

The Plan of Salvation in “The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton”

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1. Introduction

This study is intended to investigate the reflection of the Plan of Salvation, one of the principal Christian doctrines concerning God’s plan of saving human beings through the redemption of Jesus Christ, on the lives of the “about 40”-year-old¹ “curate of Shepperton” (10) Rev Amos Barton, his approximately 35-year-old (75) wife Amelia or Milly, and some kind-hearted Shepperton parishioners,² in George Eliot’s first story among the three in her maiden work *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858).

One of the most significant designs after which the author’s narrator has contrived to create this story is to describe ordinary people’s reality. Her intention to focus on “an ordinary fellow-mortal” is clarified in her declaration of the purpose of highlighting the life of the Rev Amos Barton:

For not having a lofty imagination, as you perceive, and being unable to invent thrilling incidents for your amusement, my only merit must lie in the truth with which I represent to you the humble experience of an ordinary fellow-mortal. I wish to stir your sympathy with commonplace troubles—to win your tears for real sorrow: sorrow such as may live next door to you—such as walks neither in rags nor in velvet, but in very ordinary decent apparel. (59; emphasis added)

Accordingly, the narrator stresses the Shepperton curate's mediocrity repeatedly. For instance,

The Rev. Amos Barton . . . was . . . in no respect an ideal or exceptional character; and perhaps I am doing a bold thing to bespeak your sympathy on behalf of a man who was so very far from remarkable,—a man whose virtues were not heroic, and who had no undetected crime within his breast; who had not the slightest mystery hanging about him, but was palpably and unmistakably commonplace. (43; emphasis added)

The reason for focusing on his mediocrity is elucidated in the following citation which discloses the narrator's overriding concern for drawing the realities of human life provided by the lives of ordinary people.³

Yet these commonplace people—many of them—bear a conscience, and have felt the sublime prompting to do the painful right; they have their unspoken sorrows, and their sacred joys; their hearts have perhaps gone out towards their first-born, and they have mourned over the irreclaimable dead. (44)

To note, however, is the narrator's particular emphasis on the moral excellence of his wife Amelia Barton in her meticulous descriptions of the mediocrity of the characters. Principally, realistic and graphic representations are made on their strong points as well as weak ones almost equally, but, viewed from the Christian doctrine, the narrator's conscious or unconscious intention, or the urauthor's meaning,⁴ to highlight Milly's moral strength is brought to light.

God's Plan of Salvation (or also called that of Redemption, Happiness, or Mercy) (Ronald J. Gordon, "God's Plan of Redemption"; "Plan of Redemption," *Guide to Scriptures*) shall be explained in Section 2. The character analysis shall be conducted on the

protagonist Rev Barton, his spouse Milly, and the Shepperton parishioners in Section 3, 4, and 5 respectively in terms of the two central concepts of the doctrine, i.e. (a) human beings as God's children and (b) the dual construction of a human being, to point out the similarity between G. Eliot's "Religion of Humanity" and the innate goodness of the spirit in the divine plan. Section 6 concludes our argument.

2. The Plan of Salvation⁵

The purport of the doctrine is God's plan for saving His children, or us human beings, through the redemption of His first son Jesus Christ for our happiness not only in the present world but also in the next.

Our existence in the premortal world is hinted at, for instance, in the prophet Jeremiah's quotation from the words of God: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee" (Jer. 1.5). The prophet Job records that human beings were the spirit children of God in the premortal world: "Whereupon are the foundations thereof [of the earth] fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; / When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38.6-7; emphasis added). Our being God's children is proclaimed by the Lord Himself: "I have made" you (Isa. 46.4).

Human beings who had lived with God as His spirit children in the premortal world were born into earth to have physical bodies, and only through this step can our souls have experiences to grow up in the mortal world in preparation for meeting God again in the postmortal world. Our being of dual construction—i.e. made of flesh and spirit—is confirmed by the following verse where the Apostle Paul states that we have the father of our flesh and the father of our

spirit: "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected *us*, and we gave *them* reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" (Heb. 12.9; emphasis added). A reference to the dual structure of a human being is made in the Apostle James's testimony that "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jam. 2.26; emphasis added). Death which separates spirits from bodies is a step for the eternal journey that includes resurrection when spirits will reunite with bodies. The hope of everlasting life is the promise made by God when we were in the premortal world: "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Tit. 1.2).

