Coleridge's Clerisy and Print Culture

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A VISION OF THE CLERISY—a learned class entrusted with Britain's national education—was taking shape in Coleridge's mind since at least the 1809 *Friend*.[1] By *On the Constitution of the Church and State* in 1829, Coleridge was offering a full exposition of the clerisy, arguing that his treasured idea was anticipated in the Church of England, the institution in which he hoped it would be realized. In principle, Coleridge believed, the clerisy could comprehend "the learned of all denominations," that is, from all the arts, sciences, and professions.[2] Its centers of intellectual conservation and discovery would be the ancient universities, whose fellows were then still ordained priests in the Anglican Church.[3] The universities would send forth Anglican pastors and school teachers into every parish, charged with ensuring that each citizen experienced "the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterize our *humanity*" (CS 43) and that "qualify" each person to be "the free subject of a civilized realm" (CS 74). Coleridge clarifies that whereas "Christianity, or the Church of Christ" (CS 55), is not national and looks to Christ as its head, the clergy of the Anglican Church are part of a national institution and properly swear loyalty to their king. In theory, such a "National" Church, or clerisy, need not even be Christian: "religion . . . is not the essential constitutive end of" the education they ought to provide for the nation (CS 45). Yet by what Coleridge calls "a blessed accident, a providential boon" (CS 55), Christianity is the creed of England's national church, and efforts to "separate" the clerisy's ministry from their civilizing influence, he says, would lead to "great and grievous… evils" (CS 57).

Many a reader of Coleridge's explanation of the clerisy in *Church and State* has probably recalled Byron's quip about *Biographia Literaria* (1817): "I wish he would explain his explanation."[4] Coleridge does not condescend to explain how, in nineteenth-century Britain, free academic inquiry, a broad civic and humanistic education, and Anglican devotion could be coordinated within one national system, especially at a time when every scheme for national education was withering under the heat of religious sectarian debate. Yet as Stephen

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[1] Coleridge's first use of the *term* "clerisy," as far as I know, is in his 1818 "Lectures on Principles of Judgement, Culture, and European Literature" for the London Philosophical Society. In the March 13 lecture, he says that the "clerisy," a body of reflective men of letters, "gradually disappeared" after the 1688 'Revolution,' so that "literature in general began to be addressed to the common miscellaneous public" (*Lectures on Literature: 1808-1819*, ed. R.A. Foakes, 2 vols. [Princeton: Princeton UP and Routledge, 1987], II 236). Yet the idea of a national class dedicated to moral reflection and right reason had been with Coleridge long before he fully expressed it in *Church and State*. John Klancher argues that Coleridge was attempting to form a reading audience of learned professionals through the publication of the 1809 *Friend* (*The Making of English Reading Audiences*, *1790-1832* [Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1987], 152). Coleridge approached *The Statesman's Manual* (1816) with similar ambitions. Luke Savin Herrick Wright observes that the original title of that volume was "Addressed to the Learned and Reflecting of all Ranks and Professions, especially among the Higher Classes" (*Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Anglican Church* [Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame, 2010], 136).

[2] *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, ed. John Colmer (Princeton: Princeton UP and Routledge, 1976), 46.

[3] Wright 196.

[4] "Dedication" to *Don Juan* (2.16) in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, 4th ed., Ed. Duncan Wu (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2012), 959.

Prickett suggested some time ago, Coleridge's idea of the clerisy is just that—an *idea*, an account of principles meant to inspire and guide reform, not a practical instruction manual.[5] Furthermore, this idea "exists under" necessary "tension": it resists tidy institutional and functional definitions, since "each function, the National and the Christian," is both distinct from, "and supported by, the other" (269).

