EDUCATION FOR THE KINGDOM:
An Exploration of the Religious Foundation of Charlotte Mason’s Educational Philosophy

Benjamin E. Bernier-Rodriguez B.S., M.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy

Lancaster University
Religious Studies Department
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ABSTRACT

A seminal Evangelical Anglican philosophy of education was
developed into full maturity by Charlotte Mason, a late-Victorian
Anglican churchwoman. This fact has been obscured in the history of
the theory and practice of education, but in recent years Mason’s
philosophy has attracted a new set of advocates.

An enthusiastic group of Christian parents and educators,
mainly mothers in the context of the American homeschool movement,
has been drawn spontaneously to the thought of this late-Victorian
woman and educational reformer. The philosophy has experienced a
new revitalization, apart from its original context, characterized by an
attempt to embrace and apply the principles of Mason’s philosophy
and method to the contemporary situation at the margins of the main
educational establishment in America.

My research will show that as a general rule the new set of
advocates of Mason’s ideas possess a limited appreciation of the
importance of the underlying Anglican ethos of her philosophy and its
intrinsic connection with its original late-Victorian context. Yet, this late-Victorian evangelical Anglican context underlies all of the main features of the philosophy: its spirituality, its problems and answers, language, basic principles, original aims, scope, course of development and paradoxical results. The lack of acquaintance with these facts has served well the creative impulse of the new wave of enthusiasts but also necessarily entails misreading and misrepresentation of Mason’s ideas and their importance to a contemporary audience.

This thesis explores and reveals the religious foundation of the philosophy in its historical religious context revealing how it played a foundational but paradoxical role for Mason’s work. I will show how its roots in late-Victorian Anglicanism, now hidden from the view of contemporary readers, both spurred and hindered the development of the radical implications of its original evangelical apologetic principles and the possibility of it being more generally acknowledged as an original contribution, by an English woman, to the history of Anglican educational thought. Understanding the historical, religious and philosophical roots of this paradox serves to explain both the eventual decay of the philosophy in its original context of late-Victorian England as well as its revitalization in the context of homeschooling and private schools in America.

This exploration provides the opportunity for some timely corrections of contemporary misreadings of Mason’s original thought, highlighting primary sources mostly unexamined until now which illuminate the religious foundation of Mason’s educational thought.
Yet, more important, it offers grounds to claim recognition for it as a unique contribution to the history of Anglican educational thought by a woman who developed, against formidable obstacles, the first fully articulated evangelical Anglican philosophy of discipleship in the history of Christian education.

I hope that this exploration will promote greater recognition of this singular achievement, with its limitations, and spur further research into the fertile soil of this relatively unexplored chapter of the history of education examined from a religious point of view, with its educational and philosophical implications.
DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted, either in whole or part, for a degree at this or any other university or institute of higher learning.

Benjamin E. Bernier-Rodriguez
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank God for his providential and infinite mercy in allowing me to pursue this course of studies and bring it to completion by the submission of this thesis. Along the way his merciful hand has been extended to me by the love, sympathy, help and support of many more friends than I am able to properly acknowledge here.

First and foremost, I want to thank my beloved wife Miriam, my most suitable helper, without whose loving, patient and continual support none of this would have been possible and to my seven boys: Esteban, Agustin, Sebastian, Juan Marcos, Pablo, Benjamin and Gabriel for their love and patience through all these years, waiting for ‘Dad’ to finally finish. They have been God’s instrument to lead me to look for educational alternatives and discover the value of Mason’s work. They are a continual source of love and inspiration. Also, special words of gratitude go to my dear supervisor Prof. Linda Woodhead who has been incredibly helpful, insightful and able to lead me to improve the quality and scope of this project in spite of my many deficiencies and to Gillian Taylor and to the Religious Studies Department of Lancaster University for offering such a unique atmosphere of open religious dialogue and for the high standard of excellence they give to all the work they do.

Also, I want to thank the faculty and Board of Directors of Cranmer Theological House, especially Dr. Peter Newman Brooks who was instrumental in opening this door for me, and to Mr Allen
Dickson, Bishop Ray Sutton and Bishop Royal U. Grote, without whose support I would not have been able to pursue these studies.

I am deeply indebted also to my dear friend Anna Migeon and family for her tremendous help and excellent job of proof reading the text and her many helpful questions leading me to clarify the meaning of my often confusing statements. To the members of Providence Reformed Episcopal Church I am most indebted for their continual support and love towards my family and me throughout all these years, especially to Kathy Howden, Rusty Wagoner and my friend and assistant rector the Rev. John Leal. Thanks also to my friend and collaborator in the ministry Dr. Charlie Erlandson and his wife Jackie, and their children who provided a home away from home for me when I most need it.

I am also indebted to Dr. John Thorley both for his valuable work in collecting and preserving Mason’s papers and for his helpful guidance, welcoming me to Ambleside, and leading me in the first stages of this fascinating exploration through Charlotte Mason Archive. Also, to all the members and volunteers of the Armit Library and Charlotte Mason College in Ambleside specially Linda Powell, Peter & Eleanor Browning, Elizabeth Battrick, Gilly Marshall, the Rev John and Barbara Daniels, the Rev. John Inman and all others who opened the doors of their friendship to me during my stay in Ambleside.

I have benefited greatly by the work of all those who are engaged in the study and promotion of Mason’s philosophy, some of whom I
had the privilege of meeting through our mutual interest in this important subject specially to the members of Charlotte Mason International, Elaine Cooper, Ranald and Susan Schaeffer Macaulay, Maryellen Marschke St. Cyr, Dr Steve Kaufmann and especially to Dr. Jack Beckman for his kindness in sharing with me the results of his excellent and helpful research beginning to fill a most important need in Mason’s studies.

Also, I want to acknowledge the kind help of the members of the Charlotte Mason’s College Old Student Association, life-long P.N.E.U. teachers, whom I had the honour of interviewing, especially Miss Eve E. Anderson, Ester Card, Marrion Berry and Brenda Staines, some of whom now rest with the Lord. They kindly welcomed me and shared with me their singular experience with lively and vivid minds nurtured through a whole life crowned into old age. Their testimony was for me a powerful and humbling testimony to the legacy of a philosophy which was able to translate educational and religious ideals into actual full lives characterised by the joy of living, teaching and learning.

To all of you my heartfelt thanks.
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**Introduction**

An evangelical-Anglican educational philosophy built upon spiritual premises and aimed at personal discipleship with a highly developed method actually exists. It reached full maturity as the fruit of the life work of a late-Victorian Anglican church-woman and educational reformer called Charlotte Mason (1842-1823). The awareness of such a claim immediately triggers a series of relevant questions: Who was Charlotte Mason? Who influenced her thought? What were her religious beliefs? What are the main features of her philosophy? How these two correlate? Why is this not common knowledge among professional Christian educators? And, is it possible to apply the principles of such a philosophy to the contemporary world?

This thesis explores the religious foundation of this singular educational phenomenon paying particular attention to the correlation between Mason’s religious beliefs and the realization of her philosophy and method. As a result of my research I argue there is an inherent tension between Mason’s original evangelical-Anglican principles and the institutional realization of her philosophy. A paradoxical result was generated in the process by which a philosophy originally based upon the personal convictions of a woman evolved to be identified with a method designed to respond to the requirements of an educational reform movement imposing demands designed to gain, secure and spread its influence over the whole nation. There is an underlying,
tension between some of the ‘revolutionary’ spiritual principles upon which Mason based her philosophy and the demands imposed by the religious, social conditions and conventional moral strictures of gender and social class relations characteristic of the Anglican climate of late-Victorian society. Mason took this system of values for granted as she negotiated her way over the obstacles it presented in order to gain recognition for her work as an educationalist being a self-taught women coming from relatively humble origins.

Educational developments, challenges to orthodox faith, social class constraints and gender obstacles of the late-Victorian era set the stage for the peculiar process by which this woman developed a philosophy and method through the course of more than fifty years of active work as teacher and writer. Yet, ironically, there are very few detailed records upon which to learn details about Mason’s early personal biography up to half of her life.

An official idealized narrative of Mason’s life grew with her educational reform movement becoming a fundamental requirement in its struggle to gain and keep the degree of respectability necessary to expand its influence over the whole system of education of the English nation. This need was supplied by the creation and perpetuation of a myth built around the exalted work and personality of the life of its founder, minimizing any problematic feature. It seems that the perpetuation of that myth required the suppression of some inconvenient information, like the truth concerning Mason’s humble origins, the details of her personal life, her personal religious beliefs
and in general any factor presenting a threat to the demands of late-Victorian respectability, which Mason never openly challenged. These demands generated internal tensions underlying Mason’s work and adaptations during its development which contributed to de-emphasize in the process of time some of the radical maternal Anglican-evangelical and apologetic motives predominant in her thought before the turning point of her career when she entered the field as the founder of what would become her educational reform movement.

By way of historical archival research my work aims at providing the necessary background information to elucidate this process, revealing the theological and religious foundations of Mason’s educational philosophy in its original evangelical-Anglican late-Victorian context and how it evolved into a movement for national school reform.