The resurrection of all the dead is promised by Jesus: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his [Christ's] voice, / And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5.28-29). It is affirmed by the Apostle Paul as well: "In a moment . . . the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. . . . So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15.52-54). Christ's Second Coming and our resurrection are promised by Himself: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14.18-19; emphasis added).

We can return to our Heavenly Father only through Jesus Christ His son, whom He sent for us to overcome sin and death, as is testified by the Apostles John and Paul: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth

in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3.16) and "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4.12). Stressing the eternity of God's Plan of Salvation, the author of the book of Psalms writes, "The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Ps. 33.11). The plan is made by God according to "the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3.11).

3. Rev Amos Barton

Rev Amos Barton is depicted as an "utterly uninteresting character" (43) who has both strong points and weak as all of us do. This section seeks the principal elements of the divine Plan of Salvation in the frequent depictions of the curate's mediocrity.

The information about Rev Barton's weakness is scattered over the text. For instance, the narrator honestly expresses her concerns about the shakiness of his clerical leadership: his "spiritual gifts would not have had a very commanding power even in an age of faith" (46). He has a defect in spelling and writing: he has no "gift of perfect accuracy in English orthography and syntax" (24). As for his oratory, he often misses "the right note both in public and private exhortation" and gets "a little angry in consequence," for although he "thought himself strong, he did not *feel* himself strong"; after all "Nature had given him the opinion, but not the sensation" (25). He has "neither that flexible imagination, nor that adroit tongue" (27). His temper is "a little warm" for the "patience and magnanimity" of Miss Jackson, Milly's elderly aunt (45).

Although being "indefatigable in his vocation" (47), Rev Barton is principally a mediocre priest. He preaches "two extemporary sermons every Sunday at the workhouse" and walks "the same

evening to a cottage at one or other extremity of his parish to deliver another sermon," but "not at all an ascetic" (47). He drinks "brandy,"⁶ acknowledges no "benefits of fasting," and likes "relaxing himself with a little gossip" (47). The Shepperton curate does "not more uninterruptedly exhibit a superiority to the things of the flesh" (47). Though he never comes "near the borders of a vice," his "very faults" are neither very good nor very bad: "It was not in his nature to be superlative in anything; unless, indeed, he was superlatively middling, the quintessential extract of mediocrity" (47). He is confident not in "his spiritual gifts" (46) but "in his own shrewdness and ability in practical matters" (47). Summarizing his mediocrity, the narrator writes that "The Rev. Amos Barton was more apt to fall into a blunder than into a sin—more apt to be deceived than to incur a necessity for being deceitful" (58).

Rev Barton's nonchalant response to Countess Czerlaski's imprudent talk denotes his insensitiveness to his sickly wife: "the Rev. Amos had a vague consciousness that he had risen into aristocratic life, and only associated with his middle-class parishioners in a pastoral and parenthetic manner" (47). Because of this uncompassionate response, he is "not exculpated" by "the coolness and alienation in the parishioners, which could not at once vanish before the fact" of the Countess's departure (65).

When he comes home soon after his wife accepted the Countess Caroline's bold solicitation to let her stay in his vicarage for a couple of weeks, he joins "his cordial welcome and sympathy to Milly's" (49), but the "keen-sighted virtue of Milby and Shepperton" sees "its worst suspicions" in this situation and pities his "gullibility" (50). A severe criticism against his naïvely weak charitableness is bestowed upon the parson by Mr Pilgrim, a Shepperton medical doctor who piques "himself on a talent for sarcasm": "I used to think Barton was

only a fool. . . . I thought he was imposed upon and led away by" the Countess and her brother "when they first came" (52).

When he hears the news of the Countess's decision to leave his house, Rev Barton expresses "more regret at the idea of parting than Milly could," as he retains "more of his original feeling for the Countess than" his wife does (64). Because of "his original feeling," or his belief in her as "a charming and influential woman, disposed to befriend him" (60), he fails to notice Milly's hidden relief. He is disparaged by the narrator for his lack of sympathy as having "not a keen instinct for character" (64). His imagination is "not vivid" and requires "the stimulus of actual perception" (73).