I would add that the heterogeneous and ambiguous nature of Coleridge's clerisy results from his perception of emergent structures of modern society, not only from, as he puts it in *Church and State*, his decision to explain "the *idea* of a National Church, not the history of *the* Church established in this nation" (CS 57). Through the clerisy, Coleridge is responding to the modernizing process that sociologists such as José Casanova have called "differentiation": "differentiation" refers not to widespread decline and privatization of religious belief and practice (which did not happen in nineteenth-century Britain), but to the gradual removal from formal religious supervision of various spheres of social and cultural authority—for example, the market place, the mass media, and the professions.[6]

Although Coleridge believed that in principle the clerisy included "the learned of all denominations" (CS 46), he knew that profitable practical sciences and professions—such as "law, medicine, &c."—had long ago "detached themselves" from the Church and were now financially independent (CS 50). He also recognized that this process of differentiation from the Church had extended to non-theological and non-practical dimensions of humanistic learning, so that these pursuits had no national "institutional home."[7] Guided by his sense that the humanities had been deprived of a strong institutional and national basis, Coleridge slants his account of the clerisy in *Church and State* to emphasize the Anglican Church's duty to establish a public humanistic education system rooted in "those fundamental truths, which are the common ground-work of our civil and our religious duties" (CS 48). He envisions a body of educators straddling theology and the humanities, the classroom and the sanctuary, and differently diffusing through both offices those "fundamental truths" he felt were essential to civil society.

More precisely, the elusive role Coleridge gives to the clerisy is determined by his critical view of the mass media, which he felt was expanding to fill the vacuum created by the differentiation of modern society, and as a result had become the primary influence on national imagination. How exactly Coleridge believed the clerisy should relate to the media remains a hazy subject in scholarship. As Anne Frey observes, "Coleridge at times includes the press—because of its role in distributing knowledge—in the clerisy, but at other times he complains that the press has become too involved with partisan and

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[5] "Coleridge and the Idea of the Clerisy," *Reading Coleridge: Approaches and Applications*, Ed. Walter B. Crawford (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979): 252-273, 273.

[6] Colin Jager, *The Book of God: Secularization and Design in the Romantic Era* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007), 1. See José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994).

[7] David Aram Kaiser, *Romanticism, Aesthetics, and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 70.

mercantile interests."[8] Coleridge did waver in his views, but I believe that comments he made in the last two decades of his life point to a coherent position that *Church and State* helps clarify. He eventually confined the clerisy to the university scholars, clergy, and parish teachers of the Anglican establishment because he believed Britain required an independent ethical and humanistic body that could contest the influence of a commercialized and sectarian mass media. Rather than simply restraining the press, however, the clerisy was to effect its reformation. Journalists and editors trained and guided by the national clerisy would one day extend the clerisy's teaching into the mass media that was increasingly shaping how Britons imagined their membership and responsibility in the nation. British citizens would become aware of themselves as a spiritually and ethically united community through the very media that—in Coleridge's opinion—currently threatened to undermine their freedom.

Coleridge is not dealing with syllabi, so he does not clarify what the clerisy would teach; but I will sketch my guess as to what he might have included in the curriculum before demonstrating why this form of education is calculated not only to provide a national home for the humanities, but also to monitor and, eventually, reform the mass media. Since Coleridge promoted Bell's Anglican education system,[9] we can assume that he thought the clerisy should supplement subjects such as literature, history, and what early twentieth-century U.S. educators used to call "civics" with classroom instruction in theology and the Anglican catechism. The most *crucial* responsibility of the clerisy in offering this instruction would not be to train citizens in distinct disciplines and skills, but to accompany explanation of the "laws and rights" to which British citizens are "entitled" (CS 44) with the awakening of what Coleridge called "the potential divinity in every man" (CS 52), each person's intuitive but latent knowledge of a "responsible will" and the "ultimate" ethical "ends" toward which it is to be directed (CS 123). Such intuitive knowledge, Coleridge believed, derived from God's indwelling divine Reason, and humanistic education and Christian devotion could diversely testify to it. These "ultimate ends" could not be *proven* by experience, but conviction of them was as innate as instinct and often tacitly guided the organic growth of "customs" and "familiar sympathies" in one's national society (F II 83): "free agency," Coleridge asserted in *The Friend*, "is a *fact* of immediate consciousness" (F I 509). Unless citizens could be brought to recognize, feel, and trust such ingrained ethical principles, Coleridge believed, a commonwealth would have no moral guide.