**Charlotte Mason Documentation and Current Studies**

All of Mason’s surviving manuscripts have been collected in The Charlotte Mason Archive at the Armitt Library in Ambleside by Dr. John Thorley, principal of Charlotte Mason College during the 1980s. The Armitt library in Ambleside has the collection of papers available for research since the year 2000 with all the remaining books from Mason’s personal library and a complete collection of Mason’s works which includes Mason’s earliest publications: *The Forty Shires 1880* and also a five book series on Geography, *Geographical Readers*
published from 1881-84; Her first educational publication, *Home Education* was the result of a series of lectures to ladies given in December of 1885-1886; the complete set of *The Parents’ Review*, the organ of the Parents’ National Educational Union, (P.N.E.U.). Mason founded this Journal in February of 1890 and edited it until shortly before her death in January of 1923; the ‘Home Education Series’ which is a collection of Mason’s writing in five volumes was published as a series in 1904-1905, adapting for it some of Mason’s previous publications dealing with educational subjects; There is also a collection of six volumes of poetry rendering the life of Christ in verse under the title *The Saviour of the Word* published from 1908 to 1914, and her last book, *An Essay Towards a Philosophy of Education*, 1923 which now figures as the sixth volume of the ‘Home Education’ series. There is also a volume collecting the tributes published in the *Parents’ Review* upon Mason’s death in 1923 under the title *In Memoriam*. I also found a series of Meditations covering half of the Gospel of John in a verse by verse commentary given by Mason to her students in Ambleside during 1898; which first circulated in lose leaflets and later were published in the *Parents’ Review*. This collection has not been highlighted in Mason’s studies until now. In 1960 Mason’s biography was published by Essex Cholmondeley, former student and principal of the *House of Education*, the teacher training college Mason established in Ambleside in 1892.

I had the opportunity to begin to research this abundant collection of material during two stays of several months in the years
2000 and 2001, followed by an extensive survey of Mason’s editorial labour covering the first 34 volumes of the *Parent’s Review*. Through this research I have found substantial documentation upon which I base an alternative interpretation of the origin and development of Mason’s educational ideas and its religious foundation highlighting various sources which previously have receive little or no attention in the research of these subjects.

Until recent times this vast collection of material had not been the subject of detailed scholarly attention. Interest in Mason’s thought and work began to grow among marginal groups of parents and teachers in the United States, but it has now begun to receive more attention at an academic level. The first academic work touching mostly historical aspects related to Mason’s work as a teacher was a short but important monograph on the ‘History of the William Davison Church of England School for Girls, Worthing’ by Valerie Hetzel\(^1\) written in 1975. This is the first detailed account of Charlotte Mason’s early years while working as a young teacher at a Church of England School for Girls from 1861-73. Then in 1984 Margaret Anne Coombs presented the results of her investigation into the history of the P.N.E.U., in her thesis: ‘Some Obstacles to the Establishment of a Universal Method of Education for Parenthood by the P.N.E.U.’.\(^2\) This was the first work to highlight inconsistencies in the official story surrounding Mason’s life and the P.N.E.U. Coombs presented

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criticisms of Mason’s person and work characterizing her influence over the P.N.E.U. as a primary obstacle hindering the realization of the goal of parental education which lay at the foundation of the Society.

At the same time a relatively unknown study of Mason’s educational philosophy was made by an American educator, Marian Ney, as part of the work towards a degree at Hofstra University in 1981. The work was published posthumously in 1999 under the title *Charlotte Mason: ‘A Pioneer of Sane Education’*. Her work has no relation to the American home schooling movement. It is rather an exploration of the validity of Mason’s educational philosophy, apart from its religious features, advocating the incorporation of its principles into the public school system. Ney argued for the validity of Mason’s philosophy based on her experience as a teacher applying Mason’s method with success in her own practice. According to Ney, Mason’s philosophy anticipated many fundamental principles of sound education which later theorists have highlighted in recent times. Therefore, Mason should receive wider recognition in the realm of educational theory.

Following along similar lines, the first PhD dissertation resulting from the new interest in Charlotte Mason’s thought is a dissertation by Dr. J. Carroll Smith in 2000; *Charlotte Mason: An Introductory Analysis of Her Educational Theories and Practices*, which explores the vitality of Mason’s philosophy as a workable alternative within the

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3 Marian Wallace Ney, *Charlotte Mason: ‘A Pioneer of Sane Education’* (Nottingham: Educational Heretics Press, 1999). This publication was the result of the initiative of Victoria Walters a librarian studying Charlotte Mason, who discovered some articles by Marian Ney in Back issues of the P.N.E.U. journal.
contemporary school methods. Smith gives brief attention to Mason’s religious belief system rightly characterising it within the framework of Protestant Anglicanism. Of all these works the only one which gives a little detailed attention to Mason’s religious beliefs is the work of Valerie Hetzel which highlights the centrality of Mason’s personal faith to the vision of her work as a teacher with a life vocation in the service of God.

The latest PhD research concerning Mason was realized by Dr Jack Beckman Lessons to Learn - Charlotte Mason’s House of Education and Resistance to Taxonomic Drift in 2005. This work presents the most detailed research on Mason up to this date, including a thorough survey of the scant evidence offering details about Mason early life, and pointing out the limits of our current understanding of it. The thesis explores Mason’s model of teacher training followed at the ‘House of Education’ from its creation until its eventual demise. It is also the first attempt to articulate some of the fundamental religious principles underlying Mason’s philosophy and their application to the history of the ‘House of Education’ describing the struggle of this institution to remain faithful to Mason’s realized pedagogy after her death and tracing its eventual decay. While rightly acknowledging the limitations and some inconsistencies in the official account of Mason’s life and some of the tensions underlying the government of the P.N.E.U. while Mason was still alive, Beckman

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builds his argument upon a narrative which presupposes the overall continuity of the official story which presents Mason’s philosophy as a consistent and natural unfolding of the same ideas developed over time.

This idea is a prevalent notion promoted by the official story in which Mason’s philosophy is perceived as not undergoing any serious alteration from beginning to end, being contained in a nutshell in her first set of lectures since 1886. I will show the limitations of this approach and how, in spite of an overall element of continuity and consistency in Mason’s thought, there are also strains of discontinuity and shifts of emphasis in the process of its production generating confusion and important tensions between the principles and aims of the philosophy at its beginning and its final realized pedagogy and method by means of the Parents National Educational Union, as the selected instrument by which Mason procured to influence education at the national level.

This investigation will explore the official narrative highlighting the elements of discontinuity which now lie mostly hidden behind the realized pedagogy of the P.N.E.U. movement, signalling the original tensions which eventually conspired to minimize the apologetic and evangelical ethos prevalent in Mason’s original thought, although it surviving in the inner circle of the followers of the movement.
Main Argument

I argue that there is a significant distinction to be made between the personal evangelical apologetic principles driving behind the scenes Mason’s original reflection upon the demands of Christian motherhood and the institutionalized version of her philosophy by the end of her life in the P.N.E.U. school method; that in fact, in spite of the presupposition of a flawless continuity, Mason’s philosophy underwent important modifications and adaptations in order to provide a suitable model for P.N.E.U. school education. Mason’s principles had to be adapted to respond to the requirements of teacher training and school life, displacing from the centre, without rejecting, the radical personal individualistic religious principles prevalent in the very early stages of her work, which addressed the family, motherhood in particular, as the natural and ideal locus in which the principles of home evangelical discipleship should find full expression; principles which tie education, especially in its spiritual aspect, to the level of personalized rather than institutionalized education. I will offer this unacknowledged tension between the individual versus the institutionalized evangelical principles of Mason’s philosophy and its realization within the P.N.E.U. method, as a primary reason explaining why the homeschool movement in America has been able to seize Mason’s principles and method finding in it inspiration to face the challenge of providing a Christian education for their children at home, while ignoring most of the institutional apparatus of P.N.E.U. philosophy.
This research will add to the body of Mason study a series of new sources highlighting significant tensions, partial disclosures, shifts on emphasis, frustrated attempts, polar power struggles and compromises which contributed to crystallize the received orthodoxy of Mason’s method as promoted by the P.N.E.U. movement after her death. Furthermore, as the contemporary Home school movement is itself unaware of the Anglican-evangelical religious roots, which in some P.N.E.U. circles was taken for granted as obvious, this peculiar religious ethos of Mason’s work has practically disappeared out of the picture being supplemented by a new eisegetical reading and appropriation of Mason’s thought, so that hardly a contemporary account of Mason’s life and work highlights her as an Anglican Church woman who devised the first evangelical-Anglican philosophy and method of education primarily focused in strengthening Christian discipleship through motherhood.

Mason’s late-Victorian gospel centred, apologetic educational programme and the tensions underlying its realization serve to explain both the eventual decay of interest in the philosophy in England as well as its current appeal to Christian homeschooling parents and educators outside of the Anglican tradition. The recent spontaneous resurgence of interest in Mason’s philosophy outside of its original educational movement serves as evidence of the vitality of its principles. This thesis will show that in spite of the differences there is a common ground underlying Mason’s realized philosophy and the interest of Christian parents, revealing Mason’s work as one of the few
educators presenting a series of principles upon which an evangelical philosophy of educational discipleship may be developed; suitable of adaptation to various akin denominational contexts.

I hope that this research will provide new grounds for a more thorough understanding of Mason’s thought, claiming for her a wider recognition as an evangelical-Anglican educational reformer. Mason arguably made a substantial and original contribution to the history of ideas and the practice of Christian education in spite of its modest recognition in this field until now.

