

'We do not wish to be sofa cushions, or even props to men, but we wish to work by their side'.¹

Celebrating women as popular educators at the Anglican Church Congresses 1881-1913

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Abstract

The Anglican Church Congresses, instigated in 1861, were intended to foster relations between clergy and lay people, and in so doing educate the populace in Church views on topical issues. The congresses celebrated the established status of the Church as part of the social and political fabric of the nation with parades, civic receptions, services and public talks. Women were a significant presence at the congresses as platform speakers, organisers, hostesses and members of the audience. Congresses provided opportunities for informal collaborations between individuals and for networking between members of various women's organisations including the National Union of Women Workers, the Mothers' Union and the Girls' Friendly Society. Dedicated women's sections from 1881 provided a space that was exploited by women activists seeking a voice in the public sphere. The congresses provided a forum for these women to enhance their own pedagogic authority, and reflected a context of increasing professionalization amongst women. Agendas engaged with education, work and social issues. Informed by official congress reports, newspaper articles and diaries, this article aims to celebrate the hitherto under explored contribution made by significant women in the role of popular educators via the platforms of the Church congresses between 1882 and 1913. In addition, the article seeks to commemorate the unvoiced presence of the large numbers of working class women who engaged with the congresses as members of the audience.

Introduction

Louise Creighton, who spoke at ten Church congresses between 1894 and 1924, stated in her debut congress speech that: 'We do not wish to be sofa cushions, or even props to men, but we wish to work by their side'.² An assertion that articulated the aspiration of middle class Anglican 'church women', many of whom were related to clergy, to contribute, alongside their male counterparts, to the improvement of society. This article explores the hitherto untold story of these women's quest to have their views taken seriously, and analyses how the Church congress facilitated the normalisation of women as public speakers. Dedicated 'Women's Sections' from 1881, aimed at a female audience,

¹Louise Creighton, 'What women can do to raise the standard of Moral Life' in Charles Dunkley, *The Official Report of the Church Congress, Held at Exeter, on October 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th, 1894* (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1894), 245.

²Louise Creighton, 'What women can do to raise the standard of Moral Life' in *ibid.*

provided a respectable space for public association. Working class women were a specific target audience from 1885. A gendered audience agenda, and religious milieu facilitated middle class women activists seeking a voice, to access the public sphere without loss of respectability.³ Access to platforms was mediated by capital accruing from social status, kinship, network affiliation and proximity to figures of distinction in the religious field who were the gate keepers to platform access. These women made a significant contribution to the congresses not just as speakers but as organizers, hostesses, and chairwomen. Congresses provided opportunities for informal collaborations between individuals and networking between leading members of women's organisations such as the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW), Mothers Union (MU) and Girls' Friendly Society (GFS). The two tier MU and GFS, included middle class 'Associates' and working class 'rank and file' members, both categories are likely to have been represented in congress audiences and could share in a sense that their social and religious capital was endorsed by participating in an event legitimised by the Church.

Topics allocated to women at congress expanded outwards over time as social justice, health, work, education, and leisure featured on agendas. Speaking from a congress platform signalled the approval of the Church and legitimised the pedagogic authority of the speaker and the authority of her message, a useful endorsement for women moving from traditional roles into hitherto masculine preserves such as medicine. Reciprocally the contribution of women recognized for their distinction beyond the field of the Church also served to endorse the authority of the congress as a forum for topical discussion. Congress speakers between 1881 and 1914 include a roll call of women distinguished for their contribution to public service. Mary Sumner, Founder of the Mothers Union, Louise Creighton and Laura Ridding, activists in the NUWW, represent the overlapping category of philanthropists and wives of distinguished clergy. Elizabeth Wordsworth, Lucy Soulsby, Constance Maynard and Sara Burstall represent the field of education. Lady Frederick Cavendish and Kathleen Lyttelton signal connections to the world of politics. Trade Union activist Clementina Black, and employment law expert Gertrude Tuckwell, reflect both increasing professionalism and congress engagement with social justice and the world of work. The issue of temperance drew together the association of morality with self-restraint and an interest in health and eugenics advocated by medical experts Kate Mitchell and Mary Scharlieb.

According to Alejandro Tiana Ferrer, popular education should 'be taken as the whole set of educational activities aimed at providing education for the popular classes'. This definition accommodates initiatives directed towards a wide section of the populace, encompassing, although

³See Simon Morgan, *A Victorian Woman's Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007).

in the case of this article not exclusively confined to, those of the 'lower classes'.⁴ Sjaak Braster's exploration of notions of popular education similarly includes initiatives directed towards, and arising from, attempts to educate both by formal and informal means.⁵ These understandings, which encompass provision by groups or individuals with philanthropic or religious allegiance, also accommodate the initiatives towards proliferating knowledge and modifying behaviour that the paper will explore in relation to women speakers at the Church congress. In this article we see women speakers at Church congresses, who sought to modify the behaviour of the populace with the aim of improving society, as popular educators. This is compatible with David Wardle's understanding of popular education as initiatives towards socialisation.⁶

John Hurt sees popular educational initiatives in the period covered by the article reflecting a response to fears of social disorder, and identifies the dissemination of religious knowledge as a civilising initiative.⁷ Middle class concerns about social cohesion were reflected in the congress agendas which addressed recurring themes such as 'the poor' and 'The Morality of Strikes' which was tackled at Shrewsbury in 1896.⁸ Congress speaker Archdeacon George Sumner speaking at the Hull congress on the Mothers' Union, asserted that: 'anything that tends to unite the classes together should certainly be welcomed by us who have the interests of society at stake'.⁹ This accords with Susan Mumm's interpretation of religiously inspired philanthropy as educational, and Harold Silver's advocacy for attention to religion as contributory to a broader context of ideas and social movements, influential to developments in education.¹⁰ We see the congresses as an educational forum in which gendered identities mediated by religion and class were negotiated. We also see the congresses as a forum in which assumptions as to the intellectual, professional and social capacity of women were enlarged.¹¹ In this paper we begin by putting the congresses in their religious and social context. We

⁴Alejandro Tiana Ferrer, 'The Concept of Popular Education Revisited - or What Do We Talk About When We Speak of Popular Education', *Paedagogica Historica* 47, no. Nos. 1-2 (2011): 27.

⁵Sjaak Braster, 'The People, the Poor, and the Oppressed: The Concept of Popular Education through Time', *Paedagogica Historica* 47, no. Nos. 1-2 (2011): 1-14.

⁶David. Wardle, *English Popular Education, 1780-1970* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970). However the role of women as educators through philanthropy is not given attention.

⁷John Hurt, *Education in Evolution Church, State, Society and Popular Education 1800-1870* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971).

⁸Charles Dunkley, *The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Shrewsbury, on October 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th, 1896* (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1896).

⁹George Henry Sumner. *Address at the Church Congress in Hull 1890*. Mothers Union, Lambeth Palace Library MU/MSS.2/1/3.