In some ways, C.S. Lewis, in his *Abolition of Man* (1943), a series of lectures about the need to reform British education, retains the vision of education that Coleridge hoped the clerisy would follow. Lewis contends that national education in the humanities should use classic literary and learned works drawn from many cultures, but especially Western, to cultivate in students from an

[8] Anne Frey, *British State Romanticism: Authorship, Agency, and Bureaucratic Nationalism* (Stanford UP, 2009), 31.
[9] *The Friend*, Ed. Barbara Rooke, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton UP and Routledge, 1969), II 165.

early age the *right* virtuous feelings worth following whether or not they lead to practical gain: loyalty to family; respect for elders; treatment of people as ends rather than means; sacrificial devotion to the freedom of one's country; submission to legal authority. More confidently than Lewis, Coleridge himself believed, as he remarks in *Church and State*, that all branches of learning, especially "moral science," could bring students to contemplate "the supernatural in themselves" and from this to consider a "superhuman" power, so that humanistic study would naturally "lead to religion, and remain blended with it" in the thought and practice of British citizens (CS 44).

The clerisy, then, should instill a shared ethical and religious frame of interpretation by which each person might become convinced of his or her moral responsibility within the national community. For Coleridge, the national community, or state, is not essentially a territory or discrete governmental structure, but an idea shared by its members: "The State," he wrote in his notebook, "is actual only in" this common "Idea. The Idea is the Reality of the State, yea, *is* the State."[10] Starting from idealist convictions, then, Coleridge anticipates the view of national community that Benedict Anderson famously reached as a historical materialist in his book *Imagined Communities* (1991): nations are not concrete entities but discursively constructed imagined communities existing in the minds of their members. Well before writing *Church and State*, Coleridge had become convinced that the most potent influence on national imagination was the rapidly expanding mass media, which he felt was becoming the central interpretive authority in the vacuum created by the differentiation of modern society. Coleridge summed up his view of this process in a remark made in 1832 near the end of his life: "There have been three silent revolutions in England: 1. When the Professions fell off from the Church. 2. When Literature fell off from the Professions. 3. When the Press fell off from Literature."[11] Here Coleridge describes his view of how differentiation impacted the clerisy: the practical and profitable professions "fell off" from the Church, thereby distancing themselves from guidance by reflective branches of learning unrelated to commerce ("Literature"), and such scholarship in turn lost influence on the primary modern medium of national discourse and information, the periodicals and newspapers of "the Press." If Henry Nelson Coleridge can be trusted, Coleridge made this remark only a few weeks after asserting that "The Clerisy of a Nation—its learned—" maintain its sole "points of rest" and "harmony" (TT II 164; 10 April 1832).

The expansion and centrality of the modern mass media, it seems, was a vital stimulant to Coleridge's desire for "points of" of interpretive "rest" and "harmony" provided throughout Britain by the clerisy, a body of the learned

[10] Quoted in David P. Calleo, *Coleridge and the Idea of the Modern State* (Yale UP, 1966), 77.

[11] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk*, Ed. Carl Woodring, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton UP and Routledge, 1990), I 285. As Coleridge grew older he more and more refuted 'getting and spending', believing that commercial and utilitarian interests were overtaking British society: he would, in 1827 for instance, lament 'the present dedication of all ranks from the cradle to the Coffin to the fiend Mammon. . . It has taken away the Life of England, and put a bustling drudging Death in it's place' (CN V 5697). This is what Coleridge saw as the inevitable consequence of the rise in commercialism after the 1688 'Revolution', the disappearance of a learned class, the clerisy, and literature in general being addressed to 'the common miscellaneous public' (LL II 236).

devoted to helping the rest of the nation interpret their identity and duties in a modern society otherwise dependent on the press. Here Coleridge again anticipates Benedict Anderson, who argued that national imagination in Europe and the Americas was empowered by the expansion of newspapers beginning in the eighteenth century: reading the morning paper with the knowledge that it was being encountered at roughly the same time by thousands, and later millions, of other readers, encouraged people to imagine themselves within a vast web of individuals simultaneously pursuing varied occupations and aspirations within a common national storyline.[12] Similarly, in the 1809 *Friend*, Coleridge observed that expansion of the press disseminated and standardized national consciousness: "Newspapers, their Advertisements, [their reports of the] Speeches in Parliament, Law-courts, and Public Meetings, Reviews, Magazines, [and] Obituaries" have made possible a "diffusion of uniform opinions" and "Fashions in things external and internal" so as "to render evanescent, the distinctions between the enlightened Inhabitants of the great city, and the scattered Hamlet" (II 28). While Anderson's claim that print capitalism provided the *basis* of popular national consciousness has been discredited,[13] his and Coleridge's view that the mass media has decisively shaped national imagination, especially among the middle classes and elite, remains convincing.