**Dissertation Plan**

Our exploration will begin in chapter one tracing the renewal of interest in Mason’s educational philosophy in the contemporary religious scene and some of its limitations. The chapter will trace the process by which Mason’s philosophy gained contemporary interest in the context of the homeschooling movement in America, highlighting some of its limitations and the need for a more thorough exploration of Mason’s religious ideas in historical context.

Chapter two will explore the first half of Mason’s life tracing as far as possible the religious and psychological influences in her early life. This chapter will build upon the findings of recent research which has already highlighted limitations in the official story concerning Mason’s early life, which is for the most part shrouded in secrecy and lost to posterity. I will also highlight some new additional formative sources I was able to identify which have bearing upon Mason’s
religious perspective before the development of her active educational movement: like John Keeble, Alexander White, William Carpenter and the theology of FD. Maurice; ending with the presentation of Mason’s key religious ideas as presented in first set of lectures of 1886.

Chapter three highlights the key turning point in Mason’s life and work leading to the establishment of a Parents’ association during the period of 1887 to 1891. This constitutes the initial stage of Mason’s educational movement which soon after began to change focus from parent to teacher training and eventually to school education. We will highlight the plausible origins of Mason’s remarkable interest in developing a proposal for the education of parents in the context of the challenge to faith of the late-Victorian era, highlighting the original apologetic impulse underlying her effort.

We will argue that this turning point in Mason’s career may be better understood in light of her response to the novel *Robert Elsmere* 1888, which appears to have been related to a major catalytic event for her life and work, completely unacknowledged up to the present. This new revelation will serve to explain the unusual finding of a Victorian spinster engaged in the founding and direction of an association originally conceived for the promotion of the training of parents and home life, and the underlying tensions this generated over time as it began to evolve into a teacher training and schooling movement covering the time frame between 1889-1904. During this time many significant developments took place: the foundation of the P.N.E.U. in 1889; the Foundation of the *Parents’ Review* in 1890: The
foundation of the *House of Education* in 1892; Mason’s ‘Parent’s and Children’ articles published in 1896; and the Mothers Education Course.

Of interest also for this investigation are the publication of Mason’s translation of Eugene Bersier’s apologetic sermon during this early period, appended to the second edition of *Home Education*, and Mason’s emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit under the title of the ‘Great Recognition’.

Chapter four will follow the development of the spiritual side of the philosophy, presenting Mason’s particular views concerning the importance of Meditation. I will call attention upon a collection of meditations on the Gospel of St John written by Mason which up to the present had been overlooked. Meditation is an element of Mason’s work which has received little attention up to this point and which I believe is one of the most revealing formative features of her philosophy and method. This practice was originally at the core of the life of the *House of Education* and of Mason’s work. This chapter will present in this connection the religious principles and practices stressed at the early stages and inner circle of Mason’s teacher training in the “*House of Education*” and her teachings through *The Parents’ Review* as her original emphasis in parents’ education begins to be supplemented by a growing school movement.

Chapter five will follow the growth of the movement from 1904 to Mason’s death in 1923. These years mark the later stages of the school method which having received its foundation in the “*Home
Education” series and the “synopsis” of Mason thought, is the stage more familiar to those acquainted with Mason’s philosophy in its crystallization as a School movement before and after World War I. This stage is characterized by various attempts to influence the whole of national education. In that chapter we will follow the productions of Mason’s writing, particularly the codification of her educational philosophy in the synopsis of 1904, the Home Education Series including the book *Ourselves*, a book designed to provide and complement guidance for the spiritual formation of young persons especially girls and in her poetic rendering of the life of Christ in verse, published from 1908 to 1914, which in combination with *Ourselves* became the standard text dealing with the religious aspects of Mason’s method in its later schooling phase.

The poetry volumes are arguably Mason’s most valued project and the crown of her original main goals although it remained incomplete due to the exigencies of the “Liberal Education for All” movement which was a final attempt to promote Mason’s method in state schools promoting a reform of popular education. This movement may be interpreted as a sign of how the spiritual foundation and aims of the philosophy suffered alteration relative to the efforts to satisfy the exigencies of the national school reform.

From this period I also highlight an important revelation previously unnoticed in Mason’s studies. For a short while, right before the beginning of the First World War Mason expressed enthusiastic public approval for the work of a German philosopher
named Rudolph Eucken. Although this recognition passed to the background as the war started, Eucken is the only philosopher of whom Mason ever expressed publicly a complete agreement with. I will argue also that Eucken’s philosophical outlook, interestingly, offers a framework in which to understand the paradox Mason’s movement found itself as it attempted to promote a spiritual education for the life of the nation by means of the school system.

Mason attempted to reform a system of modern state education following spiritual evangelical principles. This reflects the tensions experienced by the Anglican Church as it evolved to find itself in the odd situation of an established church within a modern secular state. Attention will be given to the paradox of success and compromise which attended the efforts to give the work of the P.N.E.U. philosophy wider influence in the British educational scene. In this regard also, attention will be given to those aspects of this history which have received little to no attention in the research of this period like, the failed attempts to commend the P.N.E.U. curriculum to the headmasters of England and the objections raised by some of them in response.

Then we will follow the aftermath of the War, and the growth of the movement between the years 1915-1923, evaluating the Liberal Education for all; and the conclusion of all of Mason’s work, bringing together all aspects of her educational thought, in the final publication of what now appears as the sixth volume of the series published
almost 20 years after the rest; exploring in it the survival of the evangelical emphasis and original apologetic impulse.

The conclusion in chapter six will gather the results of this exploration comparing the early beginnings of Mason’s project and aims with its final results, suggesting how the underlying tensions of Mason’s educational movement ultimately limited the prospects of its general continuation. I will present some of the key factors, I believe, hindered Mason’s followers from being able to resolve the seeds of conflict inherent in Mason’s work, due to the compromise she made concerning the radical individualism of her religious principles in an attempt to reconcile it with universal social and religious demands trying to be both, liberal and conservative, religiously inclusive while holding beliefs exclusively evangelical-Anglican at the same time. We will point out the continuities as well as its discontinuities on this effort and how the underlying tensions of Mason’s thought resolved themselves in the course of action in such a way that the spiritual impulse of her original vision was hindered by the gender constraints of the epoch and how the changing spiritual climate imposed the burden of an unfulfilled vision aiming at national renewal creating the weight of an unfulfilled spiritual prediction at the same time that her curriculum gained wider acceptance.

I will conclude with an assessment of Mason’s educational thought in terms of its foundational religious import within the context of Anglicanism. Mason has been variously characterized as a saint and a heretic, as liberal and conservative, as orthodox and
unorthodox, she is too catholic for some and too protestant for others in other words she reflects in her life and work some of the same difficulties which others have pointed out as inherent to the Anglican tradition.

The Dictionary of National Biography describes Mason as a ‘churchwoman’ which is a fairly accurate description. As such she faced formidable obstacles for her work, and stands as a remarkable example of the opportunities, challenges and obstacles that her Anglican ethos provided for her during the late-Victorian era. My research will show how Mason’s educational philosophy is squarely grounded upon the religious convictions characteristic of late 19th century conservative Anglicanism responding to the crisis of faith of the time. The apologetic and discipleship features of Mason’s philosophy and educational project are intimately related to her view of religious calling to help in the ‘elevation of national character’ for a nation which tended to justify its existence as an Empire as a righteous manifestation of the Kingdom of God upon earth at a time when that discourse became increasingly problematic. The terms of this identification of the Anglican Church, the British Empire and the Kingdom of God are very close to those articulated seventy years earlier by the Rev. Frederick Denison Maurice in his work ‘the Kingdom of Christ’, whose theology appears to have provided essential features of Mason’s theological outlook. In fact Mason produced what could be considered an Anglican Philosophy of Education for the British Empire.
Although this fact is little understood today, the presupposition of an identification of the Kingdom of God upon earth with English national identity by means of the Anglican Church provides the ideological framework for Mason’s educational philosophy and work to such an extent that her philosophy may be ambiguously characterized as an “Education for the Kingdom”. The failure of this vision and the subsequent resurrection of Mason’s thought outside this ideological framework, within the individualistic milieu of American Homeschooling will provide the setting for a final reflection concerning this complex issue of national education versus personal religious ideals following Christian principles.

I hope that this work will contribute to amend the underestimation of the value of this notable female British religious educational philosopher and reformer, who has not been given the credit lesser lights in the history of British education have enjoyed, and supply new raw material for a growing discussion of the value of alternative views on education, bearing in mind the importance of the particularity of religious discourse which is often taken for granted or left out of the picture assuming religious uniformity or neutrality as a precondition for the discussion of educational ideals and projects in society in post-modern times.
Chapter I: Charlotte Mason in the contemporary scene; Towards a re-assessment of the religious foundation of Mason’s educational thought.

The course of this thesis will begin by tracing the process by which Mason’s philosophy has elicited new interest among American homeschool advocates and how this process has set the stage for an under appreciation of the importance of its religious background seen in its proper historical context. The separation of Mason’s writing from its original informing religious context has facilitated its adaptation to the contemporary situation but has obscured the intrinsic relationship existing between Mason’s Anglican-evangelical religious beliefs and the realization of her method.

