimmesdale feel secure if he remains unknown by those around him? How might he confess his fears without first confessing his sin? How might he experience freedom without first trusting someone? Dimmesdale exhibits such passivity in his hiddenness that "the enemy" initiates first.

Roger Chillingworth, living in the same home as Dimmesdale, probes the pastor's psyche to expose him. Ever vigilant, Dimmesdale responds fearfully to Chillingworth's entreaties to confide in him. He says, "Not to thee! Not to an earthly physician . . . I commit myself to the one Physician of the soul! But who art thou, that meddlest in this matter? That dares thrust himself between the sufferer and his God?" (117). Dimmesdale does not yet understand Chillingworth's evil intentions, so his passionate rebuke of the physician sounds inconsistent with his soft-spoken nature. His anxiety, especially when "haunted either by Satan himself, or Satan's emissary, in the guise of old Roger Chillingworth," (109) rises to the surface. Composure crumbles under closer examination. No degree of separation from people can protect Dimmesdale from the feeling that his ministry will eventually fail because of his secret sin. This "diabolical agent" surveils Dimmesdale at a more profound level than his congregation. While the Bostonians observe Dimmesdale's piety, Chillingworth searches for hypocrisy. Dimmesdale's growing keenness toward Chillingworth's motives inflames his dread all the more. This interplay between God's ambassador and Satan's emissary provides a deeper understanding of the fear Hawthorne posits in the text. Not only is Dimmesdale fearful that he will be exposed as a hypocrite, but

he fears that his ruin will come at the hand of Satan himself. While Boston regards the spiritual battle a “struggle toward [Dimmesdale’s] triumph,” the narrator explains the truth: “the battle was a sore one, and the victory any thing but secure!” Dimmesdale shares the narrator’s analysis. His victory, his image, his ministry, are “any thing but secure.” Hawthorne’s novel illustrates the possibility that a faithful pastor may have less faith than his congregants—faith in the sense that God will fulfill His promises of spiritual victory over evil. Dimmesdale conveys the deep humanity of pastors in his suffering. Weakness shakes his faith. His resolve erodes. His anxiety heightens. Dimmesdale is altogether human, fearful, and confused. Insecurity coming from the pastor’s own psyche both humanizes Dimmesdale and exacerbates fear.

The Scarlet Letter lends American clerical literature a vital development: the exhortation to “Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred” (222). Dimmesdale’s story serves as an allegory of how the soul withers as a result of failing to “be true.” The consequences of hypocrisy, of maintaining the schism between inner life and outer reputation, ruin Dimmesdale. They transform the romantic saint into a hollow shell. The narrator reveals the pain from Dimmesdale’s hiddenness, but also the cure. Ironically, the first suggestion for Dimmesdale to “be true” comes from his mortal enemy, Chillingworth. Dimmesdale justifies his double life, shrouding his actions in vague generalizations. He delineates why pastors (in this case, Dimmesdale himself) might choose to maintain their lies.

Guilty as they may be, retaining, nevertheless, a zeal for God’s glory and man’s welfare, they shrink from displaying themselves black and filthy in the view of men; because, thenceforward, no good can be achieved by them; no evil of the past be redeemed by better service. So, to their own unutterable torment, they go about among their fellow creatures, looking pure as new-fallen snow; while their hearts are all speckled and spotted with iniquity of which they cannot rid themselves. (113)

Dimmesdale’s argument skews the value of moral integrity for the sake of external results. Although his beliefs damage his own health and soul, there is a twisted logic to them. In placing ministry above truth, Dimmesdale reveals the root of temptation for pastors who never divulge their weakness. Results trump truth when a man has something to hide. Chillingworth rebuts Dimmesdale’s ministerial utilitarianism by saying, “Wouldst thou have me to believe . . . that a false show can be better—can be more for God’s glory, or man’s welfare—than God’s own truth? Trust me, such men deceive themselves!” (113). “Satan’s emissary” ironically provides the truth to Dimmesdale, albeit from a desire to see Dimmesdale destroyed. In this the narrator illustrates that the truth always remains true, regardless of its source. Even when coming from a man such as Chillingworth, the sentiment proves accurate—no degree of success in ministry justifies a double life. As appealing as it may be, a pastor must not prioritize his effectiveness over inward truth. All pastors struggle with sin in their own ways, of course, but Dimmesdale’s sexual impropriety with Hester, his own parishioner, completely compromises him. The narrator frames the tension between Dimmesdale’s sin and his office by saying, “As a priest, the framework of his order inevitably hemmed him in” (172). To explain the “inevitably hemming” nature of pastoring, we must consider the biblical qualifications of the role. The apostle Paul wrote about overseers (still applicable to modern-day elders and pastors) of the church:

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

Dimmesdale, while fulfilling the external moral requirements of a biblical overseer, does not live above reproach. He has not been “the husband of one wife,” meaning *faithful to his wife*. This conveys the importance for a pastor to possess the self-control to abstain from sexual immorality, even if he remains unmarried. Regardless of the fruit of his ministry, Dimmesdale has disqualified himself from serving as pastor. His passivity and anxiety, however, produce cowardice through secrecy. The only option for redemption to Dimmesdale, and pastors in general, is confession—to “be true,” regardless of consequence.

Until Dimmesdale’s public confession, the narrative tells the story of a man’s soul withering because he fails to admit his brokenness to others. Left to his own devices, Dimmesdale’s sin will lead to his death—he requires external pressure to “be true.” Hester motivates Dimmesdale’s turn to truth. Dimmesdale’s first glimpse of hope occurs when meeting Hester in the forest, seven years after Pearl’s birth. Dimmesdale laments his hiddenness to Hester, saying, “I have laughed in bitterness and agony of heart, at the contrast between what I seem and what I am! And Satan laughs at it! . . . I should long ago have thrown off these garments of mock holiness, and have shown myself to mankind” (164). Despite her belief that Dimmesdale’s holy life represents the truth of his nature, not his past sin, Dimmesdale exclaims that being publicly branded as an adulterer would be preferable to his double life. The cost has been too great. He has suffered too long at his own hand. Dimmesdale furthers his point, simultaneously relieved and passionate, saying, “Thou little knowest what a relief it is, after the torment of a seven years’ cheat, to look into an eye that recognizes me for what I am! Had I one friend,—or were it my worst enemy!—to whom . . . I could daily betake myself, and be known as the vilest of all sinners, methinks my soul might keep itself alive thereby.” In showing his soul to Hester, Dimmesdale experiences some catharsis. The relief he feels at speaking honestly with Hester spurs him on to desire more—a confessor. Dimmesdale desires to “be true,” to show himself as he truly is, but on his own terms. God does not permit Dimmesdale security in the form of a confessor, however. Instead, Dimmesdale’s redemption comes through death to both parts of his double life.

Hawthorne provides gospel-centric hope in the narrative climax as Dimmesdale climbs the scaffold steps to announce his seven-years of deception. Having glimpsed the relief of confession with Hester in the forest, Dimmesdale chooses to hold his daughter’s hand in front of the town, a public display of his identity as her father: the first death. His carefully curated “mock holiness” evaporates on the scaffold. His choice to “be true” exposes his shame to all. His reputation as a spotless minister of the gospel rightfully dies—so too, does his fear. Dimmesdale resists the lure of passivity because of his hope

for freedom and his confidence that God will judge him graciously. Watching Dimmesdale, the congregation is “thoroughly appalled, yet overflowing with tearful sympathy” (217). While they squirm at his confession, they also extend far more grace than he expects. The congregation, as much as Puritans can, reward Dimmesdale for being true to them. They believe Dimmesdale “had won a victory,” the same victory that they were convinced of years prior—the victory that the narrator claimed was “any thing but secure.” Finally, their pastor has attained the triumph they always expected, albeit through more severe means than anticipated. The second death is literal; Dimmesdale’s soul leaves his body as Hester holds him on the scaffold. The end of Dimmesdale’s secret sin amounts to his death; however, death contains deep hope for Christians. Dimmesdale has looked forward to the time when he will yield up his “miserable secrets . . . at the last day, not with reluctance, but with a joy unutterable” (112). Dimmesdale’s sin, while damaging to both Hester and him, never separates him from God’s faithfulness. He believes, for much of the narrative, that his redemption will only come after his death. God, in his grace, provides him a dual redemption. God provides Dimmesdale redemption in this life through the crucible of public confession, through which the pastor fully conquers his fear of being exposed. Further, upon his death, Dimmesdale knows that God will make him *truly* perfect, spotless, and righteous forever. His “mock holiness” will be exchanged for true holiness. Hawthorne concludes the narrative with hope, even hope through death, to suggest that the only solution to the damage from secret sin is to “be true.” Pastors, however elevated, however revered, however distant, must be authentically known by others. Otherwise, they will wither until death, whether that death be physical or social.

Through Hawthorne’s Arthur Dimmesdale, we see the first intimate portrayal of an American pastor. Ministerial distance and secret sin remain prevailing factors in the life of the American pastor. In Dimmesdale, we mark an additional cause behind the person-parson divide. First, a pastor (like Hooper) may separate himself from his flock due to shame. Second, congregants’ quasi-worship of pastors’ holiness may generate a pastoral inability to confess failings. This distance may yield fruit for the congregation, but it certainly consumes the pastor himself. From Edwards and Hooper, we understand the figure of the American pastor to be a mouthpiece for a culture’s fears. Dimmesdale personifies the anxieties of his day, living as the most fearful character in *The Scarlet Letter*. This movement from external to internal fear in American clerical literature broadens the scope of how authors communicate anxiety through pastoral characters. Dimmesdale also portrays the archetype of the holy hypocrite: a saint to outsiders, a sinner to himself. Only when a pastor decides to confess and “be true” can he experience relief from his hypocrisy and hiddenness.

MOBY DICK

Also written in 1850, Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* deepens our understanding of previous clerical themes, while also introducing a culturally specific perspective. Father Mapple, who appears in only two chapters of Melville’s novel, wins sailors’ love and respect through his charisma and authenticity. Mapple, a “very great favorite” amongst the sailors, “had been a sailor and a harpooner in

his youth, but for many years past had dedicated his life to the ministry" (36). While he no longer sails, Father Mapple retains pride in his former vocation. He refers to his audience as "shipmates," suggesting relatability and humility, all without distancing himself from his past occupation. He does not position himself above his hearers, nor does he eschew his natural connection to them via their shared careers. Instead, he utilizes sailing colloquialisms to minister to his "shipmates," modernizing the biblical story of Jonah in a display of rhetorical mastery.

The narrator, who calls himself Ishmael, sits in the chapel, prepared to hear a sermon from a chaplain of such high repute. As Father Mapple enters from the storm, his clothes drenched, Ishmael notes his own interest in the clergyman, saying, "there were certain engrafted clerical peculiarities about him, imputable to that adventurous maritime life he had led." From the pastor's first moments, Ishmael details Mapple's "peculiarities," all of which relate directly to his previous vocation at sea. For example, the pastor climbs a ship's ladder to the pulpit, an unconventional practice for clergymen. Surprising himself, Ishmael assents to the ladder's strange inclusion by saying, "the whole contrivance . . . seemed by no means in bad taste" (37). Further, the pulpit itself emulates the prow of a ship, the Bible being its figurehead. Behind the pulpit are two cenotaphs framing a painting of an angel shining its light over a storm-tossed ship. Altogether, the chapel shares little decorum with a traditional church, yet Ishmael understands the deeper reason behind its abnormalities. The room reflects Mapple's eccentricity—the combination of his maritime and ecclesiastical seasons of life. While atypical, Mapple's personality garners respect rather than eschewing it. The narrator's acknowledgment of the chaplain's sincerity manifests itself before Mapple even utters a word, explaining, "Father Mapple enjoyed such a wide reputation for sincerity and sanctity, that I could not suspect him of courting notoriety by any mere tricks of the stage. No, thought I, there must be some sober reason for this thing." Before he speaks a word, the chaplain's humble entrance from the storm and slow ascent to the pulpit solidify Mapple's reputation. Mapple's sailor persona complements his ministry because Mapple uses his experience and jargon *as a means* to bless his flock—not to win their praise. In Mapple's case, *eccentricity proves authenticity*. While Rev. Hooper's eccentricity, seen through his black veil, terrified his congregants, Mapple's eccentricity, displayed by his assortment of sailing paraphernalia, complements his ministry. The sailors trust him completely. He ministers within his own niche: a pastor to sailors and their wives, Mapple sees no need to forgo his history as a sailor. He instead uses the experience to his advantage, intimately understanding his hearers' fears and needs.

Unlike the previous examples of distance stemming from an unhealthy root, Mapple's proves meaningful and symbolic. After reaching to the pulpit, Mapple pulls the rope ladder up after himself. Ishmael, remembering Mapple's reputation, says, "it *must* symbolize something unseen. Can it be, then, that by that act of physical isolation, he signifies his spiritual withdrawal for the time, from all outward worldly ties and connections? Yes . . . this pulpit, I see, is a self-containing stronghold" (italics mine). Ishmael immediately believes Mapple to have a noble reason behind his theatrics. No character confirms or denies this, but Ishmael convinces himself of the point. He asks himself a question, and, before receiving any sort of answer, responds, "Yes." The narrator's internal dialogue conveys a common conception about pastors. Laypeople—that is, non-ministers—can place clergymen into a separate category from themselves. Thus, any sort of oddity, eccentricity, or histrionics *must* originate from a holy root. Often, laypeople supply these explanations on their own accord, independent of any

ministerial input. In this way, Ishmael justifies the distance between Mapple and his “shipmates” without any support from Mapple’s words.