¹⁰Susan Mumm, 'Women and Philanthropic Cultures,' in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940*, ed. Sue Morgan and Jacqueline de Vries (London: Routledge, 2010), 54-71; Harold Silver, 'Knowing and Not Knowing in the History of Education,' *History of Education* 21, no. 1 (1992): 97-108.

¹¹Sara Delamont, 'The Contradictions in Ladies' Education,' in *The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World*, ed. Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin (London: Croom Helm, 1978). 'The Domestic Ideology and Women's Education,' in *The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World*, ed. Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin (London Croom Helm, 1978), 164-87.

outline the characteristics of congress and its attendees, and give attention to the circumstances that allowed women access to congress platforms. The paper then focusses on notions of 'good' womanhood and women's roles within the Church, and the constraints and opportunities contingent upon their gender and class. It then locates women's activism in the field of popular education in organisations and moves outwards to discuss wider horizons represented by the increasing presence of professional women as congress speakers. The paper concludes by reviewing the changes and continuities evident in women's pedagogic work via the platforms of the Church congresses between 1881 and 1913.

The Church Congress

The instigation of the Anglican Church congresses by Archbishop John Bird Sumner in 1861 can be contextualised against the increasing popularity of rival protestant denominations (as revealed in the 1851 religious census) and cross denominational evangelical enthusiasm that prioritised attention to matters of belief, both in home life, and in the conduct of public affairs. Within Anglicanism bitter disputes over 'correct' form in baptism, communion and ritual in worship between Low Church evangelicals, who emphasised individual effort towards salvation,¹² and High Church Tractarians, who favoured priestly authority, and upheld belief in transubstantiation (the objective presence of the body and blood of Christ in the mass) also provided a stimulus towards action for reconciliation and unity.¹³

The period against which the congresses took place was notable for the proliferation of woman's philanthropic activity much of this was motivated by religion.¹⁴ This legitimised the extension of woman's supposed caring domesticated sphere into public space, which despite conventional rhetoric, proved to be a permeable boundary.¹⁵ It was a time in which elite women began to access higher education and the professions. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the founding of women's colleges, including Girton and Newnham in Cambridge, and Lady Margaret Hall and St Hugh's in Oxford.¹⁶ Women's increasing access to the professions was signalled by the 1876 Medical Act, and

¹²Ian Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness; the Evangelical Impact on the Victorians* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), 35; Frank Turner, 'The Victorian Crisis of Faith and the Faith That Was Lost,' in *Victorian Faith in Crisis*, ed. Richard J. Helmstadter and Bernard Lightman (California: Stanford, 1991), 9-38. For extensive treatment of this see also Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church Part 2 1860-1901*, 2nd ed. (London: A. and C. Black, 1972).

¹³Frances Knight, *The Nineteenth Century Church and English Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Michael Chandler, *An Introduction to the Oxford Movement* (New York: Church Publishing, 2003).

¹⁴Mumm, 'Women and Philanthropic Cultures'.

¹⁵Frank Prochaska, *The Angel out of the House: Philanthropy and Gender in Nineteenth-Century England* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2002); Amanda Vickery, "'Golden Age to Separate Spheres" a Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History,' in *Gender and History in Western Europe*, ed. Robert Shoemaker and Mary Vincent (London: Addison- Wesley Longman, 1998), 197-225.

¹⁶Dale Spender, *The Education Papers: Women's Quest for Equality in Britain 1850-1912* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987).

legislative reforms that permitted women to serve as poor law guardians and members of school boards.¹⁷

Doctrinal control over elementary education became subject to negotiation following the introduction of the 1870 Education Act (The Forster Act). The expansion of secondary schools for girls was signalled by the founding of the Girls' Public Day School Company in 1872 and the instigation of the Church School Company in 1883.¹⁸ Population growth, urbanisation, industrialisation and the expansion of the male franchise following the 1884 Third Reform Act, brought issues such as poverty, health and class into focus. Recurrent themes in the Church congress programmes such as leisure, education, temperance and work reflected the attempt of the Church to position itself in relation to current social issues which included the role and status of women.

Congresses sought, not just to unite diverse factions in the Church, but to bring together clergy and lay men and women, and share the perspective of 'church people' with the wider populace. Held annually in towns and cities throughout England and Wales, the congresses celebrated the Church as part of the social and political fabric of the nation with a five day programme of services and public talks. Each congress had a president, usually the Bishop of the Diocese in which the host town was located. Local committees organized the programme of speakers and services, and secured the support of patrons or guarantors who were financially liable in the event of the congress making a loss.¹⁹

The congresses provided an opportunity for clerics and their spouses or female relations to meet with their peers. Bishop's wife Louise Creighton enjoyed the congresses because they helped her to 'get in touch with church people generally, and to understand more about church affairs'.²⁰ It was through kinship or social affiliation with clergy that women initially became involved in the congresses, as platform companions or in the role of hostesses. The provision of hospitality was a significant 'extra-curricular' dimension in which women were involved. The Reverend Charles Dunkley, in his preface to the official report of the 1890 Hull congress, noted the 'completeness of hospitality

¹⁷See Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government, 1865-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987); Joyce Goodman and Sylvia A. Harrop, *Women, Educational Policy-Making and Administration in England: Authoritative Women since 1800* (London: Routledge, 2000). 1870 First Married Women's Property Act permits a married women to retain £200 of her earnings. Elementary School Act the same year permits women ratepayers to vote for and serve on elected school boards. 1875 Women are permitted to serve as poor law guardians. 1882 Second Married Women's Property Act allows a married women to own all forms of property and her earnings. 1884 Women acquire independent legal status.

¹⁸Joyce F. Goodman, 'Girls' Public Day School Company (Act. 1872-1905),' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, October 2005).

¹⁹'The Church Congress' *Carlisle Patriot*, February 4, 1887.

²⁰Louise Creighton, *Memoir of a Victorian Woman: Reflections of Louise Creighton 1850-1936* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 112. Louise was married to Mandell (1843-1901), Bishop of Peterborough 1891 and London 1897.

and bountiful provision made for the physical wellbeing and social happiness of the visitors'.²¹ The congresses included civic receptions hosted by the Mayor and Mayoress of the host town, and the practice of a social 'conversazione' was instigated at the Exeter congress in 1894.²² The influx of congress attendees filled the local hotels and boarding houses. Laura Ridding's diary records the headaches she faced as the wife of the presiding bishop in organising accommodation. She commandeered judges' chambers to address the problem of finding sufficient beds for a succession of guests. Ridding was also responsible for the tea and cheesecake supplied at the 'conversazione'. Her diary recorded her relief that her arrangements had been a success: 'it is all going very well'.²³

Every congress began with the spectacle of a ceremonial parade of clergy and civic dignitaries which drew crowds of spectators. In addition, there were ecclesiastical art exhibitions open to the public. At the Weymouth congress, the band entertainments in the public gardens were also an attraction.²⁴ The congresses attracted large numbers of attendees who subscribed to a weekly congress membership. These members consisted of clergy and predominantly middle class lay people. Attendees could take advantage of the discounted 'congress special' tickets offered by railway companies.²⁵ Attendance at the 1893 Birmingham congress attracted a record 4,396 members. Congresses were also popular with the general public in the locality who could attend day and evening talks for a modest cost. At Birmingham almost 3000 of these tickets were sold.²⁶ Popular interest in the congresses and the reach of the words of congress speakers is also indicated by the widespread coverage given to them in national dailies, special interest magazines and the local newspapers which covered congresses around the country. At the Weymouth congress the official accounts noted that £15 was spent on a dinner for members of the press.²⁷ Moreover, published *Official Congress Reports* which included verbatim accounts of speeches, further disseminated congress proceedings to a wider audience.