This chapter presents a brief overview of the Homeschooling movement in America and the process by which Mason’s work came to be related to it. Then I will highlight a series of examples presenting problems of interpretation generated in the process by which Mason’s philosophy has been promoted to its modern audience among homeschooling advocates and detractors, pointing to places where there has been actual misrepresentation, and the problems that such mis-readings create for a serious study of Mason’s philosophy in the contemporary scene. This will serve to point out the need for a thorough exploration of the actual foundations of Mason’s philosophy viewed in their original context.
**The Homeschool Movement in America**

The religious scene of the United States in the later part of the 20th century experienced the growth of a movement of parents in search of educational alternatives to the system of state regulated compulsory education. Several groups of people coming from various religious backgrounds began to oppose the state educational system. These groups have been active in seeking and developing alternatives to the standard schooling system generating a range of educational alternatives at the margins of the massive state funded schooling apparatus. These alternatives take the form of private schools of diverse shapes and also a new generation of home educators in what is generally identified under the heading of ‘The Homeschooling Movement’ in America.

Although the phenomenon is widespread, including parents from secular and diverse religious backgrounds, a substantial number of the parents engaged in this movement identify themselves as ‘conservative’ Christians. The origins of this modern Homeschooling Movement can be traced to isolated efforts during the 1960s, when challenges to compulsory schooling laws were first fought in the United States courts. It is reported that the homeschooling population grew from some 10,000 to 15,000 children in the late 1960s to perhaps over one million children by 2001 (roughly 2 percent of the school-aged population). During the 1970s and the 1980s more

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parents were attracted to the homeschooling option fighting the legal battles against laws requiring compulsory schooling. By the end of the century, homeschooling had become legal in all states and the movement experienced phenomenal growth.

Although estimates cannot be precise and vary it has been reported that in 1990 there were around 300,000 children being educated at home, by 1998 the number was estimated in 1.5 million.\textsuperscript{7} The US Census Bureau estimated in 2001 that there may be as many a 2,000,000 with the number growing as much as 15 to 20 percent per year.\textsuperscript{8}

Although this phenomenal growth has a lot to do with manifest deficiencies in the quality of the state school system, a substantial number of families originally drawn to homeschooling have done so primarily for religious reasons.\textsuperscript{9} Some of these families perceived the rejection of the school system and the growth of the homeschooling movement as a religious battle against evil directed by the power of the Holy Spirit. They look with nostalgia to a previous time in American history when the Christian religion taught at home allegedly gave the nation its pre-eminence as a nation favoured by God until the school system began to teach secular humanist values. In this light the legal battles won by small minorities during the seventies and eighties against the powerful establishment to ‘save the children’ from


\textsuperscript{9} Saba, \textit{The McGraw-Hill Homeschooling Companion}, 2.
the state system appear as a miracle parallel to David’s battle against Goliath.\textsuperscript{10}

With the progress of the movement and its legalization homeschooling has moved from the margins to become a respectable and common alternative attracting many professionals retaining a strong appeal to Christian parents. According to Dr. Patricia Lines:

Families that elect to educate their children at home come from all major ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds, and all income levels. However, homeschoolers are more likely to be religious, conservative, white, better educated, and part of a two-parent family, compared with the average American family. Homeschooling families tend to have more children and be middle-class.\textsuperscript{11}

Dr Lines also characterizes homeschoolers as:

‘tremendously loyal as family members, they are suspicious of television and other less intimate influences. They eat as a family, they socialize as a family, they attend church as a family, they become members of an extended... homeschooling community.\textsuperscript{12}

A primary factor driving Christian parents to search for alternatives to the state system is the perceived threat the system poses to the religious formation of their children. Many consider the ‘liberal’ influence of the secular school as a threat to their religious development. For this reason they are inclined to send their children to Christian private schools or to educate them at home by themselves. Many want religion to be at the core of their children’s educational training and under strict parental control. The home is


perceived as the ideal place to make sure that this is so, according to individual family convictions, teaching their children at home without the risk of placing them under the hands of teachers who may undermine the values of their faith.

The Home School Movement in America is an unstructured one growing as a reaction to the alleged deficiencies of the system of state education. There is no one particular leader, organization or philosophy leading the movement which began by self-motivated parents and teachers in search of alternatives to exercise what they perceive as their right to choose the religious education and training of their children.

It is common for parents inclined to educate at home to look for direction concerning what to do. This need has created a substantial demand for information on ‘how-to’ manuals providing educational guidelines within the reach of the average Christian parent at home. Many parents in this process experience stress and confusion concerning basic questions such as ‘what?’, ‘how?’ and ‘why?’ educate your children at home. There are many alternative and competing answers to these fundamental questions, each influenced by particular religious presuppositions in the open market of ideas available to homeschooling parents and school teachers.

In most states Christian families seeking to educate children at home are free to choose their own curriculum and methods. They look especially for educational material able to integrate the Christian faith into the overall picture of education. This demand for religiously
crafted educational alternatives has been the occasion for the revitalization of interest in Charlotte Mason’s educational philosophy in America a hundred years later.

How Mason Entered the Contemporary Homeschooling Scene

Mason was a British educator, from obscure origins, who eventually became a noted educational reformer living in England from 1842 to 1923. By the end of her life, she had gained a considerable reputation as the founder and head of an educational movement—the Parents’ National Educational Union (P.N.E.U.)—aiming at the reformation of the whole system of English education. But, after her death the educational movement entered a steady course of decay. It gradually lost its previous influence until it practically disappeared from the English educational scene by the 1960’s. In England Mason’s method and philosophy became no more than a footnote at the margins of the history of Modern British education. Her educational work, philosophy and method have been mostly ignored in the realms of contemporary educational theory and practice and have not been identified as an original or major contribution to the history of education, Christian or not.

Mason’s work grew thoroughly immersed within the religious and social context of late-Victorian England by the end of the nineteenth century, while her ‘revival’ has being triggered a hundred years later by the personal interest of educators, mostly mothers, mainly within the protestant Christian tradition characteristic of the
American scene. During the 1980’s Mason’s philosophy and method attracted the attention of a growing number of protestant home schooling parents, teachers and schools in the United States interested in Mason’s ideas and method ranging from independent fundamentalist Christians to American Roman Catholics, among other groups.

‘For the Children’s Sake’

The resurgence of interest in Charlotte Mason’s thought by religiously minded parents and teachers in the United States may be traced to the publication in 1984 of the book *For the Children’s Sake*, by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay. This book presents a summary of Mason’s thought following the principles of Mason’s philosophy. It tells the story of how Susan Schaeffer stumbled across one of the few remaining schools related to the Parents’ National Educational Union (P.N.E.U.)—the society started by Mason in 1887 for the promotion of her ideas—one of the last remaining schools still working along Mason’s principles in England.

In the book Schaeffer provides a positive assessment of the philosophy and the effects this school had upon her own children. This motivated her to research the philosophy behind the school, discover Mason’s work and write the book.

Susan Schaeffer Macaulay is the daughter of the late Dr. Francis Schaeffer an American theologian and Presbyterian pastor whose

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lectures, apologetic writings and movie-sets became widely influential
during the 1970s especially among conservative evangelicals
throughout the United States. The apologetic writings of Francis
Schaeffer promoted a discourse explaining the decay of western
civilization based upon its departure from the principles of the
Protestant Reformation. In his view Protestant culture while rejecting
the authoritarianism of Roman Catholicism had fallen by the other
side a victim of secular humanism and relativism.

Macauly did not highlight in her presentation of Mason’s work
its intrinsic connections with the Anglican faith, she simply described
Mason as an educator with a solid Christian foundation: ‘She believed
that biblical Christianity is truth’\textsuperscript{14} and then raised the next natural
question:

What happened? Why have so few heard of her today? Why do
so few remember that she was one of the great educationalists,
one who changed the whole idea of what education is and how
we can go about it? I believe one reason is that the strong
Christian base upon which she built became unpopular. The
view of what life is all about changed.\textsuperscript{15}

This simplified account of Mason’s philosophy and the reason why so
few had heard about it found resonance among homeschooling
mothers. Without realising it, Macauly planted a seed for the
contemporary appropriation of Mason under the generic category of
‘Christian’ without any reference to its distinctive late-Victorian
Anglican origins. Although Macauly did not say it like that, the
homeschooling readers of America had categories defining what that

\textsuperscript{14} Macaulay, \textit{For the Children’s Sake}, 5.
\textsuperscript{15} Macaulay, \textit{For the Children’s Sake}, 7.
‘Christian base’ ought to have been and the reason why it became unpopular, its ‘Christian foundation’ must have been rejected by ‘secularization’. This opened the door for various mis-readings of Mason’s work apart from its historical context which are still common today. Mason’s philosophy is often presented as that of a pioneer in a struggle to reform a system of education which had to be irreligious and abusive of children, ignored due to secularization.

It is not surprising that a book by the daughter of Francis Schaeffer writing as a mother concerning Christian education promoting the thought of a forgotten Christian educator, would be read by American homeschoolers as presenting a philosophy which originally was designed to oppose secularism, in spite of the anachronism entailed in this point of view.