As a commonplace man who has not merely weak points but also strong, Amos Barton's goodness is also emphasized. For example, the "honest faithful man" has "sincerity of purpose" and "the cure of all souls in his parish, pauper as well as other" in doing his clerical works (25). Besides, the narrator impresses his goodness as an educator on the reader by introducing his words of encouragement to a naughty boy Master Fodge: "if you are naughty, God will be angry . . . and God can burn you for ever. . . . if you will be a good boy, God will love you, and you will grow up to be a good man. Now, let me hear next Thursday that you have been a good boy" (29). The Countess Caroline Czerlaski admits his being "too patient and forbearing" (34) as "a spiritual director" (42). Hearing a young tailor Jacob Tomms's talk about the village rumour of Rev Barton's scandal with the Countess, Nanny, his "maid-of-all work" (61), repudiates its veracity and confirms her master's moral integrity: "Do *you* think as the master, as has got a wife like the missis, 'ud go runnin' arter a stuck-up piece o' goods like that Countess, as isn't fit to black the missis's shoes? I'm none so fond o' the master, but I know better on him nor that" (62).

Rev Barton's goodness is intimated in the narratorial explanation of his three reasons for keeping the Countess long at his vicarage in spite of "the strong disapprobation" and the change of his kindest parishioners' feelings towards him. First, he still believes in "the Countess as a charming and influential woman, disposed to befriend him," and therefore can "hardly hint departure to a lady guest who had been kind to him and his, and who might any day spontaneously announce the termination of her visit"; secondly, he is "conscious of his own innocence, and felt some contemptuous indignation towards people who were ready to imagine evil of him"; and, lastly, he has "a strong will of his own" and "a certain obstinacy and defiance" (60). These three reasons imply such good qualities of the "evangelical clergyman" (30) as politeness, dignity, and confidence.

Our spirit remembers its innate goodness when we are in deep repentance which engenders humility. Rev Barton is no exception when he expresses his regret about "no recognition of Milly's attentions" (30) during her life.

Amos Barton had been an affectionate husband, and while Milly was with him, he was never visited by the thought that perhaps his sympathy with her was not quick and watchful enough; but now he relived all their life together, with that terrible keenness of memory and imagination which bereavement gives, and he felt as if his very love needed a pardon for its poverty and selfishness. (71)

The last independent clause "he felt as if his very love needed a pardon for its poverty and selfishness" signifies the depth of his repentance and humility. It is clarified as well in his soliloquy uttered in front of his wife's grave in the last evening of his stay at his parish: "Milly, Milly, dost thou hear me? I didn't love thee enough—

wasn't tender enough to thee—but I think of it all now" (75). The narrator closes this scene with the account of the keenness of his remorse which arouses the reader's sympathy toward the protagonist: "The sobs came and choked his utterance, and the warm tears fell" (75). The purpose of her story for the reader—"to stir your sympathy with commonplace troubles—to win your tears for real sorrow" (59)—is fulfilled in this ending.

According to the Bible, compunction brings about humility and humility forgiveness as indicated by the parable of the Prodigal Son in which the rueful prodigal is willingly forgiven by his father (Luke 15.11-32); furthermore, forgiveness induces faith in God as the woman taken in adultery and forgiven by Jesus comes to glorify God and believe in Him (John 8.2-11).⁷ G. Eliot's narrator, notwithstanding, gives no such solution to Rev Barton's penitence. She provides a human help not divine. In the scene of old Barton's visit to Milly's grave with "about thirty"-year-old Patty which takes place approximately 24 years after his last visit, the narrator illustrates that his comfort has been given by his eldest daughter, not by God.

Amos himself was much changed. His thin circlet of hair was nearly white, and his walk was no longer firm and upright. But his glance was calm, and even cheerful, and his neat linen told of a woman's care. Milly did not take all her love from the earth when she died. She had left some of it in Patty's heart. (75)

The narrator's treatment of Rev Barton's repentance reflects the author's commitment to Auguste Comte's idea "the Religion of Humanity," a new form of her moral teaching which looks "for divinity not in the supernatural, but within what is most noble in human nature itself" (Jennifer Gribble xii), or Ludwig "Feuerbach's identification of the divine with the human" (Chard 111) in the view

that “the essence of Christianity is to be found in one’s fellow human beings” (Gribble xx). It is, in other words, “the true religion of neighbourliness” (Q. D. Leavis 17) which centres on “remedial influences of pure, natural human relations” (*GEL* 3: 382; to John Blackwood dated 24 Feb. 1861) rather than on the dogmatic Christian theories.