For all Coleridge's well-known complaints against newspapers and periodicals, he himself was a lifelong contributor to them, and he not only granted their vital role in spreading the idea of a British national community, but also saw them as necessary to the freedom and progression of modern nations. In the 1809 *Friend*, he argued that the strength and wisdom of English law owed more to "the good sense and generous dispositions diffused by the Press. . . than to any other single cause" (II 60). Even the humblest British citizen, Coleridge remarked in the same publication, is becoming so used to "the stirrings of Mind" excited by the printed page that he or she can never again "be treated or governed as a Child" (II 86). The only "Upholder and Judge" of national safety and progress must now be "Intellect and Thought," and they must be freely circulated (II 86).

Yet Coleridge worried that the national community imagined through the press was becoming shallow and factious. Thinking about the widespread influence of the press on national consciousness in the 1809 *Friend*, Coleridge remarks: "I have fully persuaded my own mind, that formerly MEN WERE WORSE THAN THEIR PRINCIPLES, but that at present THE PRINCIPLES ARE WORSE THAN THE MEN" (II 28). As he argued in *Church and State,* Coleridge felt that the mass media was fueling pressure groups and sectarian societies that were increasingly setting the agenda of government (CS 67-8), thereby

[12] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 24, 35.

[13] Eric Van Young, "The Limits of Atlantic-World Nationalism in a Revolutionary Age: Imagined Communities and Lived Communities in Mexico, 1810-1921," *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, Ed. Joseph W Esherick, Hasan Kayali, and Eric Van Young (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Pub., Inc., 2006), 41, 59; John B Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 63.

overturning the balance of permanence and progress he considered necessary to good government and civil life in favor of financial and commercial interests.[14] In his own contributions to periodicals and papers, Coleridge portrayed these mass media in a state of decline: he asserted that most journalists were out to flatter the "half-instructed many" (F II 87), and consequently they adopted styles he criticized in the 1811 *Courier* (21 Sept.) as feeding a general "antipathy" to "close thinking" through "skipping, unconnected, short-winded, asthmatic sentences," even as they trained readers to disparage difficult writings as "'*heavy stuff, metaphysical jargon,'* &c."[15] Above all, Coleridge worried that print culture was encouraging Britons to substitute calculating and self-interested prudence for trust in ideas and principles of Reason as they had been recognized by the conscience and embodied in nationally specific traditions, customs, and social allegiances. The elite passing through Oxbridge were being warmed to this view of ethics and knowledge by William Paley's textbooks, even as the middle classes and working classes were encouraged to adopt it by periodicals focused more on class and party interests than fundamental principles and by Mechanics' Institutes that threatened "*plebification*" of the sciences and reduction of education to the self-interested accumulation of skills useful for getting ahead (CS 68-9).[16]

For Coleridge, then, "The Press is indifferently the passive Instrument of Evil and of Good" (F II 60). If journalists and reviewers continued to feed readers' complacent self-interest and aversion to reflection on fundamental principles necessary to moral and civic life, Coleridge warned with increasing urgency after 1810, Britain's expanding print culture would pave the way for exploitation. From the same freedom of press that made it impossible for despots to ignore public opinion (EOT I 330) a national society was even now threatening to arise in which non-negotiable convictions, such as the immorality of treating people as things or mere units of production, would become negotiable in the name of practical expediency and the supposed general good of "society" in the abstract (F II 326). For example, Coleridge argues in *Church and State*, utilitarian public policy is now regularly substituting "the wealth of the nation (*i.e.* of the wealthy individuals thereof, and the magnitude of the Revenue) for the well-being of the people" (CS 68). "[E]ven the genuine maxims of expedience," Coleridge remarked in the 1809 *Friend*, are unlikely "to be perceived or acted upon by those who have been habituated to admit nothing higher than Expedience" (II 85).