Through Ishmael’s meditations, Melville provides a picture of ministerial distance that stems not from sin or selfishness, but congregational respect. Sailors hold Father Mapple’s reputation in such high regard that even a first-time listener can convince himself that Mapple could only hold pure motives—that all abnormalities reveal spiritual truth. Melville holds readers at a narrative distance from Father Mapple, only characterizing the minister through his notoriety, entrance, and preaching. In so doing, Melville demonstrates another facet of the schism between person and parson—in this case, a positive factor. The “faithful man of God” can live apart from the corruption of the world, completely “replenished with the meat and wine of the word.” Mapple’s separation from the world manifests in his integrity, living above reproach. Still, he calls himself “a greater sinner than ye” while preaching to the sailors. He comes to them with a contrite spirit, not separate from *them*, but separate from the corruption of his past life. He sincerely pursues holiness as a man among fellow shipmates, saying, “gladly would I come down . . . and listen as you listen, while some one of you reads me that other and more awful lesson which Jonah teaches to me, as a pilot of the living God” (47). Mapple never positions himself above his hearers, but consistently places himself among them. The book of Jonah is “a lesson to us all,” Mapple says, acknowledging his own need for repentance. His past failings do not develop into hiddenness or self-hatred, but motivation to preach the hope of repentance to men like him. He avoids repeating Dimmesdale’s submission to shame. He acknowledges his failings but moves past them. Mapple’s authenticity justifies his distance because he remains connected to his flock despite his physical distancing from them.

Before Father Mapple begins his sermon, Ishmael makes a final point: “the pulpit leads the world” (38). The narrator recognizes a distinction between the pulpit and the pastor. The *pulpit* leads the world, not the man behind it. The pulpit serves as a conduit for the messages a pastor delivers. Thus, Ishmael intimately connects the pulpit to the position of *pastor*. In this way, Melville suggests that the role of pastor elevates a man to a higher degree of leadership than otherwise possible. The pastor does not win credence through his status as a man, nor his relatability, but through his *position*—through preaching behind the pulpit. Even so, the pulpit remains a vacant piece of décor without a person behind it; the pulpit and the pastor form a symbiotic relationship in Melville’s mind, responsible for leading socially, culturally, and politically. Ishmael specifies how the pulpit leads the world, saying, “From thence is the storm of God’s quick wrath is first descried, and the bow must bear the earliest brunt. From thence is the God of breezes fair or foul is first invoked for favorable winds. Yes, the world’s a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is its prow.” The pulpit, and therefore the pastor, maintains a closer relationship with God than others because of the primacy involved with withstanding storms and invoking favor. Melville conveys a reason for a pastor’s peculiarity while also suggesting its necessity. In his mind, God charges the pastor, isolated from the world, to absorb the first gale of his wrath solitarily. This is a heavy task—impossible, even. Withstanding such a force changes a man’s demeanor and values. Mapple has manned the pulpit for decades, decrying God’s anger and pleading for mercy, suggesting that his eccentricity relates to his weighty duty behind the pulpit. As Melville blurs the line between pulpit and pastor, he underscores that all clergymen will likely develop oddities like Father Mapple as they experience the first brunt of

God's mighty presence amid the tossing sea of life. Biblical prophets (especially Isaiah and Ezekiel) reacted to God's oracles in the similar ways—Israelites thought them intense and bizarre. The prophets knew they were merely obeying God's commands. Their eccentricity developed out of a special relationship to God, and their role of announcing God's judgment and deliverance to Israel. Mapple, behind the "prow" of the spiritual ship, has developed his atypical character traits. Any pastor in any time might do the same.

Melville underscores through Mapple how pastors reflect the *people* they serve and the *time* in which they serve. While some may live apart from the passions of the world, pastors are certainly not independent from their larger cultures. Mapple serves as an example of a pastor representing his people and time, and how this precision aids his ministry toward his flock. The imagined dialogue of the Gentile sailors bound for Tarshish adds a distinctly nineteenth-century seafaring element to the biblical story, with men named "Jack," "Joe," and "Harry" debating Jonah's criminality. Mapple unabashedly reforms the words of Scripture into his hearers' vocabulary. Mapple feels no need to stoke anxiety in order to move his audience to repentance. Whaling presents enough cause for fear in itself, sailors consistently risking death while out at sea. Unlike Jonathan Edwards' audience of New England families, for whom moral living could lull into a sense of security, Mapple's shipmates understand the grave possibility of dying on their next expedition. His restraint is notable, given the three prior pastors' foregrounding of fear, either through preaching, personality, or personal life.

Knowing his audience, Mapple provides an alternative to the fear they already feel. The chaplain expects that his shipmates will experience tragedy at sea. As a pastor to sailors, Father Mapple provides an explanation and response for the probable danger ahead. Preaching an overview of the first two chapters of the book of Jonah, Mapple's sermon shares the same goal as Edwards': the people's repentance. He says, "I do not place Jonah before you to be copied for his sin but I do place him before you as a model for repentance. Sin not; but if you do, take heed to repent of it like Jonah" (46). The chaplain exhorts his shipmates to repent, a common theme thus far in the literature, yet Mapple's call to repentance holds a different emphasis than Edwards', Hooper's, or Dimmesdale's. The chaplain presents the woe of living in disobedience to God, as he once did, but concludes his sermon with the promise of God's gracious provision:

But oh! shipmates! on the starboard hand of every woe, there is a sure delight; and higher the top of that delight, than the bottom of the woe is deep. Is not the main-truck higher than the keelson is low? . . . And eternal delight and deliciousness will be his, who coming to lay him down, can say with his final breath- O Father!- chiefly known to me by Thy rod- mortal or immortal, here I die. I have striven to be Thine, more than to be this world's, or mine own. Yet this is nothing: I leave eternity to Thee. (49)

Mapple, still weaving sailing imagery into his sermon, offers "eternal delight and deliciousness" to his shipmates. He proffers lasting peace. The chaplain goes beyond explaining how God delivers man from his depravity. God gives life. God gives grace. God gives joy. Not only can they be saved *from* judgment, but they can also be saved *to* delight. Further, they can have security in this delight because eternity belongs to the "Keel of Ages." Their security derives from a faithful God, not their own devices. Mapple chooses to instill confidence rather than stoke anxiety. He provides comfort over dread. This testifies to

the clergyman's precision in ministering to his niche audience. Mapple's closing exhortation also displays the first turn from judgment-centric preaching. Sin, repentance, and depravity still feature in Mapple's sermon, but his emphasis remains on God's promises of peace to those who "disobey themselves" in order to obey God. Melville invented a character entirely a product *of* his world, yet the perfect the pastor *for* his world.

Melville qualifies the notion of ministerial distance by suggesting its power for effective ministry derives from laypeople, not pastors themselves. While Hooper and Dimmesdale both enjoyed greater fruit in their respective ministries as they distanced themselves, Mapple demonstrates why this is so. Both Mapple's isolation and eccentricity find their justification in his authenticity, a pathway to accepting the chaplain's felt separation as a benefit. The combination of congregational veneration and the clergyman's unique relationship to God silently forge agreed-upon sense of pastors' otherness. Most essentially, Father Mapple illustrates a key transition in American clerical literature, portraying the pastor as a product of his time and thus distinctly equipped to minister in that setting. Further, Mapple is the first pastor to reintroduce Edwards' message of hope: the good news of God's deliverance *to* delight. Overall, the figure of the American pastor thus far concerns himself deeply with the topics of *sin* and *security*. All three fictional pastors reckon with these two ideas as they remain apart from the flock.

ELMER GANTRY

Sinclair Lewis crafts the most incisive portrayal of ministers throughout all the surveyed literature in his 1927 novel *Elmer Gantry*, signaling a marked shift away from characters modeled after Jonathan Edwards. There are over a dozen individuals in the text who work as pastors, preachers, revivalists, evangelists, and seminary professors—all are hypocrites, save one minor character. The vast range of Lewis' ministerial portraits underscores the breadth of religious corruption in the novel, and Lewis' own belief in America's spiritual bankruptcy. The novel was so incendiary upon its initial release that Lewis was invited to his own lynching in Virginia by religious zealots. Lewis struck a powerful chord in the 1920s, yet his dark imagination of deceitful ministers reaches into current times as well. His conception of the clergy as two-faced liars, no better than crooked salesmen, has burrowed its way into the collective perception of American Christian leaders. No longer do pastors radiate virtue, but vice. Further, they hardly veil their sinfulness, quite dissimilar to men like Hooper and Dimmesdale. Distrust for spiritual leaders grows quickly with such an attitude. Lewis' biting satire, portraying ministers as certain hypocrites, provides an exceedingly dissimilar opinion to previous writers. In *Elmer Gantry*, ministers are more monsters than they are men. While the novel hyperbolizes these characters, their silhouettes manifest in real pastors in less extreme forms. Most people can identify a real-world example of an Elmer Gantry or Frank Shallard. In this way, Lewis' work is not only historically representative, but also currently applicable. Lewis devises three main ministers, all of whom become archetypes through their exaggerated characterizations: Elmer, the opportunistic, charismatic, and brutal evangelical; Sharon, the beautiful, eloquent, and greedy revivalist; Frank, the passive, intellectual, and doubting liberal. These three hold diverse beliefs, yet all demonstrate staggering hypocrisy in their

own circumstances. Most importantly, none of them possess a personal relationship with the God they claim to serve. Christianity remains an intellectual exercise, never a spiritual experience. The novel contributes to the understanding of the American pastor through the ubiquity of ministerial deception and the culpability of religious Americans.

A cursory exploration of Christian terminology will aid in the analysis of *Elmer Gantry*. The term *mainline* refers to seven American denominations, also called the “Seven Sisters of American Protestantism.” These include the American Baptist Church (previously known as the Northern Baptist Convention), Disciples of Christ, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church of the United States of America, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church. There is substantial variation among local church bodies (some self-identify as moderate or conservative), but mainline denominations but more often espouse theologically liberal ideas, such as rejection of the Bible’s inerrancy and its divine inspiration. Frank Shallard is the seminal mainline pastor.

Evangelical refers to a broad collection of denominations and independent churches unified by more conservative, traditional interpretations of Scripture. The largest denomination is the Southern Baptist Convention. Christ is preached as the only way of salvation. In theory (not all self-identifying evangelicals hold the following beliefs), the Bible is understood to be God’s infallible Word, superseding current cultural mores. Evangelicals mostly believe in Christ’s divinity, God’s continued intervention, and absolute truth. Many charismatic denominations and movements (e.g., Pentecostals) consider themselves evangelicals, giving more emphasis to the gifts and work of the Holy Spirit (such as healing and tongues). Elmer begins as a Baptist before transitioning to Methodism for opportunistic reasons, but retains an evangelical characterization.

Neither *evangelical* nor *mainline* are a monolithic identifier for doctrine, but they still aid in classifying the religious zeitgeist for different religious backgrounds. For a modern representation of how mainline and evangelical adherents relate to American culture, respected pastor and author Timothy Keller says,

Liberal mainline Protestantism stresses justice but has largely jettisoned ancient affirmations of the Christian creeds, such as the preexistence and divinity of Jesus, the bodily resurrection, and the authority of the Bible. Evangelicalism stresses righteousness and traditional values, but many congregations are indifferent or even hostile toward work against injustice. (Keller)

Denominational affiliations are not primary distinguishing factors for the overall portrait of the pastor, but these terms still aid readers by providing a foundational understanding of American Protestant culture and distinctives. This will prove especially helpful for *Elmer Gantry*, a novel which presents a broad range of Christian traditions.

Lewis’ historical influences for Elmer and Sharon further bolster our understanding of the characters before engaging the text. Lewis was never fond of religion, but he visited up to three church services each Sunday while he wrote *Elmer Gantry*, spending time with both conservative and liberal pastors alike. Liberal preachers felt far less threatened by Lewis’ agnostic and socialist leanings. Elmer’s athleticism, charisma, and brashness reflect much of Billy Sunday’s evangelistic ministry beginning in the

1890s. Billy Sunday, a professional baseball player, became a full-time evangelist for several decades after retiring, traveling around the Midwest in particular. He was known for his tirades against sin, commonly preaching about God's righteous judgment toward sinners. He shared much of the First Great Awakening's theology yet preached with much more vigor (including "sliding into home plate" on stage). Elmer exhibits Sunday's vitality and explosive topical preaching but does not share his moral uprightness; for example, Sunday remained a faithful husband and father throughout his life. Sunday remained a staunch Prohibitionist until his death, inspiring Elmer's vice crusades against alcohol in the late stages of the novel. Sunday was the chief inspiration for Elmer, but Lewis' protagonist evolves far beyond the real-world evangelist. By the novel's conclusion, Elmer becomes nearly unrecognizable when compared to Sunday.