²¹Charles Dunkley, *The Official Report of the Church Congress, Held at Hull on September 30th, and October 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, 1890* (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1890), vi.

²²The adoption of the MU as a diocesan organisation following Mary Sumner's platform speech at the Portsmouth Congress was instigated at a social gathering. Mary Porter, Mary Woodward, and Horatia Erskine, *Mary Sumner Her Life and Work and a Short History of the Mothers' Union* (Winchester: Warren and Sons, 1921), 21.

²³Lady Laura Ridding, 'Diaries,' in *Selborne Papers* (Hampshire Record Office). September 25th, 28th .

²⁴ See for example: 'Scenes at the Church Congress at Barrow', *Penny Illustrated* ([London], October 13th, 1906), 229; 'The Jubilee Church Congress at Ely', *The Graphic* ([London], October 1, 1910), 510.

²⁵*Morning Post* [London] October 2, 1885.

²⁶Charles Dunkley, *The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Birmingham on October 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th, 1893* (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1893), xxii. At Weymouth weekly tickets were 7 shillings and sixpence; a family ticket for three, one guinea; day tickets were two shillings and sixpence; tickets for a women's meeting were two shillings. At Newcastle-upon-Tyne working men were offered free entry to meetings.

²⁷Charles Dunkley, *The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Weymouth October 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th 1905* (London: Bemrose, 1905).

Dedicated women's meetings in the programme were introduced in 1881 at the Newcastle congress. The first agenda featured a paper written by Mrs Philip Papillon of the Young Women's Help Society which, according to the *London Evening Standard*, was 'warmly applauded'.²⁸ Women's meetings offered respectable public space for unaccompanied women (including those from the working class) to assemble for edifying entertainment, and the initially novel experience of being addressed by members of their own sex (if not class). With the introduction of women's meetings, 'ladies', distinguished by social position or affiliation to high status clerics, were called upon to chair meetings. They formed a constituency who were also likely to have leading roles in philanthropic organisations.²⁹ As women began to address meetings, other women were recruited from amongst an expanding network that reflected women's social contacts, clerical milieu and affiliation to philanthropic societies. Women also took roles in the committees. The ladies' committee of the London congress designed and supplied the congress banner. The official report of the Weymouth congress noted that ladies of the diocese had raised £57 and 17 shillings to fund their banner. In a departure from previous practice, the report also named each member of the Women's executive committee and the ladies' committee, who organized outreach events in surrounding towns. At the Nottingham congress, located in Laura Ridding's home diocese, platform speakers included her friends Louise Creighton, and Lucy, Lady Frederick Cavendish the advocate of women's education. Also present was her sister-in-law Lady Sophia Palmer, who spoke on duties of citizenship to an audience of young women.³⁰

Lady platform speakers, drawn from the constituency of clerical spouses and socially distinguished women, were a familiar feature of congresses by 1886. Whilst authority remained vested in the 'educated' and socially distinguished platform speaker, congresses did attempt to reach out to working women. Meetings for working women were introduced the following year. The *Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal* reported a speech by the Hon. Augusta Maclagan, wife of the Bishop of Lichfield, in which she advocated the GFS to an audience of 'working girls and young women'.³¹ Despite the absence of individual voices representing less socially distinguished women, newspaper reports from the period (and the official congress proceedings and sales of day tickets) indicate the popularity of the congresses for them, and allow a picture to emerge of their attendance at congresses as members of the audience. Reports described reactions to particular women speakers, the average age of the gathering, the number of listeners and the composition of the audience in regard to men

²⁸*London Evening Standard*, October 8, 1881.

²⁹Creighton, *Memoir of a Victorian Woman: Reflections of Louise Creighton 1850-1936*, 122; Dunkley, *Church Congress Exeter*, vi.

³⁰Charles Dunkley and Arthur Cayley Headlam, *The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Nottingham on September 28th, 29th, 30th, & October 1st 1897* (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1897), 489.

³¹*Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal* October 14, 1887.

and women. The *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, reported a 'great meeting of women' at the Carlisle congress in 1884.³² At the 1885 Portsmouth congress Mary Sumner, although speaking from a middle class philanthropic perspective, did attempt to express empathy for the tribulations faced by her audience of 'Working Women': 'I know [she said] how hard your lives are'.³³ In Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1900, the *Official Congress Report* noted that Mrs Isabella Bird Bishop addressed her remarks and expressed her sympathy to 'wives of working men who constitute the majority of this gathering'. At another Newcastle meeting there was 'an enormous hall crammed' with three thousand young women.³⁴ The women only meetings at Wakefield in 1886, and in Nottingham the following year, were so well attended, that additional overflow meetings had to be arranged.³⁵ According to the *Morning Post's* report on the 1899 London congress the women's meeting was 'representative of all classes', an assertion they substantiated by mentioning the presence of 'a crying babe at the back whose voice was heard even above the singing'.³⁶ The presence of working class women in significant numbers in congress audiences may suggest the attraction of the congresses as a social space for respectable association. It may also signal women's appetite for self-education in the topical and moral issues represented on the congress programmes, such as the talk on literature and Christianity given by Mrs Leith Adams, the author of the morally instructive novel, *Aunt Hepsy's Foundling*.³⁷ Whilst the authority to speak at congress remained vested in middle and upper class self-styled 'educated women', working class women did participate as audience members.

Women in the Church: missionaries, sisterhoods, deaconesses, 'helpmeets and handmaids'

The position of women and their role in the Church was addressed explicitly in congress agendas and signalled by the space and topics accorded to women speakers, and the less documented role assumed by women as wives of delegates. Women congress members contributed as organizers, hostesses and companions to their male relatives. Women's visibility on congress platforms added a civilizing dignity and respectability to the public assembly of the Church, seemingly affirming Anglican

³²'The Church Congress', *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* (October 6th, 1884).

³³ Charles Dunkley, *The Official Report of the Church Congress, Held at Portsmouth : On October 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th, 1885* (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1885), 448.

³⁴*The Official Report of the Church Congress, Held at Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, on September 25th, 26th, 27th and 28th, 1900* (London: Bemrose, 1900), 338. *London Daily News*, September 28th, 1900, p6.