The only hope for a free press to sustain a free people, Coleridge came to believe, was national education, and he implies how he envisioned the clerisy accomplishing this mission in a letter to Rev. James Gillman written in the margins of an 1830 edition of *Church and State* (Fig. 1, below). In the letter, Coleridge portrays his idea of the state using his favorite logical scheme, the

[14] Calleo 111.

[15] *Essays on His Times*, Ed. David Erdman, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton UP and Routledge, 1978), II 306.

[16] Phillip Connell helpfully summarizes Coleridge's anxiety over these apparent trends (*Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'* [Oxford UP, 2001], 142).

Pentad, placing "The Press," which he is careful to identify as "the ideal Press," at the center of a polarity: the ideal press is the "Mesothesis," the indifferent or medial point, between the "State"—understood as the government—and "the Church" (CS 233). Coleridge's point is that British citizens, who are simultaneously members both of the state and the church, could achieve the synthesis of these identities through the medium of an ideal press, acting out on a social scale what the "Crown," head of church and state, does in one person.

Fig. 1: Pentad for the State

a. State (*Prothesis*)

b. State (*Thesis*) c. the Press (*Mesothesis*) d. the Church (*Antithesis*)

e. the Crown (*Synthesis*)

> The State (i.e. the *Nation*—n.b. NOT the People) is the Prothesis: *including* <both> the *State* in its *thetic* sense, *and* the Church, the antithesis of the latter; while the Crown, or ideal King, is the *Synthesis* of the *b.* and *d.*=State and Church; and the ideal Press the mesothesis.[17]

This Pentad for the nation, with the press at the center, can be put into dialogue with the "Pentad of Operative Christianity" with which Coleridge intended to preface his essay on biblical hermeneutics, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (Fig. 2, below). This Pentad illustrates the dialectical process by which God, in Coleridge's view, reveals truth to the Christian community. "The Holy Spirit" occupies the same mediating position as "the Press" does in the Pentad for the Nation (CS 19). In Coleridge's theology, God's "Holy Spirit" works through the divine Reason indwelling each believer to coordinate his or her subjective experiences with the objective history and scriptural revelation of Christianity, and to unite him or her in a confessing community: "the Spirit is the source of community" in the Trinity and in Christian life.[18] The same Pentad portrays "the Preacher," the local member of "the clerisy," as the one who, following the Holy Spirit also at work in his parishioners, leads them in right interpretation of the Bible and creeds.[19]

Fig. 2: "The Pentad of Operative Christianity"[20]

Prothesis
Christ, The Word

Thesis	*Mesothesis*	*Antithesis*
The Scriptures	Or "The Indifference"—The Holy Spirit	The Church

Synthesis
The Preacher

[17] Adapted from Coleridge's letter to the Rev. James Gillman, written in the margins of *On the Constitution of the Church and State* (1830, 2nd ed.); CS 233.
[18] Jeffrey W. Barbeau, *Coleridge, The Bible, and Religion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 127.
[19] Wright 219.
[20] Adapted from *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, ed. David Jasper (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 19.

Coleridge's two Pentads—of the nation, with the press at the center, and of Christianity, with the Holy Spirit at the center—suggest what he thought would happen if the clerisy were realized through the Anglican Church, and Britons were brought up in a system of education that awakened them to the ethical and spiritual truths inwardly affirmed by God's Spirit and outwardly elaborated in humanistic study and congregational worship. Journalists and editors trained under the clerisy would eventually transform Britain's burgeoning print network into a spiritually illuminated public sphere. Although operating outside the institutional and financially independent Anglican clerisy, these members of the "ideal Press" would extend the influence of the official clerisy through the nation's most popular and wide-reaching channels of information.

These reformed members of the press would help achieve within modern, differentiated British society the coordinated role Coleridge envisioned the clerisy serving in pre-modern England, when the Church, professions, and literature were not evolved into distinction. The popular press would become almost a secular—as in extra-ecclesiastical—national scripture, a medium through which members of the national community would keep attuned to the guidance of the Spirit and the "ultimate ends" of their civic responsibility, all mediated through commentary on the nation's economic, political, and social life. As Coleridge dreamed in *The Statesman's Manual*: "it would be a wise method of sympathizing with the tone and spirit of the Times, if we elevated even our daily newspapers and political journals into COMMENTS ON THE BIBLE."[21] Through such cooperation of the clerisy and press, or rather, through a press trained into civic responsibility by the clerisy, throughout Britain would spread "the spirit which… can blend and harmonize the most discordant Elements—… the spirit of a rational Freedom diffused and become national, in the consequent influence and controul of public opinion" (F II 66).