Sinclair Lewis presents an Elmer Gantry as an anti-Dimmesdale living an unrepentant life of deception, hypocrisy, and narcissism. Through Elmer, Lewis creates an entirely new category for the pastor in American literature: externally impressive, internally evil. While the idea of a pastor's externally holy and internally sinful double life is not new to *Elmer Gantry*, Elmer goes further. He displays no conviction over his own hypocrisy and sinks into a new level of spiritual bankruptcy. Elmer begins the book as an undergraduate student at Terwillinger College in rural Kansas, known for his womanizing and drinking. Nearly all his peers are Christians, which isolates Elmer; his only friend is the one outspoken atheist of the school. While mean and lazy, Elmer's lack of authority prevents him from doing any severe damage to others. He has no platform—only ambition. He dreams of self-importance, power, and fame, yet knows that his unethical lifestyle will likely keep him from such a future. Elmer's aspirations become possible when the first minister in the text, Judson Roberts. Ex-athlete Judson, the YMCA state secretary and traveling evangelist known as the "Praying Fullback," gives Elmer his first platform. Judson comes to Terwillinger College preaching a hypermasculine gospel, "calling for strong men" for the team "captained by Christ" (52). Judson portrays Jesus as a quarterback brimming with testosterone. In a way, Judson is the manipulative version of Melville's Father Mapple, co-opting the sporting language of college students, appealing to collegiate athletes as opposed to sailors. While Mapple's colloquialisms proved authentic, Judson uses athletic jargon to shame listeners into repentance. Judson preaches that faith illustrates masculinity; anything else results from weakness.

Despite playing only a small role in the beginning of the novel, Judson begins the cyclical tragedy of the narrative. During Judson's evangelistic tour at Terwillinger College, "Hell-cat" Elmer makes a public confession of faith, albeit under severe peer pressure from Judson's sermon and his mother's nagging. Elmer aspires to appear masculine to a fellow athlete like Judson. Further, he despises the feeling of his classmates' spiritual superiority over him. In a moment, Elmer sees the power that Judson holds over himself and his peers. He understands the pulpit to be a shortcut to influence. Even more, Elmer revels in "being the center of interest in the crowd" (55). Judson invites Elmer to speak, thinking his testimony will inspire others to convert. Elmer gladly accepts, feeling "popularity, almost love, almost reverence, and he felt overpoweringly his role as leading man" (56). Elmer's first words behind a pulpit drip with showmanship, feigning humility by saying, "I'm kneeling now, and, oh, the blessedness of humility! . . . it's funny that I who've been so great a sinner could dare to give you his invitation, but he's almighty and shall prevail." Elmer makes his first conversion within ten minutes of kneeling before Judson. He feels "victorious over life and king of righteousness" (57). The narrator never questions

Elmer's motivations because he clearly sees that Elmer is always a fraud. Many of Elmer's peers see through his act as well, chuckling as they walk by him. He cannot fool everyone. As Judson leaves Terwillinger, he takes "three puffs of an illegal cigarette" while pondering his lack of fulfillment. Judson's meditations demonstrate that his showmanship comes from a root of falsehood. Elmer rises out of Judson's legacy: a charismatic athlete who sees the gospel as means of wielding power over others. He says of Elmer,

It wasn't so bad for him . . . to get converted. Suppose there *isn't* anything to it. Won't hurt him to cut out some of his bad habits for a while, anyway. And how do we know? Maybe the Holy Ghost does come down. No more improbable than electricity. I do wish I could get over this doubting! I forget it when I've got 'em going in an evangelistic meeting, but when I watch a big butcher like him, with that damn smirk on his jowls—I believe I'll go into the real-estate business. I don't think I'm hurting these young fellows any, but I do wish I could be honest. Oh Lordy, Lordy, Lordy, I wish I had a good job selling real estate! (68)

Judson creates Elmer in order to forget his own doubts, even if just for a moment. He does not believe the gospel he preaches. Judson sees through Elmer's showmanship because he recognizes it in himself. In this, Lewis paints a dreadful picture of the proliferation of ministers through this interchange. Judson has little idea what damage Elmer will eventually cause, yet his own selfish inauthenticity paves the way for it all. The greater hypocrite arises from the lesser. Lewis suggests this lineage of unconvinced deceivers undergirds much of America's clergy. Judson's secret doubting, however, buries the possibility of discovering the cyclical proliferation of gospel frauds.

Elmer's fraudulence dismantles lives, the first belonging to Lulu Bains, a small-town Baptist girl. Before his meteoric rise to power, Elmer's extramarital relationship with Lulu exposes the toll of splitting person from parson. Elmer's first pastoral appointment sends him to a rural Kansan church where young Lulu, daughter of the deacon, immediately falls for Elmer's charm and vitality. Elmer's spiritual authority allures her. She feels that Elmer is superhuman, suggesting that being an ordained minister prevents him from "being a man, too" (114). To Lulu, Elmer's office supersedes his humanity. Previously, Hawthorne's Rev. Dimmesdale straddled two lives: the external saint and the internal sinner. Elmer exhibits the same duplicity yet feels no guilt. Elmer abuses the divide, allowing foolish congregants like Lulu to worship his mock holiness as he simultaneously indulges himself. Moreover, Elmer feels little remorse about his sin, unlike Dimmesdale. Lulu's belief in Elmer's otherness provides him with pernicious power. Soon, Elmer coaxes Lulu into a sexual relationship. Elmer sees her as an object; Lulu sees him as quasi-divine. In this way, Lulu (and the religious culture that raised her) plays a culpable role in Elmer's corruption. By elevating him to a godlike status, Lulu provides a façade behind which Elmer can hide his true nature. Lewis suggests that foolish Christians *promote* their leaders' double lives by espousing the idea that their impressive pastors are superhuman—Lewis thinks that blind followers should not be surprised to find immorality in their leaders.

Elmer quickly realizes Lulu's inconvenience, the narrator saying, "He had determined that marriage would now cramp his advancement in the church . . . he didn't want to marry this brainless little fluffy chick, who would be of no help in impressing rich parishioners" (126). Elmer's ambition overpowers Lulu's worship. Elmer values upward mobility at whatever (or whomever's) cost. Pastors like

Elmer, devoted to power rather than God, will always leave a path of Lulus behind them. Elmer promptly washes his hands clean of Lulu—he manufactures a situation for Deacon Bains to catch his daughter engaging in a compromising relationship with her cousin. Elmer’s problem solved. Lulu’s reputation ruined. Two decades later, Lulu resurfaces in the narrative. Elmer, now a married proto-megachurch pastor in the fictional city of Zenith, pursues an extramarital affair with her. She has not learned her lesson. She gloats about their immorality, saying, “I’m proud of it! Like as if you were different from other men—like you were somehow closer to God” (365). Once again, Elmer’s double life finds fertile soil *the very same person*. Elmer’s evil abounds in Lulu’s foolishness, demonstrative of anyone who divides person from parson and elevates pastors to a near-Godhood. A man is never anything more than a man, regardless of his virtue, role, or ability. Out of every character in *Elmer Gantry*, only a single person, a non-Christian drunkard, espouses the notion that “preachers are just ordinary guys like the rest of us” (161). Lewis places the onus for integrity upon more than just the preacher, going beyond Hawthorne’s and Melville’s imaginations. The responsibility for the person-parson schism falls on pastors *and* their flocks.

Elmer’s Trumpian obsession with winning provides another new aspect to the composite portrayal of the American minister. Upon his appointment to Deacon Bains’s church, the narrator highlights Elmer’s possessiveness, saying, “His first church . . . his own . . . and Frank had to take his orders!” (104). Beyond the repeated personal possessive pronouns, Elmer’s excitement for authority over co-pastor Frank (who is tasked with teaching Sunday school instead of preaching) emphasizes his hierarchical mindset. He hungers for subordinates. He thirsts after others’ submission, especially Frank’s. Years later, the Methodists appoint the opportunistic Elmer as pastor of a larger church in Banjo Crossing outside of Zenith. The traditionalist congregation, at first doubtful of Elmer, eventually buckles beneath his charisma. He delights in the game: “It was fun to watch the old fanatics . . . come under his spell and admit his power . . . He had conquered them all” (298). The narrator presents Elmer as a both a spiritual sorcerer (“come under his spell”) and military victor (“conquered them all”). Elmer’s ever-increasing pride balloons during his pastorate at Banjo Crossing because it provides him people to break. He turns the unconvinced into followers.

More broadly, ministry supplies Elmer with people to dominate. With such vaulting ambition, however, Elmer cannot remain satisfied with Banjo Crossing. He must bring more people under his yoke. Several years later, Elmer leads the largest church in Zenith, drawing in thousands of people each Sunday. He is the proto-megachurch pastor. With his power, he publicly crucifies Frank’s reputation, crusades against vice, and initiates more sexual infidelity. He needs others to view him as a victor. He poses with policemen closing a prostitution house so that newspapers will glorify his virtue. The narrator exposes his narcissism, intimating Elmer’s own excitement regarding his power, saying, “Not even Napoleon or Alexander had been able to dictate what a whole nation should wear and eat and say and think. That, Elmer Gantry was about to do” (441). Elmer’s lust for power illustrates how preaching has always been a means to an end. Judson Roberts could have never predicted the monster he created. Elmer’s megalomania transcends church corruption—he wants national submission. Preaching was never a calling for Elmer, nor was the career a way to serve others. It has merely represented the simplest path to power. Yet how can congregants resist his corruption if they share Lulu’s opinion that he is too godly to be a mere man? Only one character (including those who know Elmer’s fraudulence

and infidelity), Methodist mystic Andrew Pengilly, asks Elmer the most necessary question, “why don’t you believe in God?” (395). With everyone else’s eyes set upon the pulpit rather than the soul, Elmer’s functional atheism hides behind a veil of religiosity, all the while celebrated by his followers.

Elmer Gantry lives a life diametrically opposed to figures like Edwards, Dimmesdale, and Mapple. The novel closes soon after Elmer and his crooked friends hush up his latest extramarital affair, Lewis suggesting a somber truth in the world of the text: Elmer Gantrys are made, not born. Elmer demonstrates the destruction wrought by pastors who take pleasure in their mission to *not* “be true.” Elmer hides his vices (the same as Dimmesdale and Hooper) but goes much further. He seeks out sin as he crusades against others’ immorality. Yet, even with all of Elmer’s guilt, Lewis blames foolish Christians just as much as he blames the pastor himself. There can be no truth in ministry without Christ as the center. Elmer Gantry preeminently exemplifies the dire results of when a pastor has charisma and competence without character.

While Billy Sunday’s ministry waned in the 1920s, Aimee Semple McPherson’s fame rose to new heights. McPherson founded the Foursquare Church, a Pentecostal denomination that proclaims upon a fourfold gospel: Christ is savior, baptizer (by the Holy Spirit), healer, and Soon-Coming King. McPherson married three times, her first husband dying of malaria in east Asia, and her next two marriages ended in divorce. She gained traction in 1919 as she began engaging in faith-healing, reportedly healing the blind, possessed, and paralyzed. Further, McPherson claimed to interpret glossolalia (tongues), a phenomenon in which people speak in languages that do not, to our knowledge, exist. Newspapers maligned McPherson for her showmanship, anti-evolutionism, and scandals. In one case, McPherson disappeared for five weeks in 1926, claiming to have been kidnapped. Although not proven legally, journalists advanced the theory that McPherson created the hoax, either to cover up an extramarital affair or to escape from the pressure of her vocation. Other Christian leaders were similarly skeptical, citing her divorces and theatrics (speaking in tongues and faith-healing) as evidence of her insincerity. Regardless, she had the largest evangelistic reach in the 1920s, with forty million visitors visiting her Angelus Temple within seven years of its dedication in 1923. The Temple was entirely funded by offerings given during her revival tours. She was the best-known evangelist of her day, with millions of supporters and detractors alike.

Sharon Falconer, the revivalist and con artist modeled explicitly after McPherson, alone possesses the ability to dominate Elmer. She illustrates the hubris of Christian leaders in Lewis’ imagination, leading to the death of her followers, herself, and her legacy. Sharon is only present in the second act of *Elmer Gantry*, less than a fourth of the book, yet her shadow looms large even after her death. Whereas characters such as Hawthorne’s Arthur Dimmesdale or Lewis’ Elmer Gantry are *influenced* by historical clergymen, Jonathan Edwards and Billy Sunday respectively, Sharon Falconer’s portrayal goes a step further. Her life is so intricately linked to Aimee Semple McPherson’s (who was at the height of her fame when Lewis published *Elmer Gantry* in 1927) that Sharon provides close commentary upon a single historical figure, not just general themes. This lends a biographical leaning to the obvious satire of the text, grounding some of the absurdism in reality. One of the few female evangelists of her day, Sharon uses her womanhood to her advantage. She uses her beauty to her advantage as she travels the country, charming typically conservative clergy to accept her preaching in

their towns. After Elmer first hears Sharon preach, he sees “a fat Presbyterian pastor . . . holding her arm with *more than pious zeal*” (177, italics mine). When Elmer meets her, Sharon has no qualms utilizing her sexuality to build connections, but never goes so far as to engage in sexual relations with anyone (including the persistent Elmer). Elmer follows Sharon around the country, enamored by her beauty and preaching (powerful support from a man who believes women cannot preach the gospel). Once they become partners and lovers, Elmer forsakes smoking, drinking, and sex at Sharon’s command, demonstrating her emergence as the most powerful character in the novel. If someone can control the selfish, brutish, and power-hungry Elmer, then she can surely manipulate the common folk of middle America— and she does just that.