4. Amelia Barton

In contrast to her husband’s, Milly’s moral weakness is rarely described.⁸ The narrator records only one—the weakness for dress—with no nuance of reproach but rather with a sympathetic tone: “Milly has one weakness—don’t love her any the less for it, it was a pretty woman’s weakness—she was fond of dress” (33).

To her moral integrity, however, there is no lack of references: “Milly is the first of George Eliot’s idealization of selfless womanhood” (Graham Handley 375). The narrator introduces her as has “Soothing, unspeakable charm of gentle womanhood! which supersedes all acquisitions, all accomplishments” (19). Her husband will be soothed by “the loving light of her unrepublishing eyes! (19). Hating gossips and rumours, she says “why will people take so much pains to find out evil about others?(21). Even though her body is weary, her heart is not, because “her heart so overflowed with love, she felt sure she was near a fountain of love that would care for husband and babes better than she could foresee” (23). Besides, she is “gentle” and “uncomplaining” (60).

A small accident which takes place in the evening dinner at Camp Villa, Countess Caroline Czerlaski’s “country residence” (32), brings into relief not only Mill’s goodness but also the Christian doctrine of human beings as God’s children. When the Countess’s impetuous speaking to her man-servant John “at an inopportune

moment" causes his "gravy-tureen" slip and empty "itself on Mrs Barton's newly-turned black silk," Milly feels "a little inward anguish, but no ill-temper," and tries "to make light of the matter for the sake of John as well as others" (35). In contrast to Milly's considerate response to her neighbours, the Countess's response is self-centred: she feels "a little inwardly thankful that her own delicate silk" has escaped, but throws "out lavish interjections of distress and indignation" (35) probably towards John as he anticipates "what tantrums she'd ha' been in after the visitors was gone" (35) later. Although demonstrating the ordinary people's weakness of short temper, however, the Countess reveals her sound judgment on the moral question, or her divine quality, at the same time. She displays the capacity of acknowledging Milly's goodness when she says to her, "Dear saint that you are. . . . But you are so indifferent to dress; and well you may be. It is you who make dress pretty, and not dress that makes you pretty" (35). Later, "in retrieval of the accident that . . . occurred at his table," Mr Bridmain, the Countess's half brother, presents Mrs Barton "a handsome black silk" (44); the action betokens his kind consideration, a quality as a child of God.

Although Shepperton parishioners are sensitive enough "to have a strong sense that the clergyman needed their material aid, than that they needed his spiritual aid," the Countess Czerlaski is not. Her attention to the Bartons—"indefatigable" visits to her 'sweet Milly' and "sitting with her for hours together"—is depicted as senseless: she neither thinks "of taking away any of the children, nor of providing for any of Milly's probable wants; but ladies of rank and of luxurious habits . . . cannot be expected to surmise the details of poverty" (46). However, Milly thinks "her sprightliness and affectionate warmth quite charming" and feels "very fond of her" (47). This response is another instance of Milly's good-naturedness, although

inserted here rather with a sarcastic nuance.

The goodness of her spirit is found in her prompt, cordial, and humble acceptance of the Countess Caroline's request to take her in "for a week or two" in Shepperton Vicarage: "That we will . . . if you will only put up with our poor rooms and way of living. It will be delightful to have you!" (49).

Constant emphasis is laid on Milly's selflessness. At first, she "is quite glad to incur extra exertion for the sake of making her friend," the Countess Caroline Czerlaski, "comfortable," and does "all the rough work . . . with those lovely hands—all by the sly, without letting her husband know anything about it" (60). Her doing good for others surreptitiously is an achievement of Christ's teaching on doing the righteous: "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 6.1). Milly knows of the parishioners' slander concerning her husband's admission of the Countess's extended stay at his vicarage, and is "aware of the keeping aloof of old friends," but she feels these pains "almost entirely on her husband's account," not on her own (61). Her altruistic devotion to her husband is stressed in the narratorial remark: "She was only vexed that her husband should be vexed—only wounded because he was misconceived" (61).