Notwithstanding this book gives a fair presentation of Mason’s core principles, enthusiastically promoting the universal applicability of her ideas in terms such as the following:

The ideas made such good sense! We found that they are relevant to today’s child and today’s society. They are of such universal nature that one can apply them equally well at home, in different kinds of schools, in an orphanage in Africa, in an Indian village, in an inner-city school or day-care centre. The ideas are so true that many of them are instinctively used by those with different educational or religious systems. They give us a satisfying view of education, or a child’s life, from a Christian viewpoint. They provide a framework.16

It should be noted that such enthusiasm is based upon a tacit pre-agreement with a particular set of beliefs identified as ‘Christian framework’ dependent upon certain Protestant presuppositions which

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16 Macaulay, For the Children’s Sake, 5.
Schaeffer Macaulay and her audience identified as the foundation of Mason’s work. So that the ‘universal’ applicability of Mason’s ideas based upon their being ‘so true’ would be apparent only to those who are already committed to adopt such particular religious framework claiming at the same time universality without realizing the paradoxical nature of such proposal.

We will see that this paradoxical stance tending to ignore the particularity of a religious discourse while claiming universality of application also underlies Mason’s own educational theory and work generating unresolved tensions, giving to its evangelical Anglican presuppositions the status of universal principles supposedly valid for education apart from any particular religious framework.

The book stresses Mason’s value as a ‘Christian’ educator but offers little more insight concerning the relation of Mason’s philosophy to her particular religious views and their connection with late-Victorian Anglicanism, making no reference to Mason’s devotional writings, setting the stage for the beginning of the disassociation of Mason’s thought from its historical Anglican context.

**How Mason Came to America**

Mason never crossed the ocean, but her philosophy did, a hundred years later, through the homeschool movement. The contemporary connection between Mason and the homeschool movement in America was triggered by the work of Dean and Karen Andreola, a couple who in search for answers to the challenge of the
stressful and draining process related to Christian home schooling, found help and guidance in Schaeffer Macaulay’s book which led them to seek for more of Mason’s writings. They searched for a set of Mason’s out of print *Home Education Series* which they republished in 1989 through Tyndale House,\(^{17}\) a well established publishing house among evangelicals, ‘believing the books should be made available to the Christian world’.\(^{18}\) This made the main collection of Mason’s educational writing available to contemporary readers under a new title of *The Original Home Schooling Series*.\(^{19}\)

This collection of Mason’s educational writings entered the market of home schooling alternatives in the American scene disconnected from the rest of the body of her work, in particular her explicitly religious writings and its late-Victorian historical setting. But, the original Anglican evangelical religious foundation of Mason’s faith informed her presuppositions, shaped her methods, defined her goals and limited the prospects of its success.

*Mason, identified as ‘Founder of the Home Schooling Movement’*

On the cover of the 1989 republication of Mason’s six volume series the work is described as ‘An indispensable teaching reference

\(^{17}\) Charlotte M. Mason, *The Original Homeschooling Series* 1-6 (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1989). The books composing this series, do not correspond exactly with the *Home Education Series* 1-5, published in 1905-6. The books of the set underwent changes through various editions, especially the first book, *Home Education* was adapted for the series going into its fourth edition in 1905. The republication of 1989 is a collection which includes editions of the books ranging from 1905 to 1935. It also includes Mason’s last book, first published in 1923 as the sixth volume of the series. Unless otherwise indicated the references in this thesis to Mason’s work refer to the 1989 republication.


\(^{19}\) The subtle change in the title can be missed easily. Notice the change in title from ‘Home Education Series’ to ‘The Original Home Schooling Series’.
by the turn-of-the-century founder of the home schooling movement’ with a new title: the original ‘Home Schooling Series’. This new title and description, designed to grab the attention of American homeschooling parents during the 1990s, and the enthusiasm of homeschool parents who embraced it, promoted the misleading notion that Mason’s educational philosophy was somehow directly related to the modern ‘homeschooling’ movement.

The Andreolas, building upon Macaulay’s presentation and their own experience applying Mason’s philosophy to their homeschooling family promoted Mason’s thought as providing parents and teachers with a ‘Christian based method of education’. This generated strong enthusiasm for Mason’s philosophy in view of its practicality and appeal to American evangelical readers creating a new narrative which further separated Mason from its original context. They commended Mason’s writings as built upon a ‘firmly held evangelical perspective’ an accurate description by Dr. John Thorley, which nevertheless the Andreolas promoted without paying much attention to the historical and Anglican meaning of that term in the history of England.

The Andreolas actively promoted their reading of Mason’s ideas to the homeschooling community. They established the ‘Charlotte Mason Research and Supply Company’ to promote conferences and reproductions of extracts from Mason’s work in a small magazine published from 1991 to 1996, which they called the ‘Parents’ Review’. This furthered contributed to the confusion, since most American

20 John Thorley, Foreword to The Original Home Schooling Series, by Charlotte Mason. Also placed at the beginning of Charlotte Mason Companion, by Karen Andreola, 8.
readers had no knowledge about the existence of the original P.N.E.U. organ. The Andreolas reproduced old articles from the original without providing references to the original source. In 1998 Karen Andreola published ‘Charlotte Mason Companion personal Reflections on the Gentle Art of Learning’. The Companion became a primary means for the promotion of Mason’s philosophy among homeschooling mothers.\(^{21}\)

In this book Andreola collected many of the unreferenced previous extracts of her magazine\(^{22}\) and shared the fruit of her experience reading and applying Mason’s philosophy to their American Christian homeschooling experience suggesting ways to adapt Mason’s work and thought to fit within the framework of homeschooling mothers.

In their presentation of Mason to their homeschooling audience Dean Andreola created a narrative which portrays Mason as a Christian reformer of the British educational system fighting a battle for the education of Children from all classes especially for the poor oppressed children:

> With the passing of years her methods were widely assimilated into the (secular) British educational system, yet the Christian principles upon which they were established were for the most part eliminated. . .

In England, during the Late 1800’s children were not treated as whole persons. They had no rights to speak of. Poor children of lower classes were labelled by the well-to-do as ‘bad’ and were considered of little use to society. They received little or no education, and were required to work many long hours in harsh

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\(^{21}\) Andreola, A Charlotte Mason Companion.
\(^{22}\) Andreola acknowledges in the endnotes of the Companion that one of the short comings of her book is the extensive quotation of Mason’s work without the appropriate reference to the original source. She also describes many of the chapters of her book as ‘free adaptations’ of the original text of various articles from The Parents’ Review. See Andreola, A Charlotte Mason Companion, 381.
and unsafe, conditions—if they were ‘fortunate’ enough to find work. On the other hand, children from wealthy families were labelled ‘good’ and received the best education money could buy. But even wealthy parents spent little time directly raising and educating their own children. This task was left to nurses, governesses, and tutors. Overall, many people were indifferent to the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual needs of children. About this time, Dickens and others began to bring the plight of children to public attention, and the national conscience began to change. By the turn of the century, Charlotte Mason had become one of the key figures in the battle for better education for children of all classes and the restoration of the family. She took as one of her mottoes, ‘For the Children’s Sake.’ She even started a retreat center for parents to teach them the fundamentals of parenting. Those who attended nicknamed the retreat ‘the House of the Holy Spirit,’ because here they were learning to draw closer to God as well as to their children.

In this, to say the least, superficial assessment of the historical context of Mason thought, she is portrayed as a lonely champion in a battle ‘for the better education of children of all classes and the restoration of the family’, working upon an undefined ‘Christian’ foundation which was abandoned by the secular state. This narrative reflects the presuppositions of the American homeschooling audience which postulates an opposition between ‘Christian education’ and secularism in state education, underlying the need for the defence of the family by means of the homeschooling enterprise, without realizing the anachronism entailed in projecting this system of values upon Mason’s philosophy and work.

It will surprise those introduced to Mason through writings such as this to learn that English education in late-Victorian England

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23 The House of Education in Ambleside was never a “retreat center” It became established early as a training school for governesses. Mason rejected her own inclination to call it ‘The House of the Spirit’ fearing this name could convey a misleading impression. Mason had no intention to facilitate being perceived as the founder of a sect, or as challenging the established Church or the State by setting a separated educational community.

was not ‘secular’ but rather gave great importance to religious and moral instruction at all levels as an essential part of the building of national character in conjunction with the established Church of England to which Mason gave complete endorsement. Mason never claimed to be the voice of a prophet crying in the wilderness. Educational reform was the order of the day and she was part of it. There were various simultaneous efforts to improve popular education, and most of them presupposed Christian religion and moral instruction.

England has had for a long time an established Church. In contrast with contemporary America, the separation of Church and State was not an issue in regard to the legitimacy of religious instruction in state funded schools. Although there have been always degrees of dissidence in England, the established Church provided a common imaginary discourse, supporting the state, which served as an official framework familiar to all, even to the sceptics, against which the Christian duties of citizenship were defined and the various religious groups interacted, sharing their perception of British national identity as a Christian nation promoting a God-sanctioned benevolent world empire. Subsequent educational reforms, aimed at promoting popular education, opened the door for women with little resources, like Mason, to work as teachers in Church of England schools for children of the lower and middle classes, while the question of popular education was the focus of frequent public discussion by the educated classes.
It also needs to be said that a substantial part of Mason’s educational work through the P.N.E.U. had little direct relation or application to the situation of the poor, until the last stages of its development. Her lectures, training college and parents association primarily served the middle and upper English class. Notwithstanding some exhortations to the *Parents’ Review* readers to extend its teaching to poor families, the P.N.E.U. early decided that there were other associations already in place addressing those needs.\(^{25}\) Although expressing sympathy for the lower classes, with everybody else at the time, Mason was not a radical reformer marshalling the education of the poor against a secular establishment and she had no part in a movement to ‘restore the family’.