This, I believe, is the mission for the clerisy implied in Coleridge's published prose including and following *The Friend*, his notebook entries and marginalia, and his comments in *Table Talk*. Phillip Connell has helped dispel the notion that Coleridge's clerisy was imagined in any simple antagonism to "'THE COMMERCIAL SPIRIT,' the world of finance and commerce (LS 168).[22] We might further recover the complexity of Coleridge's clerisy by questioning the traditional impression that he invented this intellectual class simply to ward off the evils of the mass media and mass-market literature. Coleridge's clerisy has, with some justice, been seen as motivating an elitist and reactionary strand of nineteenth-century social criticism, exemplified in the work of Matthew Arnold, which lamented the poverty of bourgeois values and the vacuity of popular culture.[23] Yet I have argued that Coleridge's idea of the clerisy was also a creative effort to envision a dynamic interaction between religion, civic values, and education in a differentiated society, and by this to ensure the freedom and progress of the people alongside the expansion of the mass

[21] *Lay Sermons*, Ed. R.J. White (Princeton: Princeton UP and Routledge, 1972), 35.
[22] Connell 127.
[23] Connell 282-3.

media—in particular by helping the nation achieve the ethical and spiritual community that this media could uniquely facilitate.

With this view of the clerisy in mind, we can turn with greater understanding to the early enthusiastic reception of Coleridge's idea by some liberal religious figures. Christopher Kent has identified the expansion of a "higher journalism" in Victorian "reviews, the superior magazines, and the quality newspapers… between 1850 and 1875."[24] Kent suggests that this learned, literary journalism, much of it practiced by "fellows or ex-fellows from Oxford or Cambridge," constituted an extension of "the Coleridgean idea of the clerisy" (189). In Kent's view, mid-century Oxbridge educated barristers and fellows who practiced high-level journalism as an avocation, rather than as a trade upon which their livings fully depended, partially realized Coleridge's advice in *Biographia* that authors should remain loyal and respected members of society by joining established professions, even as, on the side, they contributed their genius and guidance to the republic of letters (182).[25] Yet, as I have tried to demonstrate, Coleridge's mature mission for the clerisy and media was aimed not merely at promoting high discourse through respectable publications; it also envisioned transforming the nation's mass media into a medium of unified national imagination, and of ethical and spiritual reflection on national affairs.

Among the Victorian high journalists Kent includes the Anglican theologian, educator, and social reformer Frederick Denison Maurice (190, 192). I believe Maurice was one of several young religious liberals in the 1820s and 1830s to catch the wider implications of Coleridge's clerisy. As I elaborate in an article recently published in *European Romantic Review*, Maurice perceived Coleridge's hint that the clerisy could transform the nation's print network into a medium of spiritual community, and sought to extend and practice this ideal throughout his career.[26] Through the 1848 journal *Politics for the People* aimed at radicalized workers in London's West End, the creation of the Working Men's College in 1854, and countless articles, lectures, and sermons, Maurice promoted practices of reading that he believed would transform even the most apparently degraded, insignificant, and socially disconnected forms of print communication into media through which Britons of different classes and sects could imagine themselves in a national Christian society. Even newspaper advertisements, when interpreted correctly, Maurice argued in an 1852 lecture on newspapers, could serve this purpose.[27]

Coleridge would probably never have extended the clerisy's work so far: in *Biographia Literaria*, he included advertisement reading in a list of the worst

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[24] Christopher Kent, "Higher Journalism and the Mid-Victorian Clerisy," *Victorian Studies* 13.2 (Dec. 1969): 181-198, 181.

[25] Curiously, Kent focuses entirely on Coleridge's suggestive advice to young authors in *Biographia*, and never discusses Coleridge's explicit treatment of the clerisy in *Church and State*.

[26] Joshua King, "Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection*, Print Culture, and Mediated Spiritual Community," *European Romantic Review* 23.1 (February 2012): 43-62.