The supreme goodness of Milly's spirit is incorporated in her farewell words to her little children and her husband. To her "nine-year-old Patty, the eldest child" (23), she gives a piece of motherly advice based on her Christian faith: "Patty, I'm going away from you. Love your papa. Comfort him; and take care of your little brothers and sisters. God will help you" (68). To her seven-year-old Fred and six-year-old Sophy (70), she asks them to be right: "Patty will try to be your mamma when I am gone, my darlings. You will

be good and not vex her" (68). Her last words to Rev Barton are filled with love and thankfulness: "My dear—dear—husband—you have been—very—good to me. You—have—made me—very—happy" (69). Despite her mediocre husband's thoughtlessness to her conditions,⁹ Milly utters no word of criticism of him, but quietly expresses her gratitude. Indeed, the narrator ventures to say, "Mrs Barton's nature would never have grown half so angelic if she had married the man you would perhaps have had in your eye for her—a man with sufficient income and abundant personal éclat. Besides, Amos was an affectionate husband, and, in his way, valued his wife as his best treasure" (20). Her moral integrity is a reflection of Jesus's teaching "Judge not" others (Matt. 7.1-2; Luke 6.37) and her belief in the Christian doctrine that all human beings are the beloved children of God (Rom. 8.16). Her last words signify that she has been faithful to the teaching of the Apostle John:

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. / In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. / For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. (1 John 3. 9-11)

Milly's selflessness and enduring faith in God are exhibited in the "final words of the inscription" of her gravestone: "Thy will be done" (75). This verse is taken from Jesus' teaching of the Lord's Prayer: "When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth" (Luke 11.2; emphasis added). The final words are an echo of Jesus's prayer on the Cross: "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done"

(Matt. 26.42; emphasis added). In both cases, the verse denotes Christ's stress on the trust in our Heavenly Father.

5. The Shepperton Parishioners

Mrs Hackit's morning visit to see sickly Mrs Barton provides a memorable (45) scene not only for the wife of the "church-warden" (14) but also for the reader because it spotlights the goodness of their spirits as an attribute of God's children, one of the essential concepts of the divine Plan of Salvation. The innate tenderness of the spirit of usually strict and unsentimental Mrs Hackit, whose tongue is "as sharp as . . . [a] lancet" (11), is hinted at when she calls on Milly in poor health: "Mrs Hackit, who hardly ever paid a visit to any one but her oldest and nearest neighbour, Mrs Patten, now took the unusual step of calling at the vicarage one morning; and the tears came into her unsentimental eyes as she saw Milly seated pale and feeble in the parlour" (45). Milly's moral excellence is displayed in her modest answer to Mrs Hackit's inquiry of her condition: "Milly endeavoured to make it appear that no woman was ever so much in danger of being over-fed and led into self-indulgent habits as herself" (45-46). The inborn goodness of Mrs Hackit's spirit is hinted at even in such a small action of her as below: seeing "Little Dickey, a boisterous boy of five . . . subdued into goodness, she smiled at him with her kindest smile, and, stooping down, suggested a kiss" (45). It is also intimated in her "peculiar tenderness and pity" for the boy who is "decidedly backward in his pronunciation" when he demonstrates kindness towards his sickly mother by "stroking and kissing" of her hand (46). The information she obtains then about the Shepperton doctor Mr Brand's order for Milly to drink port-wine (45, 46) prompts her to send her sickly friend a hamper containing "half-a-dozen of port-wine and two couples of fowls" (46) next day. This considerate

and thoughtful act is another example of her goodness as a spirit child of God.

Mrs Hackit's kindness draws other Shepperton parishioners' "good-natured attentions" to making "the trouble of Milly's illness more bearable" (46). For example, Mrs Farquhar, who is "very fond of" Mrs Barton (38), brings to her invalid friend her "genuine Indian" arrowroot, and carries away Milly's two little children "to stay with her a fortnight" (46).

In Mrs Barton's death scene, focus is placed on the innate goodness of the Shepperton parishioners' spirits, especially Mr and Mrs Hackit's. Soon after hearing the news of her steep decline of health, Mr Hackit tells his wife to "have the pony-chaise, and go directly" to the Vicarage (66). Their spirits' kind consideration for the Bartons is fused in such a small dialogue they have before her departure as "If I don't come home to-night, I shall send back the pony-chaise, and you'll know I'm wanted there," "Yes, yes" (66). Soon after her arrival, Mrs Hackit enters at "the kitchen door, that she might avoid knocking, and quietly question Nanny" the maid (66). In the sitting room, Milly's kind-hearted "old friend" (65) learns that her small children have been taken away by Mrs Bond, another warm-hearted neighbour or the wife of the "churchwarden" (48). When Patty the eldest child begs "to stay at home and not go to Mrs Bond's again," the faithful maid Nanny gives her a sensible reminder that she has "better go to take care of" her younger siblings (69).