³⁵'The Church Congress', *York Herald*, October 9, 1886. 'The Church Congress', *Western Times*, October 12, 1886. *The Official Report of the Church Congress, Held at Wakefield : On October 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th, 1886* (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1886), 446; Ridding, 'Diaries.' 25th September 1897.

³⁶*Morning Post*, October 10, 1899.

³⁷Charles Dunkley, *The Official Report of the Church Congress, Held at Cardiff : On October 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th, 1889* (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1889), 235. Mrs Leith Adams was the pen name of Mrs R. F. De Courcy Laffan see John Sutherland, *Longman Companion to Victorian Literature* (London: Routledge, 2009).

emphasis on family life.³⁸ However, women seeking access to the platform did so against a patriarchal doxa that assumed women's roles as domesticated. The notion that religious authority was unwomanly was drawn from scripture and the interpretation of St Paul.³⁹ The Pauline position derived from woman's secondary creation from Adam's rib as his companion in Genesis. Further, because of her susceptibility to temptation, woman was responsible for loss of innocence and sin.⁴⁰ Good women were self-controlled and their dangerous sexuality contained within the family. It was thus imperative for women seeking access to the congress forum and concessionary authority within the Church to align themselves with prized gendered capital attributes notably chastity and domesticity.⁴¹ This accounts for the categories from which women speakers were drawn, and informed the topics they addressed and how they voiced their arguments. Acquiring delegated authority through access to a platform endorsed by the Church, required women to conform to religiously authorised, and socially framed, notions of good womanhood.⁴²

A category recognized for possessing symbolic religious capital was the lady missionary who embodied valorous travail for Christianity. Congress audiences were given a glimpse of exotic locations by women with experience in the mission field.⁴³ At the 1890 Hull congress, Miss E. Mulvany of the Church of England Zenana Mission Society, which focussed on ministry to women in seclusion, contrasted the privileged status of Christian women with the degraded status of women 'in the East'.⁴⁴ In the 'Women's Work for Missions' section of the London congress in 1899, the celebrated traveller and popular author Mrs John (Isabella Bird) Bishop educated the audience with a glimpse of destinations on the imperial periphery and beyond.⁴⁵ She too affirmed the worth of the Christian doxa

³⁸Morgan, *A Victorian Woman's Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century*. 'The Church Congress', *Birmingham Daily Post*, October 9, 1893. 'A large number of ladies on the platform'.

³⁹Sean Gill, *Women and the Church of England: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1994), 15, 25, 125. Brian Heeny, *The Women's Movement in the Church of England, 1850-1930* (Clarendon, 1988), pp. 7-9.

⁴⁰I have no hesitation in declaring my full belief in the inferiority of woman nor that she brought it on herself'. Charlotte M. Yonge, *Womankind*, 2nd. ed. (London: Walter Smith and Innes, 1898), 1. Here Yonge is referring to 'Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived was in transgression' (Timothy 2.14).

⁴¹The notion of capital deployed in this paper draws on Bourdieu's 'thinking tools'. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990). ; References to pedagogic authority are informed by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Rev. ed. / preface to the 1990 edition by Pierre Bourdieu. ed. (London: Sage, 1990).

⁴²Jenny Dagers, 'The Victorian Female Civilising Mission and Women's Aspirations Towards Priesthood in the Church of England,' *Women's History Review* 10, no. 4 (2001): 651-70. Dagers uses the term 'spiritual womanhood' to encapsulate these qualities- chastity, piety, modesty, charity and attention to 'home duties'.

⁴³See Susan Thorne, 'Religion and Empire at Home,' in *At Home with the Empire Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, ed. Catherine Hall and Sonia O. Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 145. Thorne considers missionary intelligence a distinguishing feature of Victorian culture: 'Victorians learned much of what they knew about empire in church'.

⁴⁴Dunkley, *Church Congress Hull*, 261-266.

⁴⁵Amongst her works were Isabella L. Bird, *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains ... With Illustrations* (London: John Murray, 1879); *Among the Tibetans* ([S.I.]: Religious Tract Society, 1894); "Korea and Her Neighbours. A This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in HISTORY OF EDUCATION on 6 February 2019, available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0046760X.2018.1548652>.

in relation to the position of women, when she asserted that women abroad in harems were uneducated and ignorant.⁴⁶ The following year at Newcastle, according to the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, she 'caused some excitement and enthusiasm as she stepped on the platform'.⁴⁷ Her speech condemned polyandry and noted that, despite 'dazzling progress in Japan', in Korea and China the lack of Christian influence meant that women remained a despised category.⁴⁸ Congress platforms also gave space to women who had achieved distinction in the field of 'mission at home' notably, celebrated purity campaigner, Jane Ellice Hopkins. In 1883, the year following her speech on prostitution to segregated audiences of men and women at the Derby Church congress, Hopkins founded the White Cross Army, an organisation for men pledged to honour women and uphold their own chastity.⁴⁹ Representatives of University and urban mission settlements also appeared on congress agendas. Speakers included Miss Beatrice Harrington of the Oxford House Settlement, and Miss Edith Argles who spoke at the London congress in 1899. Aggie Weston the temperance campaigner and advocate of sailor's welfare represented the category of reforming philanthropist.

Although lady missionaries were esteemed, Anglican women seeking to live in religious communities known as sisterhoods divided opinion.⁵⁰ Clergy and lay response reflected anxieties that accrued around women's autonomy and spiritual authority, their segregation away from the family and a persistent suspicion of Roman Catholicism.⁵¹ Canon Clewer's advocacy for sisterhoods at the Reading congress in 1883, was condemned by the *London Quarterly Review* for promoting, what was, 'virtually a counterpart of the system of the Church of Rome'. Its report continued: 'A fuller acquaintance with all the facts respecting the 'obedience, chastity, and poverty avowed by members

Narrative of Travel, with an Account of the Recent Vicissitudes and Present Position of the Country ... With Maps and Illustrations," (London: John Murray, 1898).

⁴⁶Charles Dunkley, *The Official Report of the Church Congress, Held at London on October 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, and 14th, 1899* (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1899), 138.

⁴⁷*Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, September 28, 1900. *The London Daily News*, September 28, 1900 also describes Mrs Bishop's speech and her demeanour.

⁴⁸Dunkley, *Church Congress Newcastle*, 266.

⁴⁹*The Official Report of the Church Congress, Held at Derby : On October 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th, 1882* (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1882), 596-573; Sue Morgan, *A Passion for Purity: Ellice Hopkins and the Politics of Gender in the Late-Victorian Church* (Bristol: Centre for Comparative Studies in Religion and Gender, University of Bristol, 1999).

⁵⁰Susan Mumm, *All Saints Sisters of the Poor an Anglican Sisterhood in the Nineteenth Century* (Woodbridge Suffolk: Church of England Record Society Boydell Press, 2001). The first community the Park Village Sisterhood was founded in 1845. See also Susan Mumm, *Making Space, Taking Space: Spatial Discomfort, Gender, and Victorian Religion* http://anglicanhistory.org/academic/mumm_space 2006.pdf Project Canterbury (accessed October 16, 2017).