It must be said that Mason never advocated Homeschooling in any form close to the contemporary meaning of this term. The idea of parents, professional women in particular, choosing to leave secular careers in order to educate children at home for religious or other reasons was a practical impossibility which did not become even an issue to be contemplated at the time, and most likely would have been frowned upon when there were suitable English schools available. The educational establishment of England was changing to make education more widely available to all classes for the first time. So,

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\(^{25}\) “The question of “class legislation” caused some perplexity in the first instance. It was felt that, while here was common ground on which rich and poor should meet together, yet, on the other hand, the details of home training and culture are not the same for people who have nurseries and artistic surroundings and for those whose lot is cast within narrower lines. But the difficulty settled itself: it was found that, to meet the artisan class, it is desirable to go to their usual places of meeting, and to work through existing organizations rather than to press another society on their attention. Work in mothers’ unions, guilds, temperance halls, &c., is incumbent on every branch.” Charlotte Mason, “A New Educational Departure,” *The Parents’ Review* 1, no. 1 (February 1890): 74.
leaving children at home when school was an option would had been regarded as something uncivil which the P.N.E.U. would not have encouraged since the uplifting of national character and the harmony of State and Church demands with family idiosyncrasy was a fundamental presuppositions for the education of a good English citizen.

The situation of Protestantism in America shares some of these features with fundamental differences. Like England, common protestant religious discourse supports an idealized vision of the USA as a ‘Christian Nation’ with a divine calling and encourages civil patriotism, yet since independence there has not been an official mainstream of established Protestantism relative to which all other alternatives must interact. The analogy of a free market of related but independent religious choices, heavily marked by individualism, is more appropriate to describe the American religious situation. This helps to explain the character of the spontaneous growth of religious homeschooling in America and the curious resurgence of interest for Mason’s philosophy in America in contrast to its neglect within its native England.

In light of such considerations it can be seen how the religious situation underlying Mason’s original work and its contemporary resurgence in America, while sharing some common features relative to the framework of the protestant Christian faith is different in significant ways. Most of Mason’s work precedes that of some of her contemporary educational thinkers like Maria Montessori and John
Dewey, and grew parallel to the system of modern education of England as it evolved into its contemporary form. Mason’s philosophy is not a reaction to ‘secular’ educational models for religious reasons, but grows directly from and within the climate of religious opinion prevalent in England at the end of 19th century.

Unfortunately, the narrative promoted by the Andreolas has been reproduced and amplified many times and forms the standard portrait of Mason and her historical context for many contemporary enthusiast of Mason’s thought in the homeschool movement. As noted above, Mason has been wrongly presented to this new public as the ‘founder of the Home Schooling Movement’ in ‘the original Home Schooling Series’ mis-representing the historical context informing her thought. The original home school room of Mason has been identified without qualification as equivalent to the American home school of a hundred years later in spite of the significant differences between the two.

These changes and new attributions reinforce a misleading link between the unexamined religious presuppositions of the contemporary audience and the work of Charlotte Mason, thus taken out of context, by which Mason can be numbered as a fellow evangelical homeschooler while bypassing the heavily English Late-Victorian Anglican features of her thought.
The Internet and other helping aids

The Internet has made this sort of misconception wide spread. In an attempt to popularize Mason’s life and thought home schooling enthusiasts have written their own religious preconceptions and understandings presenting them as belonging to Mason herself.

A typical story reflecting the common process leading to the ‘discovery’ of Mason through Andreolas’ writing by a homeschool mother can be read on the reviews of the ‘The Original Home School Series’ available on Amazon’s book reviews.\(^\text{26}\) It relates how a mother attracted to homeschooling began to read general guides, which lead her to Karen Andreola’s Companion and later to Mason’s writing which she recommends with great enthusiasm because of its practical wisdom helpful for a homeschooling mother.\(^\text{27}\) This narrative fairly reflects a common experience of homeschooling mothers encountering Mason through the homeschooling guides. It begins by reading a book about Mason which reflects the experience of a Homeschoolers adapting Mason’s method to the contemporary American scene because of its apparent difficulty and ends recommending these same guides as necessary aids to understand the difficult language of Mason own writing.

Most contemporary reading of Mason by homeschoolers suffers from this incomplete and sometimes inaccurate perception of Mason’s


philosophy as a whole, giving a lot of emphasis to the practical applications of the method and little emphasis to the underlying principles of the philosophy and its original religious presuppositions. In spite of this many American mothers witness appreciation for Mason’s original writing.

The manuals and guides are written by advocates of the method, sharing their own experience, application and interpretation, in order to facilitate the work of other prospective homeschooling parents. These guides readily reflect the religious setting in which the philosophy began to be welcomed and the problems of adaptation that its ideas create. For example ‘A Charlotte Mason Education’ by Catherine Levison 1996 states:

One very important thing I always stress to people is to pray about your home schooling choices, your book selections, and your children’s futures. I strongly recommend you find a trusted prayer partner and promise to pray for each others’ school every day.28

... You may be as discriminating as you want to be and still use the C.M. method. I happen to be a very particular mother when it comes to reading material. I'll give you one personal example of my convictions. I destroyed our set of the Chronicles of Narnia a long time ago, and I have no regrets. Many people love those books, and that is fine by me. We can all give each other a little elbow room to make these choices. On the other hand, I previously rejected all Charles Dickens because of A Christmas Carol. I did not allow any ghost stories in my house. I now know I was missing out on David Copperfield and Oliver Twist, which are two of the best written and most touching fictional books I have ever read. So I have learned to censor out a chapter of a book rather than discarding the whole book. We can take what is good and godly from literature, praying about each choice according to our own convictions.29

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28 Author’s emphasis.
The homeschool enterprise is presented as a religious duty enforced with daily prayer which includes the need of censure according to parental personal religious convictions. This sort of adaptation is also applied to the actual recommendations of Mason herself. See for example Levinson discussion on reading the Bible where she agrees with Mason’s basic approach until it comes to the issue of Bible commentaries, where Levinson notes:

My personal opinion differs on this point. My emphasis is to teach and equip them at this age to handle the Word of God accurately. They are trained to do inductive study with ample time to do original language word studies.\(^{30}\)

The difference here is a reflection of the differing theological convictions in their practical application. Mason in her late-Victorian setting held a very high degree of respect towards the specialist on his field of expertise. She encouraged openness, with caution, to the reception of new discoveries of science and research while stressing the need for individual deference to expert authority in questions of knowledge. This led Mason to be very careful when dealing with scholarly opinions on religious matters from which she differed. As we will see in the next chapter, from early on Mason recommended both parents and young people to be well informed concerning theological controversies and willing to base their opinions upon, and defer to, the best scholarship even when it challenged their faith. Therefore, the use of Bible commentaries was an integral part of the preparation of the young, first guided by teachers, who would provide the context for

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the Bible readings in their lesson being informed by the commentaries, until the children themselves reached the proper age to engage this work of reading and interpretation by themselves.

Mason’s approach is in stark contrast with the radical individualism of sectors of the home schooling community of which Levinson can be read as representative, where individual authority and personal opinion serves as a primary principle and distrust for scientific and theological authorities the norm.

In conjunction with the how-to manuals and home school conferences, the Internet has become the primary tool for the dissemination of the contemporary version of Mason’s thought. More and more homeschooling mothers and teachers use the Internet on a regular basis to seek resources and collaborate through discussion groups and email lists, concerning the problems and alternatives for home schooling.31 There are numerous examples of the growing interest on Mason’s thought and work.32 An Internet search on ‘Charlotte Mason Education’ readily reflects the amount of interest Mason’s work continues to generate among many parents and teachers including ‘secular’ homeschooling parents.33 The enthusiasm for Mason’s material is also exhibited by the growing number of her

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31 See for example a group that has been active since the late 1990s, which describes itself as a: “Christian, open-membership, topical loop. We are largely but not exclusively homeschool families.” “Charlotte Mason Study Loop,” http://www.angelfire.com/journal/CharlotteMason/ (accessed 4 April 2006).


works increasingly made freely available. ³⁴ For example *The Parent’s Review* is being transcribed and posted by a group of collaborators. ³⁵ As more and more primary sources of Charlotte’s Mason’s work are being brought online,³⁶ websites and discussion groups continue to be set to discuss and apply various aspects of Mason’s philosophy and life.³⁷ There is a continual spontaneous dialogue and exploration of Mason’s ideas searching for information and understanding of her thought and the application of her method. But unfortunately the popular dissemination and interpretation of Mason’s work has tended to perpetuate the misconceptions touching its actual roots within Anglicanism and late-Victorian Society.

**Contemporary Misreadings of Mason**

Mason’s work has been widely promoted on the internet, often recommending aids to help with the complexity of Mason’s own writing. A commendable motive if it was not for the mis-representation of Mason’s thought which necessary follows from ignoring the historical context of her thought. There are many errors and

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³⁵ “Ambleside Online,” http://www.amblesideonline.org/PR.shtml. This site acknowledges the help of over 40 volunteers typing and moderating group discussions on the articles of *The Parents’ Review*.

³⁶ At this time the first of her Geography Books is available for free as a downloadable pdf file. http://www.destinationhome.net/THE_AMBLESIDE_SERIES_Elementary_Geography_in_Arial_with_illustrations.pdf

inaccurate statements in books and websites misrepresenting Mason. Rather than quoting multiple examples I will use as an illustrative case, a sample from a paraphrase version of Mason’s first book, *Home Education* originally available on the Internet and now also available in print.