The scene of Milly's funeral provides some more examples of the goodness of the neighbours' spirits. The burial of "the sweet mother" with her dead baby is presided over by Rev Cleves, who, on "the first news of Mr Barton's calamity," has "ridden over from Tripplegate to beg that he might be made of some use" (70). The

funeral procession is watched by "many a sad eye" (70). Men and women who once "brandied vulgar jests about their pastor" and "lightly charged him with sin," now seeing "him following the coffin, pale and haggard," come to agree that he is "consecrated anew by his great sorrow," and look at him "with respectful pity" (70). Feeling pity for the afflicted and respect for their forbearance is an attribute of God's children who have heard from the premortal world that "we should love one another" (1 John 3. 11).

The goodness of the Shepperton villagers' spirits is emphasized in the narrator's description of their help for the bereaved family of Mrs Barton: "Cold faces looked kind again, and parishioners turned over in their minds what they could best do to help their pastor" (71). Mr Oldinport sends "another twenty-pound note" to relieve "Mr Barton's mind from pecuniary anxieties" (71) and offers "his interest towards placing the two eldest girls in a school . . . for clergymen's daughters" (71-72). Rev Cleves collects "thirty pounds . . . and, adding ten pounds himself," sends "the sum to Amos" (71). Miss Jackson, Milly's aunt, comes "to say some months with" her children, to lessen Rev Barton's educational burden (71). Mr and Mrs Hackits take care of Dickey at their house; the Misses Farquhar give Fred and Sophy "lessons twice a-week in writing and geography"; and Mrs Farquhar, the squire's wife, devise "many treats for the little ones" (72).

The narrator's description of the parishioners' sympathy towards "Amos and his children" is found also in "the dreaded week" of their departure from Shepperton (74). Mrs Hackit's "heart aches for them poor motherless children" (74). Remarking that the "same sort of sympathy" is "strong among the poorer class of parishioners," the narrator introduces the charwoman Mrs Cramp, who helps "Nanny to pack up the day before the departure," and old "stiff-

jointed" Mr Tozer, who inquires "very particularly into Mr Barton's prospects" (74).

Critics¹⁰ may consider that the above instances signify G. Eliot's commitment to the Religion of Humanity. There is the 33-year-old Marian Evan's declaration of her attachment to the Comtian religion in her letter to Charles Bray dated 22 Jan. 1853: "Heaven help us! said the old religions—the new one, from its very lack of that faith, will teach us all the more to help one another" (*GEL* 2: 82). However, the Plan of Salvation views the above instances of human goodness as the manifestation of the inward goodness of the human spirit because we are all the children of God (Rom 8.16). In short, G. Eliot's "Religion of Humanity" and "the innate goodness of the human spirit," one of the principal concepts of God's Plan of Salvation, are fundamentally the same; the actual difference between them lies in whether goodness is attributed to human beings or their spirits. In other words, the Theory of Humanity has an affinity with the concept of human beings as God's children because both repose trust in human goodness as their quintessence.

6. Conclusion

The scriptural analysis of the Shepperton villagers' lives above unveils the presence of God's Plan of Salvation as one of the significant factors to elucidate the urauther's meaning.

According to Chard, G. Eliot's "choice of common human beings as her first heroes links her with [Charlotte] Brontë and Gaskell in their awareness that such persons in their unremarkable situations can be an entry point for the divine presence" (111). Gribble observes that G. Eliot "sees the representation of the people 'as they are' as a 'sacred task'" (xv). From the two critics' assertions, it can be inferred that the description of ordinary people is a "sacred

task” for G. Eliot because they reflect “the divine presence.”