⁵¹ See Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church Part I 1827-1859* (A. & C.Black, 1966). for controversy over doctrinal interpretation accruing around the 'High Church' Tractarian movement and 'Low Church' interpretation and the consequent defections of high profile Anglican Clergy to Roman Catholicism; *The Victorian Church Part 2 1860-1901*; D. Newsome, *The Parting of Friends: A Study of the Wilberforces and Henry Manning* (London: Murray, 1966).

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of the 'Sisterhoods' would probably intensify into disgust, the healthy repugnance of the English to these communities.⁵² A perspective that may account for the avoidance of the term nun by women seeking to gain acceptance for their communities. However in 1897, the bishops assembled at the Lambeth Conference, gave their blessing to women in religious communities.⁵³ At the London congress of 1899, Miss Anderson Morshead was able to stress not just the practical work done by sisterhoods, but their aspiration towards spiritual rather than pastoral identity, and by the following year there were ninety recognized sisterhoods in the Church.⁵⁴

Deaconesses, women trained to do pastoral work and teaching without 'unwomanly usurpation of authority in the Church', were also on the agenda at the Reading congress.⁵⁵ Dean Howson advocated an authorised and official diaconate of women but was adamant that: 'Deaconesses did not constitute a sisterhood'.⁵⁶ Another category 'Bible women', who were recruited from less socially distinguished backgrounds, were paid to advocate Church views amongst members of their own class. As with Sisters, Deaconesses stressed the seriousness of their commitment to religious work. At the Folkestone congress of 1892, Deaconess Gilmore of the Diocese of Rochester, insisted that training should be hard work.⁵⁷ In 1894 at Exeter, in a similar advocacy for professionalism, Sister Emily, the Head of St Andrew's training college for deaconesses, was scathing in refuting the assumption that the role was suitable for lady volunteers.⁵⁸ Despite the resistance shown by clergy to women as earners rather than amateurs,⁵⁹ at the London congress the Hon. Mrs Kathleen Lyttelton, the journalist and wife of the Bishop of Southampton, whose *Women and their Work* appeared in 1901, claimed that 'payment of the trained church worker is permissible and even desirable': when questioned as to

⁵²Charles Dunkley, *The Official Report of the Church Congress, Held at Reading : On October 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th, 1883* (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1883), 185, 313-323.p.122.

⁵³Lambeth Conference 1897 resolution 11. www.anglicancommuniion.org/media/127725/1897.pdf (accessed March 3, 2018).

⁵⁴Dunkley, *Church Congress London*, 137.

⁵⁵Brian Heeney, 'Women's Struggle for Professional Work and Status in the Church of England 1900-1930,' *The Historical Journal* 26, no. 2 (1983):329-347; Knight, *The Nineteenth Century Church*, 197. Knight notes Harold Browne's appointment of full time stipendiary deaconess Fanny Elizabeth Eagles – 'to seek out poor and impotent folk and intimate their names to the curate, instruct the young in school or otherwise, minister to those in hospitals and setting aside all unwomanly usurpation of authority in the church, should seek to edify the souls of Christ's people in the faith'. E.H Browne, Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese of Ely, 1869.

⁵⁶Dunkley, *Church Congress Reading*, 156.

⁵⁷*The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Folkestone, on October 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th, 1892* (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1892), 237. See also Memories Collected By Deaconess Elizabeth Robinson, (London: Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1924)

Project Canterbury <http://anglicanhistory.org/women/gilmore1924/Deaconess Gilmore> (accessed September 28, 2017).

⁵⁸*Church Congress Exeter*, 248-256.

⁵⁹Record of Events at The Church Congress at Hull, *English Woman's Review*, October 15, 1890 *English Women's Review; Church Congress Hull*, 274-276.

‘where the money is to come from?’ she replied that a trained women lay worker represented better value than ‘another young curate’.⁶⁰

Whilst clergy were hesitant in the delegation of authority to women, women’s utility as ‘helpmeets’ was recognized and encouraged. Although, according to scripture, it was ‘a shame for women to speak in the Church’ (1 Cor. 14. 35), it was considered appropriate, like Dorcas, ‘to be full of good works’ (Acts. 9. 36). While excluding women from institutional power, this stance exploited women’s contributions to religious life as, in the words of Archdeacon George Sumner, ‘handmaids of the Church’.⁶¹ In 1890, at the Hull Church congress, Archdeacon Emery, known as ‘the father of the Church congress’ on account of his long service as congress secretary, encapsulated the attitude of less adventurous clergy in claiming that he:

...wanted to speak in favour not of special societies, or guilds, or sisterhoods, or deaconesses, but in favour of the old district visiting system [...] What they wanted was the clergyman’s wife to feel she was one with her husband.⁶²

So, despite some enlargement of opportunities for activism within the Church, women were still largely assigned to domestic and caring roles, and denied spiritual authority.

The Mothers’ Union and the Girls’ Friendly Society

The Mothers’ Union and The Girls’ Friendly Society epitomised the extension of perceived womanly caring qualities outwards from the home, via religiously sanctioned philanthropic activism, to the public sphere. The instigation of the MU, which expanded rapidly to achieve a transnational membership of almost 400,000 by 1921, is directly attributable to the opportunity the Church congress provided as a forum for discussion of women’s issues. The adoption of the MU as a diocesan organisation exemplifies both the typical means through which women gained access to the platform as speakers, and the emphasis on self-restraint, sexual continence and domesticated womanhood that dominated sections of the congress programme dedicated to women. It also illustrates the acknowledgement that women as ‘helpmeets and handmaids’ (to their male relatives), drawing on traditions of social patronage and philanthropy, had a pastoral role in the church.⁶³ Mary Sumner’s presence on the platform at the 1885 Portsmouth congress was as the consort of her husband the Archdeacon. Her invitation to speak came from her friend Ernest Wilberforce, then Bishop of

⁶⁰Church Congress London, 137, 138.

⁶¹George Sumner, "Speech to the Annual G.F.S. Diocesan Conference at the George Hotel Winchester," *Girls' Friendly Society Associates Journal*, January 1885. George was the husband of Mary Sumner GFS activist and founder of the Mothers' Union.

⁶²English Woman's Review, "Record of Events Report of the Church Congress at Hull," *English Woman's Review*, October 15th 1890.

⁶³Gill, *Women and the Church of England*, 131-145.

Newcastle. The subsequent adoption of the MU as diocesan organisation was under the patronage of Bishop Edward Harold Browne, who was father-in law to Sumner's younger daughter.