Sharon clearly does not believe in the gospel she preaches. She understands only the monetary benefit of the gospel work she does. A cursory survey of her comments and actions displays her fraudulence immediately. Sharon confesses to Elmer that she may physically fall in love with him, but that she is spiritually above all others—an island separated by an ocean of authority. Her narcissism expands when she says “I can’t sin! I am above sin! . . . whatever I may choose to do, though it might be sin in one unsanctified, with me God will turn it to his glory” (190). Sharon’s pride drips from every word, demonstrating her staunch belief in her spiritual superiority. Not only does she insinuate her own perfection, but also God’s special anointing upon her life. Sharon portrays the process of God turning her “sin” into his glory like an assistant completing the work of his supervisor. Sharon belittles God himself, privately positioning herself above him. God, and thus the gospel of Jesus Christ, become subservient to Sharon’s talent and ambition. She effectively lives above God. She compounds this heresy by saying, “I love the big [sins]—murder, lust, cruelty, ambition!” (193). Sin in others excites Sharon, even if she believes herself too important to transgress. This is the spiritual leader trailblazing the frontier of America: a woman who not only rejects basic tenets of the gospel, but also relishes actions that grieve God. Sharon’s most unsettling action reveals her deep insecurity and longing for significance.

Sharon brings Elmer to her private room, an amalgamation of Christian icons and pagan idols. She commands Elmer to kneel while she prays, “Blessed Virgin, Mother Hera, Mother Frigga, Mother Ishtar, Mother Isis, dread Mother Astarte of the weaving arms, it is thy priestess . . .” (202). This blasphemy shocks even Elmer. Sharon’s worship of this dreadful pantheon of gods and idols illuminates Sharon’s complete lack of conscience. She is not even loyal to one god—how could she possibly be loyal to the crowds? Sharon lives unconvinced by the power of the gospel she preaches, seeking out power from goddesses around the world. Lewis suggests that revivalists lack any semblance of morality or integrity; they are willing to risk the damnation of their own souls if it provides the possibility of temporary power. Sharon’s lifestyle lends itself to worship of *her*, rather than God, illustrated by Elmer’s exclamation, “I love you . . . I worship you!” Thousands of Sharon’s rabid fans share this sentiment, mere fodder for her greed.

Elmer uses the Church as a political machine. Sharon runs revivals like a business. Elmer’s first glimpse of Sharon outside of her revivalist robes delineates her primary identity: saleswoman. The narrator notes, “she was no high priestess now in Grecian robe, but a businesswoman, in straw hat, gray suit, white shirt-waist, linen cuffs and collar. Only her blue bow and the jeweled cross on her watch-fob distinguished her from the women in offices” (175). Sharon’s businesswoman clothing relegates her role

of evangelist to a small trinket worn on her wrist. Through this picture, Lewis introduces how Sharon operates as this kind of businesswoman, even when clothed in white robes. Her six-week revival business model proves effective, a Congregationalist minister saying, “she goes away with enough cash for herself, after six weeks’ work, to have run our whole church for two years” (177). Sharon does not leave with enough “cash” for *the work of evangelism*, but enough cash for *herself*. As keen as this minister may be, the vast majority of Sharon’s supporters (faithful pastors included) seldom consider the possibility that Sharon might be a con woman. Even Elmer, who despises feeling underappreciated, tolerates Sharon’s savvy greed. To his knowledge, Sharon pays Elmer \$3800 per year, while pocketing over \$20,000 in the same span of time. He recognizes this disparity, yet quietly accepts the insult. Even Sharon’s Jordan Tabernacle, directly paralleling Aimee Semple McPherson’s Angelus Temple, serves as a means of constant revenue flow. Instead of having to stoke business by traveling across America, the tabernacle promotes a stationary business model. Hapless fans travel *to* Sharon, cutting her own overhead costs, all because of the charitable donations of decent Christians across the country. Sharon’s shrewdness reduces revivalist Christianity to a capitalist machine. Lewis, once a member of the Socialist Party, excoriates Christianity and evangelists alike, who illustrate religion as financial exploitation of the working class. In Sharon, money replaces ministry, and business supersedes blessing.

As previously exhibited by Edwards, Hooper, Dimmesdale, and Mapple, Christian ministers possess a unique relationship to fear. In these prior examples, fear inspires insecurity, serving to bring hearers to repentance, ushering in a new life marked by security from God’s grace. Sharon intentionally avoids inspiring dread in her preaching, desiring to drum up donations through positive feelings. Even so, Lewis conveys his own anxieties regarding the dangers of Christianity and its leaders through Sharon and her work. Her revivalism displays spiritual impotence and blatant dehumanization. Citing local churches’ growing resistance arising from the revivalists’ excess and disrespect, the narrator says, “Not ten percent of the converts at emotional revival meetings remained church members” (207). Retaining fewer than ten percent of converts is dismal, especially for a movement claiming genuine anointing from God. The narrator’s statistic evokes the anxiety that, despite all its funding, talent, and showmanship, revivalism (and Christianity at large) produces no lasting fruit. This should be most disconcerting for genuine Christians. The impressive displays of Sharon and Elmer leave nothing. They bring no change. Their ineffectuality stems from their spiritual bankruptcy, yet none of the men and women who flock to the revivals in hopes of experiencing the divine remain unaware. Lewis, despite not pitying religious Americans, effectively reinforces Christ’s teaching, “you shall know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16 KJV). From this arises the fear that Christianity lacks real power, and Christian leaders (even the most gifted and externally “holy”) should not be trusted.

Furthermore, the revivalists’ misanthropy introduces the unsettling possibility that Christian leaders lack any sort of love for their followers. The narrator quips, “The gospel crew could never consider their converts as human beings” (215), denoting something deeper than a *choice* to regard people as subhuman. No, Sharon and her company “*could never consider* their converts as human beings.” A basic respect for human life and personhood remains outside of their *ability* to believe. Their misanthropy has fundamentally altered their perception of the value of human life. Through this, Lewis presents another fear: foundational insignificance. Without a genuine care for their people, spiritual leaders like Sharon reduce converts to little more pawns to manipulate for money and power. Lewis

generalizes this indictment, supporting the belief that all evangelists share the same disregard for humanity. He sees Sharon's misanthropy as a necessary component in fulfilling the office of an evangelist. Thus, Lewis indiscriminately accuses all revivalists and evangelists of the same heartlessness, in turn stoking the fear of being eternally insignificant. If a man is less than human to the preacher who converted him, what does he become in the eyes God? Because ministers can become easy stand-ins for God himself, as previously explored with Jonathan Edwards, a complete lack of care between Sharon and her converts spreads a pernicious belief of God's indifference toward mankind. Sharon's ministry, and the fears that arise from it, hold eternal weight.

Even if the narrator, Elmer, Sharon, and the novel's other ministers seem unconvinced of God's existence, *Elmer Gantry* still possesses a sense of divine justice. Sharon's life and ministry end together when her famed Jordan Tabernacle burns to the ground. Sharon's death in the fire seems shocking in the world of the text (surprising considering how most fraudulent ministers in the world of *Elmer Gantry* continually escape danger [social or physical] unscathed). Further, the destruction of the temple directly contrasts with McPherson's Angelus Temple, which still operates today. Through this, Lewis opts for literary symbolism rather than historical parallelism. Sharon, whose fame and enterprise rely entirely upon deception, dies as her dreams and aspirations collapse in the form of the tabernacle. All the work Sharon and her "gospel crew" achieved from the years of traveling incinerate in the conflagration. Already the narrator has cited the pitiful retention rate of converts, already proving how Sharon's work does not endure through *them* because they did not experience lasting healing in their lives. They will not memorialize the legacy of someone whose talent made no permanent impact. Her work instead is memorialized in the Jordan Tabernacle, the physical result of her years of financial manipulation. Sharon's legacy burns alongside her. The tabernacle becomes a vacant heap of ashes, remembered for death rather than life. Sharon reaps what she sowed. She only leaves behind emptiness and trauma. Disconcertingly, her followers also reap the same tragedy. Over one hundred of Sharon's followers also perish in the fire, a final demonstration of the collateral damage caused by those who use the gospel as a means of gaining wealth and significance. If Sharon's mock holiness and feigned spiritual authority lack the power to stop a building's collapse, certainly she cannot prevent God's judgment. Sinclair Lewis uses a final minister, Frank Shallard, to expose a central lie in American clerical culture, responsible for manufacturing religious narcissists like Sharon Falconer.

Frank stands in direct contrast to Elmer throughout the entirety of the book, yet even in dissimilarity, Frank still abuses Christianity, albeit upon a smaller scale. Frank, classmate of Elmer at Mizpah Seminary, shares his first pastoral appointment with the recently "converted" Gantry. Congregants always refer to Frank in relation to Elmer, such as Deacon Bains, who says, "Don't think much of Brother Shallard, though . . . dumb in the head. Stands there like a bump on a log. Well, he's good enough to teach the kids in Sunday school" (106). Immediately, Frank is distinguished by being less impressive than Elmer, only "good enough" for ministry to children. He resents the judgment yet understands its truthfulness. Although Frank possesses both a greater intellectual capacity and thirst for knowledge, the narrative never presents a moment where Frank triumphs over Elmer. The religious climate of the text values showmen over academics. Frank's inspiration to preach arises from the desire to please his father rather than genuine belief in Christ. While this longing is certainly less inherently corrupt than Elmer's megalomania or Sharon's greed, it comes from the same root. In Frank, Lewis

connects, and thus reveals, all three ministers' base motivation: the yearning for significance. Elmer believes his worth comes from possessing authority. Sharon justifies her deception through fame and fortune. Frank merely wants his father's approval. Although more commonplace, Frank's central desire to feel significant through paternal acceptance never materializes. Just like his two enemies, Elmer and Sharon, Frank uses religion as a means of self-validation. The narrator does not show Frank any pity, however. In this, Lewis illustrates American pastors to be unified by a collective pursuit to justify their own being. Because Frank constantly vacillates between despair and doubt, never quite believing in the God his vocation is dedicated to, he dives headlong into a mission that he can control—one that can be worked toward independently of faith. He self-righteously attempts to live as "a liberal from within" the Church—to diminish the power Christianity has in American society—yet his internal crusading fails repeatedly, ultimately resulting in his removal from the pastorate. A cursory summary in his journey of doubt demonstrates Frank's failure to attain the feeling of significance that he deeply craves, as well as the draw of his liberalizing mission.

Frank begins by exercising the bounds of his doubt, challenging an admitted atheist at Mizpah Theological Seminary, not to prove Christianity correct, but to understand his own predisposition toward faithlessness. Within a year, Frank denounces the validity of Scripture under the mentorship of Mizpah's well-known atheist professor, Bruno Zechlin. Frank feels a sense of completeness in this season because his core desire for significance is fulfilled by a satisfying quasi-paternal relationship, with Zechlin as a surrogate father. Years later, Methodist pastor Andrew Pengilly (the same character who rebukes Elmer for his functional atheism) shakes Frank's doubt by inviting him to experience the presence of God. Frank sees hope for the first time in his vocational ministry under Pengilly's mentorship, flowing from a combination of feeling God's presence and seeing the fruit from Pengilly's holy life. Still, Frank rejects the idea of a personal God out of fear he will be ostracized from the intellectuals around him. He retreats to the safety of atheism, surrounding himself with pastors like himself in the "Preacher's Liberal Club." He knows the pastors around him are frauds, who, just like Elmer, lie to their congregants each Sunday by preaching sermons they do not believe. Frank does the same. The narrator says, "He who each Sunday morning neatly pointed his congregation the way to heaven was himself tossed in a purgatory of self-despising doubt, where his every domestic virtue was cowardice, his every mystic aspiration a superstitious mockery, and his every desire to be honest a cruelty" (265). Frank's vacillating wreaks havoc upon his psyche, yet the narrator shows little mercy. He puts on a show for his congregation every Sunday, fundamentally paralleling Elmer and Sharon.

While not brash and arrogant like Elmer, Frank's ministry hinges upon the same core hypocrisy. Neither of these men believe what they preach. After decades of ministry, Frank reveals what he believes to be the most intolerable part of American Christianity: "My chief objection is that ninety-nine percent of sermons and Sunday School teachings are so agonizingly *dull!*" (407). While admittedly humorous, Frank's frustration still reveals the cost of his double life. His continued lack of honesty behind the pulpit gives him little ground to criticize the church. Frank sets his mind on the most banal of criticisms because he has forsaken any moral right to condemn others' hypocrisy. Lewis suggests that even well-meaning, pitiable pastors like Frank contribute to the same systemic transgressions as Elmer and Sharon. Frank's faithlessness limits the credibility of all pastors, even those opposed to Elmer. *Lesser* damage does not excuse hypocrisy. In fact, Frank's waffling allows Elmer to gain even more control in

the Christian political landscape of Zenith. Elmer, with quite the log in his eye, publicly accuses Frank of heresy. In response, Frank “screamed back at Elmer that he did not accept Jesus Christ as divine; that he was not sure of a future life; that he wasn’t even certain of a personal God” yet still says, “I’ve done nothing for which to resign! . . . I haven’t lied or been indecent or stolen” (411-412). Even as he rejects core beliefs of the Christian faith, tenets of the gospel which he has preached behind a pulpit for decades, Frank genuinely believes he has not lied. Forced to resign, Frank delivers two farewell addresses. The first, fantasy:

I have decided that no one in this room, including your pastor, believes in the Christian religion. Not one of us would turn the other cheek. Not one of us would sell all that he has and give to the poor. Not one of us would give his coat to some man who took his overcoat. Every one of us lays up all the treasure he can. We don’t practice the Christian religion. We don’t intend to practice it. Therefore, we don’t believe in it. Therefore I resign, and I advise you to quit lying and disband.