Concerning the concluding remark at the closing scene of Rev Barton’s visit to his wife’s grave with their eldest child Patty that “Milly did not take all her love from the earth when she died. She had left some of it in Patty’s heart” (75), Chard offers a similar interpretation to ours that the narratorial comment mirrors G. Eliot’s affinity with the Religion of Humanity:

The restorative power, as always in Eliot’s novels, is expressed solely in human terms and through human agency. Following Milly’s death there is no reference to the abiding presence and comforting love of a supernatural being. On the contrary, the proper object of faith is seen to be humanity itself. . . . The focus is on life in this world rather than on hope for the next. (113; emphasis added)

In terms of the divine doctrine God’s Plan of Salvation, nevertheless, it is uncertain if the author really holds the idea that the “focus is on life in this world rather than on hope for the next.” For, as we have seen, frequent allusions to the concepts “human beings as God’s children” and “a human being made of spirit and body” are made in this story, and the author’s trust in humanity is another name of her trust in the goodness of human spirit. To verify this interpretation or G. Eliot’s conscious or unconscious commitment to the Plan of Salvation, this study shall be closed by quoting her narrator’s references to (a) the soul, or spirit, as one of the binary components of a human being and (b) the belief in the next world—both the vital concepts in the divine doctrine.

In the Clerical Meeting held at Milby Vicarage on the first “Thursday” (53) of “November” (50), where Milly’s working as a cook for her husband, their six children, and the Countess is broached as one of the “dinner” (56) topics, Rev Archibald Duke, a “dyspeptic

and evangelical man" (54), proposes to the clergy that they should "remonstrate with Mr Barton on the scandal he is causing" by referring to his soul: "He is not only imperilling his own soul, but the souls of his flock" (57; emphasis added). In recording Rev Barton's regret about his inattentiveness for his dead wife, the narrator uses "soul" to signify Milly: "we can never atone to our dead . . . for the little reverence we showed to that sacred human soul that lived so close to us, and was the divinest thing God had given us to know" (71; emphasis added).

Rev Barton's belief in the postmortal world is expressed in his advice to old Mrs Brick, "one of those hard undying old women" (27) who hopes that "the parson might be intending to replenish" (28) her snuff-box, "you'll soon be going where there is no more snuff" (28; emphasis added). The belief is articulated by his maid Nanny to Dickey his fourth child at his wife's burial: mamma is "in heaven" (70). It is manifested by the Countess Czerlaski as well: "Only this little bit of pretence and vanity, and then I will be *quite* good, and make myself quite safe for another world" ("AB" 42; emphasis added). She knows the truth of Jesus's parable of a net that being good is a requisite for the kingdom of heaven: "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just" (Matt. 13.49).

Notes

1. "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton" 19. Hereafter, page references shall be inserted in the text.
2. The analysis of the 35-year-old (41) Countess Caroline Czerlaski shall be given in another paper because of the word limit for this paper.
3. G. Eliot's special interest in realism is articulated in her devotion to John Ruskin the Victorian art critic (1819-1900) expressed in her essay "Art and

Belles Lettres”: “The truth of infinite value that he teaches is *realism*—the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality” (*George Eliot Letters* 2: 228).

4. The urauthor is William Irwin’s term for the author constructed in the reader’s mind: “This study has defended a particular normative approach, uninterpretation, the central claim of which is that the meaning of a text is the author’s intended communication. Importantly, it is not the author as person with whom we are concerned but the author as a particular mental construct, the urauthor, and it is through our conception of the urauthor that we seek meaning” (112).
5. This section is a slightly modified version of Section 1 of my paper “The Plan of Salvation and the Religion of Humanity in ‘Janet’s Repentance.’”
6. The then Christian view of the habit of drinking alcohol as immoral is hinted at also in Milly’s consideration of “the sober Mr Bridmain taking to brandy” as the degradation of the Countess Caroline’s brother (49).
7. Chard explains the process as this: “only after the spirit is broken and made contrite can it be truly regenerated and directed beyond itself” (114-15).
8. Her physical weakness is intimated a few times: Milly’s “cheek was paler than usual” (23); “Milly had an illness” (45); her “delicate body was becoming daily less fit for all the many things that had to be done between rising up and lying down” (60).
9. Rev Barton’s contrition about his thoughtlessness to Milly he suffers after her death is recorded as this: “O the anguish of that thought that we can never atone to our dead for the stunted affection we gave them, for the light answers we returned to their complaints or their pleadings, for the little reverence we showed to that sacred human soul that lived so close to us, and was the divinest thing God had given us to know” (71).
10. For instance, Terry Eagleton (qtd. in Charles LaPort 547), Norman Vance (483), LaPorte (547), Jenny Uglow (*GE* 91), and M. Joan Chard (108). See my article “The Plan of Salvation and the Religion of Humanity in ‘Janet’s Repentance’” (16) for details.

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