Sumner's Portsmouth speech, was a harangue about parental responsibility and temperance, rather than the visionary call to start a union of mothers, recounted in her biography.⁶⁴ However for a woman to speak was at that time unusual, and Mary Sumner's debut established a precedent. MU officials, who were frequently distinguished as the wives of high status clerics, publicised their organisation at every Church congress between 1887 and 1921. Sumner herself spoke at Hull in 1890, Liverpool in 1904, and Southampton in 1913. She articulated a vision of motherhood that was innovative and empowering in asserting the pedagogic expertise required of mothers.⁶⁵ It was also empowering in proclaiming the value of mothers' work as religious educators. In associating motherhood with a divinely ordained role she invested children, as well as mothers, with symbolic value. In so doing, she may be considered to be in accord with changing notions of childhood that identified it as a stage of development to be respected. Yet, Sumner's message was simultaneously constraining in its insistence on the home as women's divinely ordained sphere, the prioritisation of Anglican doxa, and the acceptance of gendered, social, and implicitly racial stratification.⁶⁶ Sumner's speech at Hull demonstrates her negotiation of the paternal authority vested in both family and Church: 'It must be self-evident that the Mothers' Union is a work of women to women, of mothers to mothers and that we could hardly summon fathers of all ranks and classes, as well as mothers to our meetings, we should be considered presumptuous and impertinent if we were to do so. It would be outside our province as women.'⁶⁷

The Girls' Friendly Society had started as a result of social contact between its founder Mrs Mary Townsend and Bishop Samuel Wilberforce. Founded in 1875, it preceded the MU as the first official Church organisation run by and for, women.⁶⁸ The GFS, as it was known, focused on fostering the spiritual and material wellbeing of unmarried girls and working women. Its speakers were a regular presence on congress platforms. As in the case of the MU, GFS leadership was assumed by clergy wives

⁶⁴Mary Porter, Mary Woodward and Horatia Erskine, *Mary Sumner her Life and Work and A Short History of the Mothers' Union* (Winchester: Warren and Sons, 1921), 22. Dunkley, *Church Congress Portsmouth*, 448-449.

⁶⁵Wardle, *English Popular Education, 1780-1970*, 81.

⁶⁶Eileen Janes Yeo, 'Some Paradoxes of Empowerment,' in *Radical Femininity; Womens' Self Representation in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eileen Janes Yeo (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 9-17; See Sue Anderson-Faithful, 'Aspects of Agency: Change and Constraint in the Activism of Mary Sumner, Founder of the Anglican Mothers' Union,' *Women's History Review* (2017); For a history of the MU see Cordelia Moyse, *A History of the Mothers' Union: Women Anglicanism and Globalisation, 1876-2008* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009).

⁶⁷Dunkley, *Church Congress Hull*, 256-260.

⁶⁸Agnes Louisa Money, *History of the Girls' Friendly Society* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton, 1902); Mary Heath-Stubbs, *Friendships Highway; Being the History of the Girls' Friendly Society* (London: Girls' Friendly Society, 1926); Dunkley, *Church Congress Portsmouth*, 156-159. Mr Townsend read a paper on the GFS written by his wife, the founder of the society.

or socially distinguished women such as Augusta Maclagan and Louise Creighton who often took roles in both organisations.⁶⁹

The GFS envisaged the destiny of its members in marriage and motherhood and, like the Mothers' Union, was equally concerned to secure the symbolic capital of an elevated standard of womanhood for its members. Central Rule Three (1875) stated: 'No girl who has not borne a virtuous character to be admitted; such a character being lost, the Member to forfeit her Card.' this was not entirely uncontested. At the Hull congress Mrs Papillion, the founder of the Women's League, an organisation that did not insist on 'purity' as a condition of membership, contested the exclusivity of the GFS on the grounds that its moral elitism set an unrealistic standard and excluded girls who might otherwise be brought into the Church. Her advocacy for incorporating the GFS into a larger and less morally exclusive society was vigorously refuted. Miss Mason, HM's inspector of boarded out pauper children, abandoned her prepared speech to uphold the GFS stand on purity.⁷⁰

Reforming initiatives were not just directed at women, the MU and GFS operated on the assumption that members would 'influence' the conduct of husbands and the wider public through their witness of purity, temperance and churchgoing. According to Miss Mason, on this occasion speaking from the platform at Rhyl in 1891, 'Women's duties do not end at her home... her influence reaches much further'.⁷¹ Purity was upheld as an ideal not just for women. Jane Ellice Hopkins' capital as a published advocate of purity and protégée of Bishop George Wilkinson, enabled her to speak to an audience of men on prostitution at the Derby congress in 1882. Whilst challenging the Church to engage with sexual double standards, Hopkins prefaced her talk with a disclaimer that sought to excuse her engagement with a subject considered unsuitable for a lady, according to gendered assumptions accruing around the presumed 'innocence' of the 'pure' woman: 'I am sure I may ask the sympathy of my audience in the terrible effort they must be aware it costs a woman to speak on this subject'.⁷² Louise Creighton, who in 1913, was one of only three women to serve on the Venereal Disease Commission, had no patience with the 'womanly disclaimer' in addressing unsavoury topics.⁷³ It was her view that women working to raise moral standards should forgo a pretence of innocence

⁶⁹Congress speakers Mary Sumner, Augusta Maclagan, Louise Creighton and Emeline Francis Stendhal as well as having MU and GFS affiliation were also associated with Charlotte Mason's Parents National Education Union. See Sue Anderson-Faithful, *Mary Sumner, Mission, Education and Motherhood, Thinking a Life with Bourdieu* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2018).

⁷⁰Dunkley, *Church Congress Hull*, 271-274, 276.

⁷¹*The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Rhyl, October 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th, 1891* (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1891), 389.

⁷²*Church Congress Derby*, 569-573. Hopkins repeated her talk 'The legal and Social Position of Our Girls' to an audience of women in a separate meeting. ; Morgan, *A Passion for Purity*.

⁷³Another speaker from the 1894 Church Congress gynaecologist Mary Scharlieb was also a commissioner Mary Scharlieb, *Reminiscences ... With Portrait, Etc* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1924). Scharlieb was the first woman to graduate as an MD from London University. She was a lunacy commissioner and also served as a magistrate from 1920.

and show they were aware of the temptations faced by men: 'The world has not yet by any means recognized that chastity must be demanded of men as well as of women and that it is not impossible for men: neither have women sufficiently recognized the special difficulties of men'.⁷⁴ Purity was no longer to be the exclusive preserve of women.