The second, reality:

I still feel I have an honest right to an honest pulpit. But I am setting brother against brother . . . I have loved you and the work, the sound of friends singing together, the happiness of meeting on leisurely Sunday mornings. This I give up. I resign, and I wish I could say, ‘God be with you and bless you all. But the good Christians have taken God and made him into a menacing bully, and I cannot even say ‘God bless you,’ during this last moment. (415)

Frank exhibits genuine heartache in resigning. The scene plays like a tragedy. His resigned despair invites compassion. Yet finally, Frank’s curated life of comfort, using ministry as a means of attaining significance, crumbles. In Frank’s imagined resignation, Lewis emphasizes that *Elmer Gantry* exists within a functionally godless world—Christian in name only. In such a world, pastors will certainly be the greatest of deceivers. Frank’s earlier thought that “a preacher can be a scoundrel and a hypocrite and still be accepted by his congregation” (254) proves entirely true. Frank is nowhere near as monstrous as Elmer or Sharon, yet he tolerates his own hypocrisy for too long, only admitting his deception in a moment of passion. Lewis unilaterally condemns the religious climate bred by *Elmer Gantry*’s brood of hypocrites. All contribute to the duplicity of American Christianity in Lewis’ eyes: liberals, conservatives, Mainliners, evangelicals, revivalists. The author proffers a universal rule of preachers’ untrustworthiness.

Frank’s inclusion in *Elmer Gantry* proves essential upon taking a broader view of the religious climate Lewis imagines. In Lewis’ mind, socially and theologically liberal pastors, despite causing less uproar, are also fundamentally hypocritical. *Elmer Gantry* develops from an exposé about authoritarian pastors, to a universal indictment of all Christian pastors. Not one of them can believe the gospel he preaches. Mainline Christianity, although less culturally controversial, possesses the same root problems as Fundamentalist Christianity. Through this, Lewis portrays all clergy as inherently fraudulent, regardless of intentions. He sees pastors and evangelists as innately deceptive, casting an ominous shadow upon the composite portrayal of American ministers in literature. Lewis rejects the idea that Christian leaders live holy lives in service of their flocks. Instead, they devour their followers, each other,

and themselves. Because of the profound spiritual, emotional, and eternal impact Christianity can have, its abuse causes genuine harm, even if authors like Lewis feel little compassion for victims.

Lewis' biting satire provides three American ministers that juxtapose the overall goodness of previously explored pastors like Dimmesdale and Mapple. Despite Lewis' departure from well-respected ministerial figures, *Elmer Gantry* still serves as a coherent case study for American clerical literature. Hypocrisy, secrecy, and duplicity remain common themes. Elmer's relationship with Lulu and Elmer's awe of Sharon both reveal the danger of elevating clergy to a superhuman platform. In *Elmer Gantry*, this human-centered worship both excuses corruption and blinds foolish Christians to their culpability in the corruption. The cyclical nature of the abuse of Christianity reveals how American culture also plays a part in creating Elmers, Sharons, and Franks. The novel serves as a critical evolution, grounding the narrative in a godless world, the first (and only) of the surveyed literature. Lewis illustrates a cultural pivot where clergy function as corrupt figureheads in an unjust society, bred in the excess of the Roaring Twenties. The text's main advancement comes from its suggestion that the core motivation behind Christian fraudulence is the search for intrinsic significance. Any time a pastor attempts to use his office as a means of attaining significance, he will fall into hypocrisy. This applies retroactively to Reverends Hooper and Dimmesdale. The former hid his life behind the veil, demonstrating his belief that the effectiveness of his ministry served as his greatest value. His wife certainly disagreed. The latter feverishly withdrew into himself, using ministry and his spotless reputation to prove his worth to Boston. Their secret sin prevented them from gaining significance from their security in Christ. Insignificance and insecurity are mutually perpetuating diseases, especially for pastors. Arthur Miller expands upon Lewis' the connection between pastors, religious climate, and the cultural setting of the time of writing.

THE CRUCIBLE

Arthur Miller's 1952 drama, *The Crucible*, presents two opposing Puritan clergymen, Reverends Parris and Hale, during the 1692 Salem witch trials. The play explicitly links the trials to the Red Scare of the 1950s. Miller portrays the pastors as misguided and ineffectual at best, evil and manipulative at worst. Either way, the two reverends of *The Crucible* share a portion of responsibility for the nineteen executions following the public's hysteria. These "men of God" make a mockery of justice, both human and divine. The main narrative follows John Proctor, a respectable farmer caught up in the consequences of his adultery with Rev. Parris' niece, seventeen-year-old Abigail. The two clergymen, while only supporting characters, develop the play's commentary upon pastoral significance and fearmongering. Parris' self-preserving motives drive him to protect his manipulative niece at whatever cost, while Hale's confidence in his own ability initiates irrevocable mistakes. While Arthur Miller based both Hale and Parris upon the historical figures sharing their names, their counterparts in the play are primarily fictionalized portraits, thus warranting discussion as fictional characters. With this view, Hale and Parris coherently bolster the overall evolution of the pastor in American literature while also reinforcing the prevailing significance of colonial-era Puritanism. The reverends' inclusion in the

comprehensive picture of literary pastors emphasizes deeper ties between fear and culture, and how pastors serve as a unique mouthpiece for both.

Reverend Parris quickly shows himself to be a self-absorbed and insecure, albeit pitiable, coward. He bears the unenviable distinction of being the only fictional pastor thus far who is unilaterally disliked. Even Elmer and Sharon, as evil as they were, had thousands of vehement (yet misled) supporters. Act I begins with Parris kneeling, whispering frantic prayers over his daughter's bed-ridden body. His despair is real. The desperation caused by his paternal instincts explains one facet of his later willingness to condemn dozens to their deaths. He needs the courts to believe his daughter's (and niece's) self-preserving accusations, lest they be executed for perjury and witchcraft. Miller, despite his obvious disgust of Parris, refuses to portray him as monstrous. His actions are inexcusable, yet at least partially arise from genuine love for his daughter. Miller's positive concessions regarding Parris' character conclude there, however.

The playwright illustrates Parris' diffidence through the pastor's initial dialogue with John Proctor. The parson responds to Proctor's accusations against his materialism by saying, "I want a mark of confidence, is all! I am your third preacher in seven years. I do not wish to be put out like the cat whenever some majority feels the whim. You people seem not to comprehend that a minister is the Lord's man in the parish; a minister is not to be so lightly crossed and contradicted" (28). In a few sentences, Parris communicates his foremost fear: replacement. Returning to ideas explored in *Elmer Gantry*, Parris' insecurity in his pastorate stems from a deeper fear of insignificance. To be removed from the church is to become worthless in Puritan society. While he lacks the power of figures like Elmer or Sharon, Parris demonstrates how someone's identity completely arising *from* his role as pastor leads to tragedy. Further, he reaffirms the belief that a pastor serves as a stand-in for God because of a supposedly *closer* standing to the divine. In his words, "a minister is the Lord's man in the parish." Despite saying this, Parris does not live convinced by his words. If he genuinely believed God specially ordained him for Salem's pulpit, his sense of significance would already be secure. He would have no need of "confidence" from his congregation. Parris, however, illustrates the severe lesson of the damage an insecure pastor can have upon his congregation and his community. In this case, Parris' cover-up for his niece and daughter provokes fearmongering, resulting in nineteen hangings. Followers pay a heavy price when ministers seek significance and security from the pastorate.

Reverend Hale, admittedly less corrupt than Parris, enters the narrative hopeful and haughty. He prays for Salem's complete deliverance from the devil's power. The narrator introduces Hale's character by saying the Salem witch investigation "is a beloved errand for him; on being called here to ascertain witchcraft he felt the pride of the specialist whose unique knowledge has at last been publicly called for" (31). Hale believes his time to prove his significance has arrived "at last." His pride immediately clouds his judgment. Deriving from his pride-induced myopia, he believes he possesses the skill to accurately identify the "witches" causing the village's hysteria. Worse, Hale genuinely believes Salem's God-ordained legal system will be the means of discovering the truth. Neither come to pass. Hale embodies the idea that pastors are arbiters of divine justice, first implied through Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Rev. Hale approves dozens of deaths by signing execution warrants, yet ultimately renounces his involvement, understanding his blindness. If he can be so blind to

earthly injustice, how can Salem trust his pronouncements regarding eternal justice? These questions introduce a general anxiety, issued to all of Salem. Their Christian leaders, their spiritual experts, Hale foremost among them, are easily deceived. Once again, the *people* bear the consequences of the clergy's failings. In *The Crucible*, pastors do not introduce fear, they merely give it direction. Hale attempts to limit Salem's terror through empiricism and discernment, yet his ineffectiveness catalyzes even more horror, beginning in his own conscience.

Hale starts his witchcraft-ascertaining completely convinced of his own righteous motives and the certainty of finding definitive evidence of evil. He says, "We cannot look to superstition in this. The Devil is precise; *the marks of his presence are definite as stone*" (35, italics mine). His certainty derives from his faith in his skill and Puritan law, however, rather than faith in the Almighty. He assures Francis Nurse to "rest upon the justice of the court" (67) and Proctor that "the court is just" (71). The momentum of the trials eradicates Hale's sense of certainty, both in his own discernment and Salem's courts. He eventually understands "there is a prodigious fear of this court in the country" (90) before "quitting" the unjust proceedings altogether. His status as witchcraft expert yields no benefit to himself or the victims—only guilt remains. In Hale, Miller demonstrates the limits to a pastor's power. Hawthorne's Rev. Hooper introduced the power behind the notion of pastor as mouthpiece. Hale, with all his supposed expertise, retains no authority in his words. He counsels the accused to confess crimes they did not commit. Yet even in his final plea to Elizabeth Proctor, Hale misunderstands how his own pride has made him ineffectual. He speaks of divine justice again, saying, "Quail not before God's judgment in this, for it may well be God damns a liar less than he that throws his life away for pride" (122). Even in his guiltiness, Hale can only speak for what God "may well" do. His mockery of justice has eroded his platform of spiritual authority, thus removing any strength or security behind his words. Hale's desperation doubles as he says, "before the laws of God we are as swine! We cannot read His will!" Rev. Hale has lost the authority to speak as a man certain of justice, yet he continues to employ the same legal vocabulary ("judgment," "laws," "will") as the beginning of the play. Ultimately, Hale's approach fails at every stage of the play, conveying the fundamental fear that authority is untrustworthy and set against those under it, directly branching into the political anxieties present during Miller's writing of the play.

Arthur Miller penned *The Crucible* in direct response to the "Red Scare" of the late 1940s and early 1950s in which the House Un-American Activities Committee, led by senator Joe McCarthy, tried many high-profile men and women accused of Communist ties. The narrator makes a direct connection between the Salem witch trials and the Red Scare, saying, "Since 1692 a great but superficial change has wiped out God's beard and the Devil's horns, but the world is still gripped between two diametrically opposed absolutes" (31). McCarthyism's political crusades replaced Salem's spiritual hysteria, yet the central anxiety of secret, propagating evil was constant. In fact, America's Puritan heritage provides a platform for the kind of demagoguery in 1692 Salem and 1950 Washington D.C. As explored in Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," Puritan culture and those it influenced eschew an ambivalent worldview. There is only innocent or guilty, righteous or unrighteous. There can be little complexity or indifference. The HUAC operated under the same conviction, sown deeply into the soil of American culture. The narrator claims that the Puritans "had no ritual for the washing away of sins. It is a trait we inherited from them, and it has helped to discipline us as well as to breed hypocrisy among us" (19).

Miller's narrator, with the awareness of an American in 1953, understands America's Puritan heritage to be the direct ancestor to McCarthyism, responsible for its damage. Puritan morality and its lack of a "ritual for the washing away of sins" led Dimmesdale to seven years of hiddenness, Dimmesdale unable to "be true" without losing his life in the process. Because of this, the appearance of holiness can become the ultimate value, as the morality espoused by Puritanism's rigidity can scarcely be followed. Out of this, hypocritical demagogues like Elmer can arise behind the pulpit.

The Crucible's Hale and Parris bolster the portrayal of American pastors in search of significance and security. Both men fail to gain either, while also sharing responsibility for stripping security away from innocent Salemites. Thus far, the figure of the pastor in American literature seems to have lost his way. His conscience dims, his distance grows, his hypocrisy festers. We are beginning to see and increasingly negative picture of the American minister. There has been little ambivalence in the ministerial characters from the twentieth century, marking a progression away from beloved pastors like Dimmesdale and Father Mapple. Further, Miller's assertion that the country lacks a "ritual for the washing away of sins," which produces a sense that Americans, especially ministers (who possess a lofty calling and reputation), must seek solace in hiddenness, usually initiated by secret sin. *The Crucible's* connection between the Red Scare and the Salem witch trials displays the prevailing power of Puritanism beyond its theological identity, ironically providing an opening for extremely non-Puritan figures. The play underscores how the United States's strong lineage of Puritanism provides a pathway to power for pastors who look and sound "holy," yet are truly the opposite. Their forcefulness serves as a substitute for substance. James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* completes the portrait of a pastor whose upbringing in moral rigidity leads to a life of double life, simultaneously seen as hypocritical and holy.

GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN

Go Tell It on the Mountain, James Baldwin's 1952 semi-autobiographical debut, follows the story of John, the newly fourteen-year-old son of Pentecostal preacher-turned-deacon Gabriel Grimes. He is yet another preacher who fails to "be true." Baldwin splits the novel into five distinct sections, with John as the frame character of the first and last. Gabriel is the primary character in the third and largest section of the book entitled "Gabriel's Prayer," the narrative oscillating between the past and present as the Grimes family and fellow Christians attend a worship service on the Saturday night of John's birthday. Gabriel Grimes is the first African American Christian minister explored thus far in the project. He will not serve as a comprehensive portrait for all African American pastors, but further diversity in author background provides a more thorough exploration of themes in American literature. A full understanding of Gabriel's function as a preacher comes from an attention to the cultural context in which he exists, previously highlighted in "Sinners," *Elmer Gantry*, and *The Crucible*. Gabriel and his older sister, Florence, were born in the South in the late nineteenth century. Gabriel's first two decades of life were marked by rebellion, belligerence, and seduction. After his conversion, Gabriel vows to live a life of holiness, exercising his gifts as a speaker, steadily rising into Southern Pentecostal prominence. To

bolster his upright image, Gabriel marries Deborah, a patient-yet-passionless saint he grows to hate. Even in small ways, Deborah and Gabriel's marriage reveals the pernicious impact of the person-parson schism, as Deborah only refers to her husband as "Reverend," never his name. The central intimacy of calling her spouse by his name, unique and personal, gives way to a title that reminds them both of a power dynamic in which he resides above her. Gabriel grows to despise his wife, always upright but never desirable, and fathers a child out of wedlock with a non-believing co-worker named Esther. The guilt from abandoning his illegitimate son leads Gabriel to a lifetime of hiddenness and self-penance, driving him to marry a young woman named Elizabeth (and adopt her own illegitimate son, John) after Deborah's death in the South. Gabriel's festering guilt erodes his humanity as he attempts to raise John as an atoning replacement for his first son.

To respectfully understand cultural distinctions in Baldwin's novel and the rest of the works (by Anglo American writers), we must switch paradigms from northeast Puritan history to the Southern African American experience through the help of James Weldon Johnson's meditations. The African American poet (1871-1938) penned *God's Trombones* in 1927, an anthology of poems dedicated to the figure of the "old-time Negro preacher" (4), contextualizing and amplifying Gabriel's place in the text. Johnson grew up listening to Black Southern preachers, noting their unparalleled ability to rouse crowds through wit, imagination, and energy. Gabriel's life is nearly contemporary with Johnson's, lending *Go Tell It* a fuller explanation of the early twentieth century South which young Gabriel preaches. In his introduction, Johnson elaborates on the centrality of the pastor to African American life. He believes the preacher to be the most profound figure of unity and influence among his community:

It was through him [the preacher] that the people of diverse languages and customs who were brought here from diverse parts of Africa and thrown into slavery were given their first sense of unity and solidarity. He was the first shepherd of this bewildered flock. His power for good or ill was very great. It was the old-time preacher who for generations was the mainspring of hope and inspiration for the Negro in America. It was also he who instilled into the Negro the narcotic doctrine epitomized in the Spiritual, "You May Have All Dis World, But Give Me Jesus." This power of the old time preacher, somewhat lessened and changed in his successors, is still a vital force; in fact, it is still the greatest single influence among the colored people of the United States. The Negro today is, perhaps, the most priest-governed group in the country. (2-3)

Johnson concedes that the Black preachers' power waned in the Roaring Twenties (a further explanation for Gabriel's diminished influence in within the 1935 portions of the text). Still, he understands the preacher to be an essential figure in African American life. He is constant. He captures the hope, the inspiration, and fear of his people and turns it to praise. He is "frequently, a man of positive genius" and "above all a good orator, and in good measure an actor" (4-5). Further, Johnson's idea that African Americans are "the most priest-governed group in the country" emphasizes the ultimate authority of such pastors in their community, surpassing any of the previous figures in both ability and authority. Even the Puritans, in a system theocracy, set stricter limits upon their religious leaders (evidenced by Rev. Hale's inability overturn the court's judgments in *The Crucible*). This creates a religious climate predisposed to the abuse of power. Johnson understands that the preacher's potency firstly derives from the necessity for unity after the African diaspora. The preacher, however, has evolved from

historical necessity (a rallying point for disparate peoples) to cultural necessity. To Johnson, the preacher is integral to African American life.

One further distinction between *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and the previously explored texts must be noted. Gabriel serves as a Pentecostal minister. Pentecostals, while undoubtedly Protestant Christians, hold a different theology of salvation than evangelicals like Edwards, Hooper, and Dimmesdale. Pentecostals heavily prioritize the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon believers, emphasizing the importance of spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues or healing. While Sharon Falconer was modeled after real-life Pentecostal Aimee Semple McPherson, denominational theology had little to do the character's revivals or preaching. Gabriel's troubled spirit directly relates to the Pentecostal, Arminian doctrine that salvation can be lost through disobedience (directly opposed by Calvinist theology). Most evangelical Christians affirm the belief that nothing, not even the Christian himself, can cause division between himself and God (see John 10:28-30, Romans 8:37-39). This insecurity marks Gabriel's life and stems directly from the Pentecostal doctrine that one can forfeit God's gift of salvation after having tasted its goodness. This difference in religious worldview prepares a natural path for fear and hiddenness.

Baldwin outlines an important development in understanding the evolution of the American pastor in literature through the concept of holiness. Biblical holiness describes something, or someone, set apart for God's sacred use. The holiness of people or objects reflects God's own innate holiness—his moral perfection and complete goodness, so overwhelming that it can be dangerous to approach (see Leviticus 10:1-2). God calls his people to pursue holiness as a testament to his sufficiency, glory, and beauty—God commands that they should live distinctly so that non-believers might better understand his goodness. In *Go Tell It*, however, “holiness” denotes status rather than upright living. Ministers in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, regardless of excessive moral failings, are continually referred to as “holy.” Gabriel serves as the clearest example of this development. Gabriel's stepson, John (unaware that Gabriel is not his biological father), ponders how “none of the saints in any case had ever reproached or rebuked his father, or suggested that his life was spotless. Nevertheless, this man, God's minister, had struck John's mother, and John had wanted to kill him” (53). John's meditation weaves Gabriel's holy reputation and identity as “God's minister” and his abuse of Elizabeth into the same mental strand. John's youth and proximity provide him with an advantage to see Gabriel accurately. He is aware, but not swayed, by the power of image within the church. Through this, the narrator quickly communicates how the paradoxical ideas of blameless status and abusive living can coexist. In this novel, the two are not mutually exclusive.

A more explicit example comes after Gabriel's mistress moves to the North, she sends him a scathing letter, condemning his hypocrisy. Esther writes, “I ain't holy like you are, but I know right from wrong” (156). Esther's comment seems initially paradoxical because an understanding of biblical holiness *should* cause a response of morally upright living. Esther, however, splits the ideas of holiness and basic morality, positioning herself morally above Gabriel. The division between these typically indivisible concepts provides new vocabulary to the dilemma of a pastor's double life. Many previous ministers, most notably Hawthorne's Dimmesdale, found themselves caught between their unconfessed sin and external service. In Gabriel's case, holiness has not derived from his upright living, but his

pastoral calling. His culture, not God, primarily deems him holy. Gabriel's double life strengthens the literary consistency of pastors living in hypocrisy. Further, the culturally derived equivocation of holiness and pastoral power in Baldwin's conception of the African American Church reinforces the notion of preachers as superhuman. Holiness becomes an unattainable characteristic to the common Christian who does not possess his own pulpit. When political power in the church creates holiness as opposed to God, Christians reinforce the *otherness* of the American pastor.

Even so, Gabriel's lifestyle disgusts his older sister, Florence. His title and ability do not convince Florence of any kind of inherent goodness on his part. She generalizes this sentiment when Deborah tells of Gabriel's extramarital affair, saying, "being a preacher ain't never stopped a nigger from doing his dirt . . . he ain't got no right to be a preacher. He ain't better'n nobody else" (98-99). Florence's objections to her brother's holy persona emphasize the limits of pastors' power. Her realistic, albeit cynical, statement mirrors a non-Christian's in *Elmer Gantry*, the man saying, "preachers are normal guys just like the rest of us" (161). In both cases, only the characters who do not subscribe to the Christian worldview eschew the notion of ministerial otherness. Further, Florence communicates the enduring belief that pastoral office *should* require a life above reproach. Despite the repeated motif of hypocritical clergymen in the literature, the role itself retains lofty standards, even in the eyes of non-Christians like Florence. Once again, the pastor seems to be othered by Christians far more often than by non-Christians.

Despite congregants' (especially Deborah's) overly deferential treatment of him, Gabriel shares with Dimmesdale the oppressive insecurity caused by the shame of sin. The façade that Gabriel's status as preacher, then deacon, weighs upon his conscience. He spends more effort maintaining his image via the politics of the church, rather than attempting to "be true." In fact, to "be true" would more accurately represent a step *away* from holiness, in the sense of his image within the African American Church. This constant burden prevents Gabriel from moving toward true, biblical holiness, bringing detriment to Gabriel's ministry and family. In the pattern of Hawthorne's Reverends Hooper and Dimmesdale, Gabriel sees his guilt in the faces of his congregants. After receiving Esther's damning letter, Gabriel's sermons transform into an asphyxiating combination of horror and shame: "he saw his guilt in everybody's eyes. When he stood in the pulpit to preach they looked at him, he felt, as though he had no right to be there, as though they condemned him" (157). Just as Dimmesdale saw his guilt in every parishioner, especially heightened while preaching behind the pulpit, Gabriel also feels most guilty when publicly ministering. Not only is his image at stake, but he knows that it *should* rightfully suffer. Even though none of the churchgoers express knowledge of his infidelity, Gabriel's own conscience turns them against him. Through this, Baldwin accomplishes two feats. First, he supports Hawthorne's conclusions from "The Minister's Black Veil" and *The Scarlet Letter*, affirming how the role of preacher innately amplifies the guilt he experiences over his sin. Second, Gabriel's hypocritical preaching reveals his increasing withdrawal, motivated by hiddenness. Taken together, Reverend Gabriel Grimes demonstrates the overall thematic consistency within American clerical literature: the archetypal pastor is consistently plagued by moral failings, exacerbated by the emotional suffocation prompted by hiddenness arising from ministerial distance. Gabriel goes one step further, beginning to hate the flock he shepherds, none more than Deborah. While Dimmesdale's hatred was self-directed, Gabriel's turns

outward. This speaks more to a difference in characters than inconsistency within the literary conception of the pastor.

Gabriel's crippled conscience deals heavy damage upon his family with his second wife, Elizabeth. He initially views marrying Elizabeth and raising John as his own son as a means of redemption for abandoning his first son. Gabriel seeks to purify himself by substituting his illegitimate son with another (John). He believes he can cleanse his conscience, making himself secure, by proving his transformation to God and himself. Just the opposite occurs. As the time passes, Gabriel increasingly punishes his wife and children for his past, especially John. Only Florence knows of his past impropriety, yet Gabriel does not live as a mentally free man. If Gabriel saw infant John as a path to redemption, he views teenage John as atonement—that is, a sacrifice to absorb sin, making the offender clean and reconciled to God. Biblically, Jesus Christ's death on the cross serves as the atoning sacrifice for all time, having borne the sins of the world and allowing humans a reconciled relationship to God. In *Go Tell It*, the concept manifests heretically through Gabriel's physical, verbal, and mental abuse toward his son. Gabriel struggles to find solace in the biblical truth of Christ's atonement because he has not accepted the forgiveness and redemption that flows from it. He aspires to cause his own redemption by punishing his unbelieving son. He cannot cede control. For example, Gabriel consistently tells John that he has "the face of Satan" (23), emphasizing that Gabriel deems the abuse as righteous because its aim is against Satan. No wonder John rebels against both his father and his father's God! Unfortunately for John, Gabriel's punishment of John does not end. Further, it cannot produce any sort of peace with God.

This redirection of Gabriel's hatred illuminates the undercurrent of his own eternal insecurity. The concept of eternal insecurity by Jonathan Edwards preached concerned whether people had devoted their souls to Christ. Edwards reminded his listeners that moral living is not what wins salvation from God. In "Sinners," the onus was upon those who had not yet made their decision to believe in Christ. Anxiety comes prior to salvation and is assuaged after conversion. For Gabriel and the other Pentecostals of *Go Tell It*, the possibility of lost salvation generates constant terror. Conversion does not guarantee security. In his eyes, there is truly no way for Gabriel to truly know his standing with God, even if he feigns confidence. Florence uses this fear against him in their final confrontation, saying,

You still promising the Lord you going to do better—and you think whatever you done already, whatever you doing right at that *minute*, don't count. Of all the men I *ever* knew, you's the man who ought to be hoping the Bible's all a lie—'cause if that trumpet ever sounds, you going to spend eternity talking. (254, italics original)

Florence, fully knowledgeable of her brother's affair with Esther and his current mistreatment of Elizabeth, insinuates his damnation. She believes that Gabriel will never mature past the sins of his youth, even if he claims, "that's all done and finished." Gabriel deceives himself—he has no reason to unreasonably punish John besides his prevailing sense of dread. If he honestly believed himself right with God, he would understand that his redemption has already been won by Christ. There is no need to for his son to serve as a scapegoat for God's supposed anger toward Gabriel. John would be spared.