This paraphrase was written with the aim of making Mason more accessible to modern readers. In the original lectures of *Home Education*, (1886) as part of a presentation of the role of conscience in relation to the will, Mason quoted a verse which eventually became the motto for the Parents’ Review Schools:

- ‘I am, I ought, I can, I will’—these are the steps of that ladder of St. Augustine, whereby we

  ‘rise on stepping stones
  Of our dead selves to higher things.’

These verses appear in Mason’s original text as an unreferenced quotation of the famous poem by Tennyson’s *In Memoriam A.H.H.* Mason often quoted without reference verses presumed to be easily recognized by her cultured contemporary audience. In the online paraphrased version of Mason’s first book the original text is substantially transformed as it is rendered:

'I am, I ought, I can, I will.' These are like four steps of the ladder that St. Augustine wrote about when he said we could 'go up on the stepping stones of the old, sinful man we cast off and are dead to, and ascend to higher things.'

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41 Leslie Noelani Laurio, *Home Education in Modern English Volume 1 of Charlotte Mason’s*
The paraphrase version asserts a series of inaccurate attributions. First, the separate reference to Tennyson’s poem disappears and St. Augustine is wrongly identified as the author of a quote he never asserted concerning a ‘four step’ ladder to ‘go up on the stepping stones of the ‘old, sinful man’. The confusion is helped by the fact that Mason did not point out the source of the motto. Therefore it has been wrongly identified as a quotation from St. Augustine’s writing.42

A careful reading shows that the paraphrase does not reflect accurately Mason’s original meaning. Mason, in keeping with her views of conscience and will, sets her appreciation of the value of the motto, by linking it with Tennyson’s poem, a favourite of Queen Victoria, which in the preceding verses says:

I held it truth, with him who sings
To one clear harp in divers tones,
That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.

Mason interprets the opening verses of Tennyson ‘him who sings’ as a reference to St. Augustine’s teaching that ‘We make ourselves a ladder out of our vices if we trample the vices themselves underfoot’.43 This connection is not entirely hers. There is another poem ‘the ladder of St. Augustine’ by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the title of which Mason is probably quoting, which begins:

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Series (United States, Lulu.com, 2007), 330.
42 The motto does not figure in St. Augustine’s writings. In Chapter 2 I will discuss the actual source from which Mason gathered the motto and its possible origins.
Saint Augustine! well hast thou said,
That of our vices we can frame
A ladder, if we will but tread
Beneath our feet each deed of shame! 44

In this poem St. Augustine’s teaching serves as the introduction to an exhortation to moral elevation by self-control and self-discipline using our failures as opportunities to grow in the practice of higher moral perfection. The ideas expressed in this poem are much closer to Mason’s own text. Hers is not an assertion attributing the motto to St. Augustine to ‘sanctify it’ 45 or relating the ‘dead self’ with pauline teaching concerning the ‘putting off the old man’. Instead Mason sees in the motto an application of the general principle of moral growth by a resolution to exercise moral control and self-discipline.

The paraphrase of this extract presents a clear example of the sort of errors entailed in the reading, interpretation and appropriation of Mason's work disconnected from its original Victorian context. Such a reading is liable to read into Mason’s text anachronistic meanings concerning her religious ideas ignoring their proper original connotations, the process which tends to promote the mis-apprehension of Mason as a homeschooler advocate instead of an Anglican educational reformer and thinker.

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45 See Coombs, “Some Obstacles to the Establishment of a Universal Method of Education for Parenthood” 244.
Conflicting interpretations

As mentioned before, the particular circumstances marking the resurgence of interest in Mason’s philosophy has spurred a quest for clarifying its meaning raising questions concerning her writing and actual religious views. This is the contemporary situation in which the problem this thesis addresses first showed itself. The appropriation of Mason’s ideas has been spontaneously generated by the personal interest of parents and teachers. Insight and guidance concerning Mason’s religious views has often been looked for and sometimes become the centre of heated debate without a detailed reference to the whole of Mason’s work or its historical and religious context.

Mason’s philosophy and method has proved to be very attractive to some while utterly offensive to others. Many recognize that at a practical level Mason’s method offers valuable insights. But when it comes to assess her overall value as a model for Christian spirituality and the suitability of her educational philosophy and method for the new generation of Christian homeschoolers the opinions have remained sharply divided.

For example, Mason’s ‘orthodoxy’ has been questioned in online discussions. Was she really a Christian? If so, what kind of Christian? Was she a ‘liberal’ or an ‘evangelical’? Was she a Deist? Did she believe in evolution? Did she believe the doctrine of original sin? Can a Roman Catholic homeschool apply her methods within a Roman Catholic home environment? Can she be safely read or was she a
dangerous heretic? Many such discussions have been carried on and off through the Internet and sometimes in newsletters and magazines.

A good early example of this problem was a discussion between Aimee Natal and Elaine Cooper held through magazine articles during 1999, which also circulated through email at the time. Natal argued against Mason’s orthodoxy based on a criticism of the implications of the second principle of Mason’s synopsis of her educational thought: ‘children are not born either good or bad, but with possibilities for good and evil’. Natal interpreted this as a tacit denial of the doctrine of original sin, while Cooper defends Mason as a devout Christian who contemporary readers may easily misunderstand. Another example coming from Roman Catholic home school is the opposite assessments by Lydia Reynolds and Marianna Bartold. Reynolds advocated Mason educational philosophy and method as that of a faithful Anglican woman, who in spite of not being Roman Catholic could hardly be a ‘more sympathetic educator’ to the Roman Catholic parent. On the other hand Bartold strongly condemns Mason’s philosophy and method as being ‘replete with heretical ideas and the ‘methods’ to enforce them’ against Roman Catholic teaching.

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Of course various readings and evaluations of Mason’s thought are possible, each group bringing their own set of religious presuppositions leading to contrary conclusions in regard to the religious import of Mason’s own thought and its role within her educational philosophy and method. But the fact remains that most people seeking answers to these questions have not been exposed to the bulk of Mason’s religious writings or the historical process by which her thought came into existence in its historical context and therefore have a hard time placing it within the context of the history of Christian education to assess its value relative to educational theory from a Christian perspective.

**Mason’s Religious Writings**

The contemporary audience confronts an additional limitation in their assessment of Mason’s religious views and spirituality. The production of Mason’s work is monumental. Behind the six volume series, which as mentioned before has been the primary source of encounter for contemporary Mason’s advocates, there lies the work of 50 years of school teaching, adult lecturing, book writing, teacher training and over 30 years of service as editor of thousands of pages in *the Parents’ Review* growing with the history of the P.N.E.U.

On the religious side, few people know that one of Mason’s highest life goals was to produce a poetry commentary to the Gospel story, which began to be published after she had also written a
manual for spiritual direction for young persons titled *Ourselves,*\(^{49}\) intended to be an essential element of the educational series; all these resulting from the practice of meditation.

Of the group of Mason enthusiasts today very few are aware of the importance Mason gave to the practice of meditation in her training school, and that she also wrote a verse by verse commentary to the first seven chapters of the Gospel according to St. John. This commentary is the most direct statement of Mason’s religious belief, and, as was mentioned before, is completely unknown to contemporary readers. Therefore, there is a substantial historical and religious background in which the *‘Home Education Series’* ought to be read which serves to ascertain Mason’s answers to the various religious questions and allows us to adjudicate her educational thought within the context of Christian educational theory with its strengths and limitations.

A growing awareness of such difficulties has led some to look beyond the republishing of the Six Volume Series to explore other publications and the history of the P.N.E.U., by researching the original *Parent’s Review.* This publication continued as the organ of the Parent’s Union until 1983. Also noted was the existence of a relatively late biography published in 1960, by Essex Cholmondeley, mentioned by Susan Schaeffer and others but at the time not easily available until it was republished in 2000.\(^{50}\) Through these means the

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\(^{50}\) Republished in 2000 by Child light, an editorial company related to Charlotte Mason
interested public has learned about the existence of a wealth of sources relating to Mason’s work, i.e. The Parents’ Review, The Six Volumes of poetry, ‘the Saviour of the World’51, among others, going well beyond the practical needs of a homeschooling parent. I will argue that this wealth of material was aimed at the development of a mature Protestant Evangelical Anglican philosophy of education.

These works have not been the object of extensive academic research in order to clarify Mason’s religious thought in relation to her educational reform and therefore exploring them in their historical context will be a primary goal of my work.