Widening horizons: education, work and social concerns

At the Rhyl congress in 1891, Mrs Herbert a Mothers' Union speaker, noted 'the fact of my standing here to address an assembly of women, in itself may remind us, how greatly the area of women's influence is extended in this generation'.⁷⁵ Louise Creighton and her friend Lady Laura Ridding were prominent amongst the new generation of speakers who emerged from 1887 onwards.⁷⁶ Both women embodied the typical attributes of the congress speaker as Bishop's wives, and in their association with the long established MU and GFS, but they were keenly interested in affairs beyond the home.⁷⁷ As the daughter of Roundell Palmer, the first Earl of Selborne, who served in Gladstone's government, Laura Ridding also exemplifies social and political capital, and the intricacy of kinship networks.⁷⁸ Her network included figures distinguished in the world of politics as well as the Church. Her 'dear, dear friend' Kathleen Lyttleton, was married to Arthur Temple Lyttleton. Arthur's maternal aunt Catherine Glynn was Gladstone's wife. Arthur's sister was Lady Frederick Cavendish (Lucy) who made six platform appearances between 1892 and 1904.⁷⁹ Ridding, who gave five congress speeches between 1887 and 1898, like Creighton took her role as a Bishop's wife seriously. Her diary records, amongst numerous other commitments, workhouse visiting as a poor law guardian, work for the Church of England Temperance Society, Education Committee meetings and a visit to Colney Hatch mental

⁷⁴Creighton, *Memoir of a Victorian Woman: Reflections of Louise Creighton 1850-1936*, 115.

⁷⁵Dunkley, *Church Congress Rhyl*, 386.

⁷⁶James Thane Covert, *A Victorian Marriage: Mandell and Louise Creighton* (London: Hambledon, 2000). Louise Von Glenn married Mandell Creighton in 1872 and at the time of her debut speech at the Exeter Congress in 1894 Mandell was Bishop of Peterborough. He became Bishop of London in 1897. In 1901 Creighton initiated the Girls' Diocesan Association. Her daughter Beatrice served as its first president. Creighton chaired the women's meeting at the Pan-Anglican Conference in 1908, participated in the World Missionary Conference in 1910 and was involved in the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. She edited her husband's letters and published on women and their role in the church. In later years she supported Maude Royden's aspiration towards women entering the priesthood.

⁷⁷Laura Palmer married Revd Dr George Ridding in (1876). George had previously been the headmaster of Winchester College and had been ordained Bishop of Southwell, (Derby and Nottingham) in 1884.

⁷⁸David Steele, 'Palmer, Roundell, first earl of Selborne (1812-1895)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21210>, (accessed October 2, 2017)

⁷⁹Lord Frederick Cavendish was Financial Secretary to the Treasury in Gladstone's government. His brother Lord Spencer Compton Cavendish was a Liberal politician. Arthur Lyttleton's brother Alfred was later a Liberal Unionist MP.

asylum. Meetings with Trade Union activists and congress speakers Gertrude Tuckwell and Clementina Black reflected Ridding's concern for the improvement of the lives of working women.⁸⁰

It was Creighton's view that she and Ridding had raised the standard for commitment and expertise expected in public voluntary service. Both distanced themselves from the conservative 'old guard' represented by Mary Sumner and the 'dull prosy' Augusta Maclagan.⁸¹ They were distinguished as pioneers in the National Union of Women Workers, instigated in 1895, that Creighton, its first president, noted brought together women voluntary workers in diverse fields.⁸² Women linked through the network of the NUWW made regular appearances on congress platforms, speaking on social issues such as education, working conditions and health. They represented women's increasing professional expertise and the acknowledgment of this that the content of congress agendas reflected.

The personal and institutional Anglican religious milieu of congress speakers was reflected in the priority given to religion as an essential aspect of education. The Church congresses coincided with the 'Board School era' (1870-1902) when Anglican pre-eminence in the field of elementary education was subject to challenge by the emergence of state sponsored, non-denominational schools, administered by locally elected Boards.⁸³ The concern for upholding religious education in the home was a recurring theme from MU speakers. At Cardiff in 1889, Mrs Henry Kingsley followed a similar theme in expressing concern over the inadequacy of religious education for children in workhouses.⁸⁴ The 1891 congress in Rhyl, saw Mrs Herbert deplore the absence of religious education in Welsh elementary schools, and exhort her audience to redress this deficit: 'dear mothers take up the glorious duty, and make it your own.'⁸⁵

Congress speakers, despite the constraints on access to formal educational structures and gendered assumptions on curricula, embodied educational and cultural capital. Many had published on the topics that they addressed at congress. Congresses reflected the expansion in the provision of schooling for middle and upper class girls and the realisation of aspirations for higher education amongst elite women. At Exeter in 1894 speakers included Headmistress Lucy Soulsby and Elizabeth Wordsworth, the first principal of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford.⁸⁶ Four years later Miss Wordsworth

⁸⁰Ridding, 'Diaries,' Friday 18, April 1890.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, October 5, 1896.

⁸² Laura Ridding was NUWW President in 1901 see 'The Early Days of the National Union of Women Workers,' in *Selborne Papers* (Hampshire Record Office, n.d).

⁸³Wardle, *English Popular Education, 1780-1970*.

⁸⁴Dunkley, *Church Congress Cardiff*, 352.

⁸⁵*Church Congress Rhyl*, 387-388.

⁸⁶Soulsby was a Mothers' Union Associate and amongst her publications were Lucy Soulsby, *Stray Thoughts for Mothers and Teachers* (London: Longmans, 1897); Lucy H.M. Soulsby, *Two Aspects of Education* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1899). Elizabeth Wordsworth, a lifelong friend of novelist Charlotte Yonge had also This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in HISTORY OF EDUCATION on 6 February 2019, available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0046760X.2018.1548652>.

spoke at the Bradford congress to a meeting of girls over 16 on 'The Use of Imagination in Religion and Life'. Also on the platform were Miss Soulsby and Miss Constance Maynard, Mistress of Westfield College.⁸⁷ The Manchester congress of 1908, featured a meeting for women and girl students at which Miss Wordsworth and Miss Maynard, who spoke on charitable work and British values respectively, were joined on the platform by Miss Sara Burstall the distinguished Headmistress of Manchester High School.⁸⁸ Attention to schooling for girls reflected the debates on the practice and purpose of girls' education as preparation for their future roles and responsibilities in the home and beyond.

Whilst speakers were predominantly representative of a middle/upper class philanthropic perspective which assumed the authority to express views to those less socially advantaged, congress agendas began to acknowledge the significance of the work place in the lives of women. The theme of the working girl featured repeatedly in Church congress speeches. Lucy Soulsby's 1894 Exeter speech, engaged with 'Night Schools for Working Women', and at the same congress, Louise Creighton advocated 'the same opportunities for education and self-development as working men have', so that young women were prepared for life and were able to make good decisions.⁸⁹ Lady Laura Ridding's address *The Guardianship of Working Girls*, advocated the need for safe and suitable places for working girls to meet with their 'lovers'. It reflected an acknowledgement of the realities of life for young working women.⁹⁰ Talks about suitable employment and the conditions of working life also reflected these changing perceptions. In 1896, Augusta Maclagan approved nursery nursing and the role of governess as acceptable employment. In addition, she suggested that girls should learn shorthand and typing or should take up journalism.⁹¹ Louise Creighton continued the theme in 1899.⁹² Increasing attention to working conditions demonstrated a growing engagement with the realities of employment and a widening of class perspective. Mrs Hicks, secretary of the London Rope Makers Union, discussed the problems of poor working conditions and called for 'Christian assemblage' to help.⁹³ Christian socialist, teacher and campaigner for workers' protection, Gertrude Tuckwell, the author of *Women in Industry: Seven Points of View*, and *Women's Trade Unions*, made repeated

published novels under the pseudonym Grant Loyd. She also wrote devotional works and in 1888 co-authored a biography of her father Bishop Christopher Wordsworth the former headmaster of Harrow School.