The primary consequences of Gabriel's obstinance stemming from his sense of eternal insecurity influence John. For John, Gabriel and God are inextricably connected. The narrator explains how John's

father “was God’s minister, the ambassador of the King of Heaven, and John could not bow before the throne of grace without first kneeling to his father” (15). Accepting the riches of God’s grace and blessing proves impossible in John’s mind because Gabriel serves as the gatekeeper of the gospel. Thus, John’s rebellion against God illustrates rebellion against Gabriel. He cannot remove his father’s face from the character of the Father. Gabriel’s paternal role goes one degree further in representing who God is. While pastors and preachers should certainly serve as a human image of God’s love, tenderness, strength, and wisdom, combining the role of father with that of the pastor cements a fundamentally closer relationship. On a basic level, the figure of father suggests a greater intimacy than that of the pastor because he exists within a family structure. The pastor may only have a general stake in his congregants’ lives, while a father is expected to love and provide for his family. Through Gabriel, Baldwin illustrates the effect of combining the two roles into one man. Dimmesdale previously shared these two roles, but he repressed the truth behind his fatherhood. In Gabriel, it is explicit. Fatherhood, however, is inherently connected to shame for both men. Both Gabriel and Dimmesdale have their first children outside of marriage, thus their identities as fathers are innately shaped by their hidden sin. While Dimmesdale moves beyond this paradigm, publicly pronouncing his iniquity on the scaffold, Gabriel allows his sin to dominate his life and thus infect his fatherhood. Further, his failures as a father prefigure his decline as a minister. By 1935, the main setting of the text, John calls Gabriel a “mere deacon” — “only a caretaker in the house of God” (52). For abandoning his first son, God quietly humbled Gabriel within the culture of the African American Church. He has gone from powerful preacher to dutiful deacon. Gabriel accepts God’s discipline as his due, yet his greatest defeat comes at John’s hand.

Throughout the entirety of the novel, Gabriel fears John’s possible conversion. He sees God’s salvation, as insecure as he may feel within it, as his final bastion of superiority over a son he desperately hates. Because John fails to distinguish father (Gabriel) from Father (God), rebelling by refusing to accept Jesus, he subtly fulfills Gabriel’s desire. He craves hellfire for John, but Gabriel’s adoptive son devotes his life to Christ, many hours into the prayer meeting that began the night before. John cries out, confessing his belief in Jesus Christ and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Gabriel’s soul sinks. The narrator describes the moment of Gabriel’s greatest defeat:

Then he [John] stood before his father. In the moment that he forced himself to raise his eyes and look into his father’s face, he felt in himself a stiffening, and a panic, and a blind rebellion, and a hope for peace . . . “Praise the Lord,” said his father. He did not move to touch him, did not kiss him, did not smile. They stood before each other in silence, while the saints rejoiced: and John struggled to speak the authoritative, the living word that would conquer the great division between his father and himself. But it did not come, the living word; in the silence something died in John, and something came alive . . . he remembered, suddenly, the text of a sermon he had once heard his father preach. And he opened his mouth, feeling, as he watched his father, the darkness roar behind him, and the very earth beneath him seem to shake; yet he gave to his father their common testimony. “I’m saved,” he said, “and I know I’m saved.” And then, as his father did not speak, he repeated his father’s text: “My witness is in Heaven and my record is on high.” (245)

Despite all the trauma Gabriel has caused his son, John still longs for the reconciliation of their souls. His very being has now been reconciled to the Father, yet John's father hates himself and his son too deeply to accept John's salvation. Gabriel quickly responds to the indicting words from his own sermon, largely invalidating John's confession, saying, "I want to see you live it. It's more than just a notion," implicating himself more than his son. Under public scrutiny, this is the closest to rebuking John that he will go. These words are more piercing than they first appear. Regardless of Gabriel's continued emotional abuse, John claims the victory. He is now, in God's eyes, spiritually equal to his father. No longer can John's rebellion against God be used as a guise for Gabriel's mistreatment, nor as a misguided object of "righteous" wrath. John's salvation proves Gabriel's final self-condemnation. The one soul he longed to see condemned has risen above him. His guilt, sin, shame, and self-hatred have lost their target. Without John as the external target Gabriel's life now turns upon itself, the novel closing with John's rise and Gabriel's fall. Gabriel loses nearly all his power as a father when John becomes a Christian. He has gone from neglectful to resigned. The adoptive son has been adopted by a new Father. John's successful delineation between Father and father strips Gabriel of his "right" to punish his son's unrighteousness. Through John's victory over his father, we see a complete supplanting of Gabriel's role as minister. Not only has Gabriel been humbled previously in his reduction from preacher to deacon, but he is ultimately disgraced when his son completely circumvents him in conversion. Gabriel's power of preventing John's salvation breaks forever, emphasizing his impotence as both father and minister.

Go Tell It on the Mountain again emphasizes the seemingly innate hypocrisy in American ministers' lives, demonstrating remarkable consistency across American clerical literature. Further, Gabriel's infidelity connects him to both Dimmesdale and Elmer; the rate of sexual impropriety repeated in these works speaks to its place in the American conception of the pastor. The figure of the pastor is not *guaranteed* to fall into sexual sin, but the repetition of it reminds us of the ever-present possibility of sexual misconduct in Christian leaders, inviting vigilance from followers. This certainly applies to American culture today, just as it has for centuries prior. *Go Tell It* introduces a helpful paradigm through which to understand a pastor's double life, that of image-based versus Bible-based holiness. This construct expands upon the previous ideas of distance and hiddenness by suggesting a cultural inescapability within the African American Church. Thus, our conception of the American pastor may be one of moral failings, but Christians' faith in him still stands. Further, the novel reminds us of the profound damage that arises from a pastor's sense of spiritual insecurity. Gabriel's fear of being exposed and thus losing his reputation, sends him into a downward spiral of hiddenness and abuse, demonstrating a new outworking of the pastor as a mouthpiece for fear. The text's main contribution to the progression of the portrayal of the pastor in American literature stems from the combining of roles of father and preacher into one character. While Dimmesdale (and Parris, to a lesser extent) displayed this previously, Gabriel's status as a father is central to his characterization. Moreover, his role as father seems overshadowed by the more prestigious title of "God's minister." Thus, Baldwin introduces the idea that the American pastor values ministry over family. He derives his paternal longings from his work behind the pulpit, shirking his duty in the home. Overall, the twentieth century texts have departed from their predecessors by imagining Christian clergy as increasingly backwards, untrustworthy, and immoral. The comprehensive evolution of the pastor trends downwards until the beginning of the

twenty-first century, where a fictional pastor responds to many objections to the American pastor through a life well-lived.

GILEAD

The overall portrait of American pastors' hypocrisy, distance, hiddenness, and longing finds quiet hope in the elegiac letters of Congregationalist pastor John Ames III, devoted husband and father, from Marilynne Robinson's 2004 novel *Gilead*. Ames serves as an antithesis to Elmer's brashness, Dimmesdale's hiddenness, Mapple's eccentricity, and Gabriel's hatred. Despite his life being markedly dissimilar to this project's preceding characters, he cohesively encapsulates the subtle beauty within the figure of the American pastor. John Ames shares his name with his grandfather and father, both of whom served as pastors in Gilead before him. He believes himself to be a common man, living seventy-four of his seventy-six years in the small town of Gilead, Iowa. The novel, set in 1956, takes the shape through John's journal to his seven-year-old son, that he may "know his begats" even as Ames's health increasingly wanes. The return of Jack (birth name John Ames Boughton), the prodigal son of Ames's best friend, drives the narrative of *Gilead* forward by exposing John to his prejudices and failings. Ames desires that his son know his family history, which is just as much a story of John Ames III. In *Gilead*, to know a person is to know both his lineage and legacy. Rev. Ames follows the Calvinist theology of his American forefathers, yet his life bears witness to an exceedingly different application of doctrine. He is slow to anger and judgment. He loves his wife and son passionately. He marvels at nature and art. He admits his shortcomings. He prays. He reads and appreciates the work of atheists, even if he does not agree with their conclusions. In short, he lives out the gospel that he preaches. Frank Shallard's imagined rebuke that says, "We don't practice the Christian religion. We don't intend to practice it. Therefore, we don't believe in it" meets strong resistance in the character of John Ames. *Gilead's* protagonist never feigns perfection or dons mock holiness. He explicitly records his sins and shortcomings. Thus, Ames does not function as an unrealistic portrait. He remains authentic. Yet to understand why Ames, a character so markedly distinct from his predecessors, still coheres into the central figure of the American pastor in literature, we must first consider *how* he differentiates himself.

Ames illustrates that he lives an integrated life. Almost immediately, understanding the American view of pastors being separate from their people, he comments on the same idea of ministerial distance common to his predecessors. As he walks past a couple of "young fellows on the street," they abruptly quit laughing. Ames laments, "I appreciate a joke as much as anybody . . . But it's not a thing people are willing to accept. They want you to be a little bit apart" (5). Due to no fault of his own, Ames experiences the same divide resulting from his occupation. Robinson, despite challenging many other preexisting notions of the literary pastor, does well to affirm the general truth that, to be a pastor is to be treated differently. To his delight, Ames quickly tells his son the surprising inverse, saying, "that's the strangest thing about this life, about being in the ministry. People change the subject when they see you coming. And then sometimes those very same people come into your study and tell you the most remarkable things" (6). So, while Ames admits that the culturally imagined division between pastor and parishioner exists, he too emphasizes a benefit. Because of his seeming *otherness*, the very same people who silence their laughter at his presence are willing to divulge their souls to him. While he

longs to be invited into the tender places of laughter, he appreciates even more the invitation into a person's soul.

Moreover, Ames is *sought out* by others, a rare happenstance in the pastors surveyed for this project. He inspires the same kind of reverence of characters like Hawthorne's Dimmesdale and Melville's Mapple, but also possesses a warmth that attracts souls. Interestingly, Ames himself serves as the exception to the rule of ministerial distance through his identity as a son. Because his primary relationship to his grandfather and father, both pastors before him, is that of a family member, Ames can supersede the seemingly inherent divide fixed between shepherd and flock. He never refers to his father or grandfather by their title of "Reverend" because his chief relationship to them is that of a son. This is exceedingly uncommon. The prior examples of pastoral parental relationships have revealed estrangement in each case. Pearl did not know her father for seven years. John hated his father, and related to Gabriel foremost as "God's minister," not a family member. Rev. Ames's especially close relationship with his father suggests that paternity takes precedence over ministry in *Gilead*, a model that Ames follows with his own son.

Ames's wife, Lila, 40 years his junior, likens Ames to Abraham (55). While initially dismissive of the comparison, citing Abraham's elderly wife and promise of a son, he eventually agrees with Lila's notion. He ties himself to the biblical patriarch, the "father of many nations," as he reckons with the necessity of giving up his own son—that is, feeling the freedom to pass away without the guilt of leaving his child fatherless. Ames goes further, saying "any father, particularly an old father, must finally give his child up to the wilderness and trust to the providence of God . . . this is the narrative of all generations, and [it is] only by the grace of God that we are made instruments of His providence and participants in a fatherhood that is always ultimately His" (129). Ames redeems the picture of ministers' fatherhood corrupted by Baldwin's Gabriel (and Dimmesdale to a lesser degree—he rejected Pearl for the majority of *The Scarlet Letter*). He submits his paternal role to the true Father, aspiring only to dimly illustrate God's own paternal love. Ames entrusts his son to the God he worships, trusting God to preserve and trusting his son to choose. Gabriel sought to take John's choice of salvation away from him, stripping him of spiritual agency through abuse and spite. Indeed, Gabriel sought his stepson's damnation. Ames earnestly yearns to *know* his son and *be known by* his son, thus the reason for his journaling, but he especially desires that his son would faithfully choose Christ out of his own volition. Ames prays about, writes to, and hopes for his son, but never manipulates him. He consciously lives out the belief that God will justify those he calls.

Further, Ames is the first pastor to faithfully love his wife. Hawthorne's Hooper chose the black veil over his betrothed. Dimmesdale initiated his relationship with Hester in lust, followed by seven years of near estrangement. Elmer claimed to love Lulu and Sharon but abandoned them both when they hindered his ascent to power. Frank dutifully settled into domestic life with his wife, considering love irrelevant. Gabriel came to hate his first wife and abuse his second. John Ames recounts his wife's holistic beauty in his writing, explaining how he maintained a healthy relationship with her before they were married. He only treated her with grace and admiration, but never did anything that might invite reproach. He reflects that Lila's bold suggestion that Ames propose to her "was the first time in my life I ever knew what it was to love another human being . . . I hadn't realized what it *meant* to love them

before" (55). Even at seventy-six, Ames giddily recounts nine beautiful years of appreciation and love for his wife. Romance has never been a means to social climbing (in fact, marrying an uneducated woman like Lila was socially frowned upon), nor was their marriage grounded in lust. Ames loves his wife as he aspires to love everyone, saying, "Love is holy because it is like grace—the worthiness of its object is never really what matters" (209). He finds himself an unworthy recipient of Lila's love but accepts it nonetheless because it derives from God himself. To accept love is to obey God.