[27] Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Friendship of Books and other Lectures*, Ed. T. Hughes, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1886), 72.

examples of "*kill-time*" pursued by the masses.[28] Coleridge would have also had qualms about Maurice's willingness for Anglicans to share the labor of education with unbelievers, and to learn from working people as well as teach them. For at the root of Coleridge's clerisy is his elitist faith in a philosophic few who remain attuned to the light of Reason amidst general darkness and ignorance: all history shows, he claimed in the 1809 *Friend*, "noble structures raised by the Wisdom of the Few, and gradually undermined by the Ignorance and Profligacy of the Many" (II 52). Yet Coleridge's vision of the clerisy was also adaptive and aimed at developing a free and just national community by establishing a national learned body capable of curbing, and eventually reforming, the influence of the mass media—a fact that Maurice, for all his own paternalism toward the working classes, helps us recognize through his more participatory, reform-minded approach to promoting forms of education that could enable social and moral consensus in a mass-mediated society.

Coleridge's and Maurice's dreams of national spiritual community are now unconvincing, and it would be easy to assume their sense of clerical calling is likewise simply outdated. But is that true? In loose phrases, such as "critical thinking," circulating through departmental websites and vigorously defended by public intellectuals such as Martha Nussbaum, humanities scholars retain a shadowy sense of clerical mission: the feeling that we are paid to instill habits of reflection and scrutiny that extend beyond a single profession or practical application and are essential to individual and public life in a free society.[29] Perhaps we could consider this vague sense of vocation more carefully, by more conscientiously asking ourselves and our students whether studying Romantic-era texts offers wisdom for present life. In a class on Romantic poetry, we might pause to wonder why Blake, living under the 1795 Gagging Acts and network of Home Spies, concluded in 1798 that "Nothing can be more contemptible than to suppose Public RECORDS to be True,"[30] and then appreciate how Blake gave such convictions imaginative force when depicting Urizen's suppression of eternity's vital dissent under iron codes of law. Being careful to avoid undue influence, we—especially those of us in the U.S.—might take the less familiar step of asking students whether we can learn from Blake when watching and reading today's mainline news. We might suggest interested students "google" the Habbush memo, Ayad Allawi, and "Agent Curveball," and later ask those who do how responsibly the consolidated U.S. media has reported on the manufactured justification of a war that has, according to major surveys, cost over one million Iraqi lives.[31] In a mass-

[28] *Biographia Literaria*, Ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton UP and Routledge, 1983), I 48-49n.

[29] Martha Nussbaum frequently identifies "critical thinking" as the primary contribution of the humanities, arguing that this capacity is essential to the preservation of democracy, and is in danger of utter neglect by current models of education that stress economic profit above all else (*Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* [Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010]).

[30] William Blake, *Blake's Poetry and Designs,* Ed. John E. Grant, Mary Lynn Johnson (W.W. Norton & Co., 2007), 458.

[31] In 2007, a survey conducted by Opinion Research Business, a leading independent polling group in Britain, concluded that between 946,258 and 1.12 million Iraqis had died as a result of the war ("Iraqi Conflict Has Killed a Million Iraqis: Survey," *Reuters* [Jan 30, 2008]. Web. 29 October 2012).

mediated world often perilously lacking in spaces for the "critical thinking" some of us still profess to teach, we would do well to apply Coleridge's belief that humanistic instruction should cultivate civic responsibility—in part by allowing Romantic-era texts to encourage students' critical analysis of the ways public opinion and state actions are represented in the mass media.[32]

[32] Talal Asad argues that corporate mainline media contradict widespread belief that liberal democracies are based on "direct-access" participation. "[*T*]*he mass media*, increasingly owned by conglomerates and often cooperating with the state, mediate the political reactions of the public and its sense of guarantee and threat. . . The media are not simply the means through which individuals simultaneously imagine their national community; they *mediate* that imagination, construct the sensibilities that underpin it" (*Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* [Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003], 4-5). Issued through a consolidated mass media, "coverage" of public debate, elections, state actions, and global affairs never just "informs" or "reflects" public opinion; it also manufactures images of how the public has reacted and, in effect, sets the terms on which it can react.