⁸⁷Charles Dunkley, *The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Bradford, on September 27th, 28th, 29th, & 30th, 1898* (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1898), 355, 347; Catherine Beatrice Firth, *Constance Louisa Maynard, Mistress of Westfield College* ([S.l.]: Allen & U., 1949).

⁸⁸Charles Dunkley, *The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Manchester October 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th 1908* (London: Bemrose 1908), 650, 658, 663. Burstall was a founder member of the British Federation of University Women in 1907; Sara A. Burstall and T. F. Tout, *The Story of the Manchester High School for Girls, 1871-1911* (Manchester, 1911).

⁸⁹'What women can do to raise the standard of moral life', Dunkley, *Church Congress Exeter*, 241.

⁹⁰*The Derby Mercury*, October, 17, 1894.

⁹¹Dunkley, *Church Congress Shrewsbury*, 495.

⁹²*Church Congress London*, 383.

⁹³*Church Congress Folkstone*, 251.

Congress appearances. Between 1902 and 1911, she focused on the enforcement of safety regulations at work, and improving the conditions of factory life.⁹⁴ Another advocate for improving working women's conditions Clementina Black, secretary of the Women's Protective and Provident League in 1886 the precursor of the Women's Trade Union, spoke at the Folkestone congress in 1892.⁹⁵ Congress concern with workers' welfare was reflected in attention to health and the increasing presence of women speakers with medical expertise.

Temperance was a recurring theme amongst congress speakers who sought to educate the populace about the dangers of alcohol. At the 1885 Portsmouth congress, the 'sailors' friend' Miss Agnes Weston, publisher of the newsletter *'Ashore and Afloat'*, spoke of the efforts being made to encourage seamen to refrain from 'the grog'.⁹⁶ Six years later, she was able to report on her 'successes' to the Brighton congress.⁹⁷ Concern over drinking was not exclusively focused on the working classes: Lady Frederick Cavendish, in 1892, complained about young ladies 'accompanying gentlemen to the smoking room after dinner, and sharing, not only the cigars, but the spirits and water'.⁹⁸ Other temperance advocates included those with professional expertise. Domestic science pioneer and 'Lecturer to the National Health Society', Alice Ravenhill spoke at Bradford in 1898, Weymouth in 1905 and at Barrow-in-Furness in 1906 where she advocated self-control, a virtue that included the avoidance of alcohol.⁹⁹ Dr Kate Mitchell and gynaecologist Mary Scharlieb's advocacy for temperance also reflected eugenic concern over the relationship of alcohol abuse to the physical as well as moral degradation of the race.¹⁰⁰ Dr Mitchell commented in 1891 that she was 'firmly of the belief that all children ought to be brought up without any knowledge of alcohol'.¹⁰¹ Despite the contribution from

⁹⁴*The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Northampton 1902* (London Bemrose, 1902), 151; *The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Barrow-in-Furness October 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th 1906* (London: Bemrose, 1906), 205; *The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Stoke on Trent October 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th 1911* (London: Bemrose, 1911), 71; *Church Congress Manchester 1909*; See Cathy Hunt, "Gertrude Tuckwell and the British Labour Movement, 1891–1921: A Study in Motives and Influences," *Women's History Review* 22, no. 3 (2013).

⁹⁵Black was editor of the journal *Women's Industrial News* from 1895 and author of *Sweated Industry and the minimum wage* (1907), *Married Women's Work* (1915) and *A New Way of Housekeeping* (1918).

⁹⁶'The Church Congress', *London Daily News*, October 7th, 1885, p 3. Agnes was the author of *My Life Among the Blue Jackets* See Royal Navy Information sheet no.043 nmrn.portsmouth.org.uk and aggies.org.uk for her legacy.

⁹⁷Dunkley, *Church Congress Portsmouth*, 80-83; W.R. Nightingale, *The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Brighton on October 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th 1901* (London: Bemrose, 1901), 329.

⁹⁸Dunkley, *Church Congress Folkstone*, 261.

⁹⁹*Church Congress Bradford*, 316; *Church Congress Barrow*, 259; Dunkley, *Church Congress Weymouth*, 97, 247; Ravenhill published on health her work included Alice Ravenhill, *Lessons in Practical Hygiene for Use in Schools* (Leeds: E. J. Arnold & Son, 1907).

¹⁰⁰See Almeric W. Fitzroy, *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration. Vol.1. Report and Appendix* ([S.l.]: Printed for H.M.S.O., 1904). Scharlieb was the author *The Mother's Guide to the Health and Care of her Children* (1905), *A Woman's Words to Women on the Care of the Health in England and in India* (1895), *Womanhood and Race-Regeneration* (1912).

¹⁰¹Dunkley, *Church Congress Rhyl*, 399.

women with professional medical credentials, their perspective reflected concern over morality, and continued to advocate self-restraint as a means of alleviating social ills, and in so doing they continued to uphold the conservative Church agenda.

Conclusion

Women 'experts' on the platform of the Church congress from 1882 onwards, educated and informed the public, their peers and clergy in a diverse range of topics. These topics reflected women's increasing professionalization and engagement with social issues and education. Their expertise was further disseminated via official congress publications. An overriding message that can be drawn from this is that women could assume intellectual authority. However, discourses of domesticity and motherhood also remained and continued to dominate agendas in the space assigned to women speakers at the congresses. Despite some progress in the field of the Church, signalled by the recognition of women's organisations, in the period prior to the 1914-18 war, little overt challenge was presented to the hegemony of a male priesthood. Although Louise Creighton articulated the aspiration 'not be sofa cushions but to work by men's side' and the seriousness of women's religious vocations was asserted by deaconesses and sisterhoods, the assumption of women as subject to paternal theological authority was not confronted.¹⁰² This reflected the durability of religiously framed gendered notions of 'good' womanhood. This may be accounted for by the enduring presence of representatives of the MU and GFS (officially sanctioned Church organisations) who continued to endorse religiously framed notions of womanhood as domesticated and maternal. However, middle and upper class women acting as popular educators did reflect, and contribute to, changing perceptions of identities, procedure and behaviour within the congress and beyond. As advocates of formal and informal education for women and girls of all classes, they normalised the presence of women as speakers, demonstrated expertise in topics beyond the domestic to clergy, laymen and other women via platforms and through circulated congress reports. In so doing, despite the reluctance of the Church to concede them spiritual authority, they broadened the knowledge deemed appropriate for, and accessible to, women.

¹⁰²*Church Congress Exeter*, 245.

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