Reverend Ames continues to distinguish himself from the archetypal pastor by serving as a mouthpiece for courage rather than fear. As far back as Edwards, we have observed how pastors have the unique ability to convey cultural anxieties for two reasons. First, the pastor positions himself (at least externally) as secure due to his position of authority, thus congregants believe him to be unaffected by the fear he evokes in listeners. Second, the religious office grants him a greater effectiveness in communicating truths about the soul, circumventing followers' outer layers of guardedness to pierce what is profoundly spiritual within them. Ames chooses to diverge, encouraging obedience and repentance (the same as Edwards, Hooper, Dimmesdale, and Mapple) through preaching about the beauty of God and his creation. As he finishes his journal, Ames leaves his son with a clear exhortation without any mention of fear. Instead, Ames encourages his son to pursue bravery and usefulness. He writes,

Theologians talk about a prevenient grace that precedes grace itself and allows us to accept it. I think there must also be a prevenient courage that allows us to be brave—that is, to acknowledge that there is more beauty than our eyes can bear, that precious things have been put into our hands and to do nothing to honor them is to do great harm. And therefore, this courage allows us, as the old men said, to make ourselves useful . . . I'll pray that you grow up a brave man in a brave country. I will pray you will find a way to be useful. (246-247)

Admittedly, Ames directs his advice to a markedly different audience than his literary predecessors who communicated anxiety through their preaching or lifestyle. They spoke to audiences they could see, people who could immediately respond to God's offer of grace. Ames writes to the son he will not see grow up. He writes to a boy who will not read this journal for years to come. He writes to a man in the future, praying that his son will have already chosen to pursue bravery, beauty, and usefulness. In this, Marilynne Robinson does not disqualify the notion of the pastor as a mouthpiece for cultural fears. Even though Ames does not comment upon insecurities of the day, its exclusion does not disprove the idea that American authors view pastors as commonly related to fear. Instead, Robinson illustrates the enduring nature of courage. Preaching that evokes dread provokes immediate response. An immediate response requires a present, physical audience. For example, Edwards' terrifying rhetoric in "Sinners of the Hands of an Angry God" was written for colonial Americans during the First Great Awakening who were prepared for repentance and revival. While its text might still stir feelings of dread in modern readers, the manipulation of such feelings occurs with a live audience that can be brought to conversion. Ames has no present, physical audience for his journal, merely a future recipient. His emphasis of courage does not lose its effect, however, because the charge revolves around Ames's *hope*, not the emotional reaction of his son. There is an entirely distinct set of goals at work in Ames's journal as opposed to the anxieties preached by previous pastors.

Now that we have explored *how* Ames distinguishes himself from his pastoral peers in American literature, we may explore *why* this occurs. Over a century and a half after Hawthorne's implored readers to "Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred" (Hawthorne 222), Marilynne Robinson fulfills the exhortation. Ames's life provides the first example of an American pastor who accepts the charge to "be true," explaining why he functions in such stark contrast to his predecessors. Ames allows his best friend and fellow pastor, affectionately called "old Boughton," to see the depths of his soul, struggles, and sin. Further, Ames's written reflections to his son reveal him to be a man of authenticity, not desiring that any shadow of shame would interfere with his mission of delivering honest memoirs. On a structural level, the epistolary mode of the novel (notably the only first-person work in the entire project) exhibits Ames's self-divulgence, a quality unique to him. He is the only minister thus far who makes a practice of sharing his true thoughts, even if they display his shortcomings. The very nature of *Gilead's* text emphasizes Ames's mission to "be true"—the only way to be fully known by the son he will leave behind. Ames recognizes that a half-drawn portrait, presenting his saintliness and omitting his sinfulness, would provide his son with an imagined John Ames III rather than the man himself. At a basic level, Ames's desire to show himself openly to his son (and the effort he expends to do so through his writing), places him in a distinctly different plane than that of other fictional clergymen. To Ames, truth is essential in delivering his legacy and person to his son. He operates on a value system that views ministry as the manifestation of a healthy inner life. Ames is a competent minister, yet his life is not defined by ministry. His significance arises from identity, not ability.

By no means is Ames perfect, but because of his secure sense of identity, failures of ability possess no power to ruin him. Ames's clearest struggle in the text is to forgive his namesake, John Ames "Jack" Boughton. Old Boughton desires that Ames would function as a second father to Jack, despite his rebellious nature, termed "meanness" by Ames. Rev. Ames does not shy away from divulging Jack's immorality to his son. Jack's lack of belief in Christianity bothers Ames considerably little, but Jack's abandonment of his illegitimate daughter (who died as a toddler) proves too much for Ames to bear. Ames's first wife died in childbirth, and his daughter passed away soon after, leaving him a widower for many decades. He reflects, "That one man should lose his child and the next man should squander his fatherhood as if it were nothing—well, that does not mean that the second man has transgressed the first. I don't forgive him. I don't know where to begin" (164). Ames logically understands the fallacious nature of his resentment toward Jack, his namesake and godson, yet refuses to forgive him for nearly the entire narrative. Because of this festering anger, Jack and Ames's interactions possess a notable unease. Jack is the only character with the power to shake Ames's conscience and spirit—the only character Ames fails to sincerely serve as a pastor, (surrogate) father, and friend—yet even this decades-long rift does not prevent Ames from eventually meeting Jack halfway. After hearing about Jack's African American wife and son and Jack's clear desire to support them, Ames finally garners the perspective to move past their interpersonal division. He demonstrates the courage that he later writes to his son about by blessing Jack before his departure from Gilead, praying, "Lord, bless John Ames Boughton, this beloved son and brother and husband and father" (241). This blessing seems commonplace, terse even, for a thoughtful pastor like Ames, but both he and Jack know the authenticity of the prayer. A single sentence erases four decades' worth of bitterness. He later tells old Boughton, "I

blessed that boy of yours for you. I still feel the weight of his brow on my hand . . . I love him as much as you meant me to" (244).

Moreover, Ames's essential identity is not dependent upon his vocation. He holds many *identities*, including husband, son, father, friend, and pastor, but all these function as parts of the collective whole of John Ames. There is no person-parson split in Ames's life because his lifestyle and philosophy do not permit it. He is unwilling to sacrifice the health of his soul to overemphasize external ministry (like Hawthorne's Hooper and Dimmesdale). Even in the decades Ames spent as a single man, he never viewed himself as a pastor first. He has always seen himself as nothing more or less than John Ames III—a common man. Ames demonstrates this when he asks Lila to burn his sermon manuscripts, approximately 67,000 pages over five decades, conveying the clear understanding that his value, legacy, and identity exist beyond his words behind the pulpit. Ames feels the freedom to burn his life's work as a preacher because his greater work, that of a father and husband, endures. He gives his congregants (or his family) little opportunity to remember him for his prolific production. He desires to be remembered as John Ames III, the man. For someone to see himself primarily through a lens of humanity rather than occupation seems overwhelmingly simple at face value. In the context of the pastor in American literature, however, we see how John Ames serves as the singular example of this opinion. He stands alone—one out of eleven. Thus, we see that a great deal of pastoral dangers, stemming both from the clergyman's own failings or the cultural pressure surrounding him, have theoretically simple solutions. The difficulty stems from living out the pursuit of being true, of being fully known, even when it incurs great cost: loss of reputation, resistance of cultural expectations, rejection of pastor elevation (when it nears pastor worship), and beyond.

John Ames provides the final say in our perception of the pastor in American literature, but he cannot singlehandedly compel us to forget the ten prior figures. Ames does not singlehandedly reconstruct our literary or cultural imagination, forming the pastor into a man of love, intellect, beauty, and tenderness. He does, however, provide hope amid an increasingly pessimistic literary imagination of the American minister. In such, ministerial hypocrisy and hiddenness are not foregone conclusions, even if they are prevalent. Still, Ames does not disqualify the wrongs of his predecessors, nor does he redeem their failings. Instead, Ames's life adheres into the collective portrait that has evolved over three centuries, illustrating how the lofty calling of pastoral leadership need not be reduced, nor must American Christians abandon hope of following a minister who practices what he preaches. There is still room for pastors like John Ames within the American literary conscience, and plentiful redemption from God's own grace.

CONCLUSION

I undertook this project to investigate how the portrayal of pastors in American literature progressed over the past three centuries. I sought to discover how the literary conscience of the United States, informed by works by some of its seminal authors from a range of time periods, understood the

pastor. Within that search, I delineated two main factors: cohesion and evolution. For cohesion, I explored which ideas consistently emerged. I learned that the pastor in American literature largely operates as an isolated individual, distanced from his congregation and relationships. This ministerial divide typically arises for two reasons. First, a pastor may hide himself due to some sense of shame or secret sin that he feels disqualifies him from living a full life. He fails to “be true.” This first possibility usually lends itself to eccentricity within the pastor. Ironically, this distance usually produces a positive effect for recipients of a pastor’s ministry, even as the clergyman’s soul wanes. Second, the external pressure and quasi-worship pastors receive from followers either inflames oppressive feelings of inadequacy or creates a path to the abuse of leadership. The platforming of Christian leaders to a level of authority near God always generates despair, either within the individual pastor, or within victimized congregants.

This pastor worship provides an avenue into another key consistency: the person-parson schism. Very commonly, the pastor in American literature is viewed as a minister first, and a person second. This often prevents clergy from living integrated lives in which they express their humanity and fallibility as part of their ministry. This common thread throughout the surveyed works suggests how American culture brands pastors as inherently *other*, perpetuating the perceived distance between shepherd and flock, and flattening our culture’s belief of their individuality. By reducing a pastor to his vocation alone, Americans lose a vital understanding of his humanity, including his longings and failings. He is often denied basic intimacies within relationships, his name regularly supplanted by his title. This person-parson split commonly illustrates how pastoral hypocrisy can fester unchecked. The *person* is excused or ignored while the *parson* is exalted. Within this cultural paradigm, pastors either enter or sustain ministry as a means of attaining significance. The minister often derives his sense of value from either his ability or output. This expedition perpetuates feelings of insecurity and hopelessness, even if congregants reap benefits.

Progression within the literary survey is entirely dependent first upon its unity. Only because of the coherence of the comprehensive arc of the pastor could I explore what makes them distinct. Regarding the evolution of the figure, most of the distinguishing features between pastors stem from a common foundation. To begin, the American pastor’s relationship to fear developed from Jonathan Edwards until John Ames. In the earlier works, the pastor clearly serves as a literal mouthpiece for fear, especially relating to eternity. Through preaching, the pastor communicates and utilizes the anxieties of his day. We can partially understand a culture’s fears through a focus upon a pastor’s sermons. The pastor retains an intimate relationship with cultural anxiety, but fear becomes increasingly grounded within the pastor’s own psyche. He bears the dread, demonstrating its impact through his own insecurity. Thus, writers show the pastor to be increasingly assailed by fear, losing a sense of steadfastness. This only comes through to readers, however, and not congregants. The pastor readily retains his *reputation* of external security.

A second progression for the overall trajectory of the literature is the increasing distrust toward the pastor. As American culture becomes more secular and diverse, the pastor loses authorial respect. Even if congregants fervently follow the pastor, narrators clarify how Christians’ reverence is misguided. Moreover, this esteem invites a greater level of ministerial abuse, even when under scrutiny. This

downward slope rebounds in *Gilead*, but the overall trajectory has definitively dropped. Other bits of progression within the survey bear greater weight within their individual works, and do not necessarily contribute to the overall arc for the American pastor in literature. They remain important for understanding their source texts, but do not shape the composite portrait of the figure on their own.

The greatest textual hinge for the literature, and the most direct test of a pastor's quality, is whether a pastor seeks to "be true." The pastor may retain an effective ministry amid hypocrisy and hiddenness, but he only experiences freedom and redemption when he places truth above image. Indeed, "what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36 KJV). The pastors who seek to "be true" experience genuine catharsis and relational intimacy in ways that isolated ministers never approach.

Our response to these findings should not generate a reduction in the standards we hold pastors to. God, the Judge of all, certainly does not lower his expectations due to human inability. Paul clearly relays in both 1 Timothy and Titus what God requires for a biblical pastor. Those words, and thus the pastor's calling to live above reproach, never change. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount reminds us both of our incapability to attain the standard of perfection and God's prevailing perfection. "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). No one, pastor or layman, will reach this standard through his own striving (see Romans 1-7, especially 7:13-25). He requires grace at each moment, depending wholly upon God's resources. The answer is not to reduce God's standard, but to instead diminish cultural constructions that muddy our perception of the pastor. These characters all exhibit failings, ranging from private doubts to large-scale abuse. We are not *responsible* for the failings of our spiritual leaders, but we can easily become *culpable* in them. American attitudes have the power to cause isolation, hiddenness, anxiety, and beyond. All these may specifically lead to an exacerbation of moral and spiritual erosion within the pastorate, or at least increase the sense of distance pastors feel toward those around them. We must reconsider what we value in pastors. Charisma and competency impress us, but Christlike character pleases God. An authoritative, unreachable leader may bring us security, but ministerial distance from any source will reap pernicious effects. We must seek out and affirm pastors who "count the cost" and choose to "be true." We must retain respect for, yet utterly reject the quasi-worship of pastors. The American populace has but little direct impact in pastors' personal lives, but our overall attitude and actions toward them may certainly contribute to their burnout, scandals, and hopelessness.

The figure of the American pastor will prevail regardless of the cultural context in which he exists. He will continue to rise and fall throughout the following decades and centuries, even if Christianity loses its social prevalence, because he inhabits a unique place within our cultural and literary consciences. The pastor has played a vital role in both forming and representing the country's beliefs, fears, and hopes. He will continue to do so. A special attention to the American perception of the pastor should accompany us as our country continues to evolve, and our pastors along with it.

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