Today, there are groups interested in preserving Mason’s archives and promoting the study of Mason’s thought not only for the homeschool but for the subject of education in general including school education.52 Some have developed schools following Mason’s philosophy at an international level53 while others advocate the possible use of some of Mason’s ideas in the current system of public education. An annual conference called ‘Charlotte Mason Education Conference’54 was set in 2005 with the purpose of supporting the use of Mason’s educational methods by ‘teachers, administrators, home educators, and university communities throughout the world’, and ‘to

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bring together in community all the voices of those who currently use these methods in their own educational practice’.55

It becomes apparent that what begins as a simple question concerning Mason’s religious beliefs and how they relate to her method requires a careful reading of all this relevant material in context in order to provide a satisfactory answer. Mason’s educational work spans over 50 years of active teaching and writing upon explicitly religious themes from a well thought religious point of view. It is the aim of this thesis to clarify that point of view by tracing it back to its historical roots highlighting the inner tensions and paradoxical developments which lie hidden under the edifice of Mason’s monumental work.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have presented an account of the process by which Mason’s thought re-entered the scene of educational thought in relation to the Homeschool Movement in America. The creative appropriation of Mason’s insights has been an inspiring source of help for many homeschooling parents, and Masons’ attraction appears to continue to expand. But unfortunately in this process of re-appropriation a breach has been created by reading and interpreting Mason with an inadequate conception of the whole of her work and its original context. Contemporary readers of Mason suffer from lack of access to foundational sources which help to illuminate and

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understand the meaning and purpose of Mason’s philosophy as it
developed over time. I have presented some reasons for these
misconceptions signalling the need for a more thorough assessment of
the religious foundations of Mason’s educational thought viewed in its
historical context to provide the contemporary audience a more
complete framework in which to assess her meaning and importance
in the history of Christian educational thought.

In the next chapter we will begin this exploration of the religious
foundations of Mason’s thought beginning with the early influences in
the first half of her life culminating with her first set of lectures to
ladies in *Home Education* published in 1886.
Chapter II: Religious Ideas and Influences in the Early Stages of Charlotte Mason’s Educational Work.

My dear, my life does not matter, I have no desire that it should ever be written. It is the work that matters and, I say it with all reverence, it will some day (not in my lifetime) be seen to be one of the greatest things that has happened in the world.56

Charlotte M. Mason

In this chapter I will begin an exploration of the first half of Mason’s life (1842-1886) collecting insights to help us understand the background of Mason’s religious profile. There is not much material covering the early years of Mason’s life and little information concerning her religious formation. Therefore, I will give particular attention to three new samples of unpublished material reflecting the religious life of Mason during these years of ‘preparation’, showing the romantic element combined with evangelical and Anglican features of Mason’s early spiritual life. Then I will call attention to the work of Dr. William B. Carpenter, as the most important influence lying at the foundation of Mason’s educational thought. Carpenter provided Mason with all the key categories she needed for the articulation of her ‘educational gospel’ except for its religious point of view. Mason followed and appropriated Carpenter’s physiological work very closely while supplying an evangelical point of view, broad enough to receive the new insights from science but not so much as to transgress the

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boundaries of orthodox belief within the Anglican Church. Mason integrated Carpenter’s physiological insights into the creation of her first set of lectures to ladies on ‘Home Education’ in the winter of 1885, where she presents, to an audience of Anglican Church ladies, her first and important contribution to the history of Christian education by providing instructions for mothers on how to convey a Gospel centred spiritual education for their young children and daughters at home.

**Mason’s Early Life**

The period involving the early stages of Charlotte Mason’s educational work is relatively long and the available sources covering it are very limited. The official account of Mason’s life was originally compiled by her personal secretary Elsie Kitching and finally printed in 1960 as *The Story of Charlotte Mason* by Essex Cholmondeley. The whole ‘preparation’ period covering from Mason’s birth in 1842 to 1879 is given in the first 13 pages of the biography. The scant information provided there raises more questions than answers. In her 1984 Master Thesis Margaret Coombs was the first to call attention upon the limitations of the biography and offered some suggestive biographical revisions but without providing sufficient grounds to validate them. Jack Beckman in his 2005 dissertation offered a

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58 Coombs, “Some Obstacles to the Establishment of a Universal Method of Education for Parenthood by the P.N.E.U."
59 Beckman also draws attention upon some limitations of Coomb’s work, which include inaccurate representations, unverifiable sources and arguments from silence.
much more thorough account of this period presenting the most complete examination of the available evidence up to date, highlighting at the beginning of chapter four the air of secrecy which survived Mason respecting the details of her personal life.  

There are few primary sources providing details concerning Charlotte Mason’s early life. Elsie Kitching, Mason’s personal secretary since 1893, indicates that Mason did not keep letters or dairies and had little interest in making public the details of her life. This accounts for the scant amount of biographical information in existence today, especially corresponding to the first forty four years of Mason’s life leading to the publication of her first educational work in 1886. The few personal surviving manuscripts corresponding to this early period of her life contain a few religious poems, some notes on studies and notes from walks. Some of these materials eventually reached publication as Mason used them in producing later articles and books.

Although few and devoid of biographical details these early materials reveal limited features of Mason’s early spiritual life. Mason began her teaching career at an early age. Her first appointment which she started before receiving her certification as licensed teacher was in 1861 at the Davison School for Girls in Worthing (1861-1873). From the beginning Mason held the conviction that her work was a

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60 ‘One didn’t ask too many questions about Miss Mason’s background; it had an air of mystery to it. We wondered what this great lady might have hidden in her reticence.’ Doreen Russo, interviewed by J. Beckman. Beckman, “Lessons to Learn” 97.


divine calling for her life. A study of the history of this school by Valerie Hetzel contains a helpful presentation of Mason’s work as teacher and headmistress of the infant school during this early stage.

According to Hetzel:

Religious Education was very important to her. She felt it must form the basis of all other education. Her own beliefs were very profound. Many of her surviving letters refer to God and to her conviction that she was called to do ‘this work’. In fact, shortly after the opening of the Worthing School she had been thinking of leaving to start a similar one in Bradford with a friend. However, she felt that God wanted her to continue her work in Worthing.63

According to Kitching, Mason was writing devotional poems with religious themes as early as 1865.64 She points, for example, to The World to Come,65 which presents reflections about the meaning of life and death in light of the hope of eternal life, showing that at the age of 23 Mason already had a strong Christian faith:

Death opes not heaven’s gate; for long ago,
Soon as the King Shone in upon the soul
Did heaven begin
A blessed state, a lifting up for ever;66

The poem reflects the spiritual conviction of faith which already prevailed during Mason’s early twenties and appears to have remained constant as a primary note for the rest of her life. Some of the poems, appearing throughout the six volume poetry work The Saviour of the World,67 were written early in her life, showing that her poetical work

64 Elsie Kitching “The Beginning of Things,” in In Memoriam, 121.
65 Charlotte M. Mason, “The World to Come” in The Saviour of The World 2 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd., 1908), 73. This poem was also used at the beginning of In Memoriam.
incorporates the fruit of prayer and meditation of her whole life. 68 These early poems were intercalated thematically as meditations under the title ‘The Disciple’ along the rest of the later poems which paraphrase and comment the life of Christ.

After working as a primary school teacher for twelve years in the Davidson School, Worthing, in Sussex Charlotte Mason worked from 1873 to 1877 69 as ‘lecturer on Education and Teacher of Human Physiology’ 70 at Bishop Otter College, Chichester, a recently established women college for training teachers in Elementary Schools re-opened in 1873 after closing in 1866 as a men’s college. 71 While working at Chichester, Mason used her spare time in the summer to travel around the countryside taking notes which she later used to produce her first book,  The Forty Shires, (1880) by which she began to gain some recognition as a writer and public figure. 72

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68 Cholmondeley, The Story of Charlotte Mason. 179.
70 F. C. Williams, “Some Reminiscences,” in In Memoriam, 57. McGregor points out that the records of Bishop Otter College simply refer to Mason’s appointment as ‘Senior Governess’ (McGregor, Bishop Otter College..., 97). He also points out that there is no record of Charlotte Mason being appointed Vice-principal of the School as Cholmondeley and Kitching claimed (Cholmondeley, The Story of Charlotte Mason. p. 12). It should be noted that some students while Mason worked at Bishop Otter College, like F.C. Williams and Frances Epps, became deeply involved with Mason’s educational movement for many years after, and added their personal witness to the limitations of the record books of the College. More relevant to our study than the actual titles given is the testimony of how these students perceived Charlotte Mason’s work there: “Under dear Miss Mason’s teaching, my views of life changed; I saw that teaching might be a noble profession instead of a mere trade, and I too longed to put her theories into practice. I am sure that many old ‘Otters’ would gladly testify to the help and enlightenment they received from Miss Mason’s lectures on Education. I remember she told us that the true teacher must be prepared to lay down her life for her pupils.” F.C. Williams, in In Memoriam, 57-58.
72 Charlotte M. Mason, The Forty Shires. Their History, Scenery, Arts and Legends (London:
The reopening of the College responded to the provision for the establishment of elementary schools of the 1870 Education Act. The project of reopening the college was first suggested to the Bishop as an effort to ‘christianise the country’ by means of training the daughters of clergymen to become teachers with the conviction that ‘whoever trains the teachers governs the education of the country!’\textsuperscript{73} With such goals in mind Mason was recruited by Miss Trevor, the first principal of the new college as Senior Governess during the first months of its reopening. It is important to observe this underlying connection between education and religion as a means to further the influence of Christianity over the country, as it corresponds to the general tenor of Mason’s approach to her educational endeavours as a means to revitalize the influence of Christianity in England from within the institutions of the established Church of England.

\textbf{A Visit to Scotland}

Among the unpublished material I found some notes, not referenced in Mason’s biography, which reveal interesting details concerning Mason’s religious life and influences during this period. One of the few dated references of this period is found on a pocket notebook containing Mason’s hand-written notes taken during a

\textsuperscript{73} Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth in private correspondence to Miss Louisa Hubbard in 1871 suggests to her in such terms the possibility of reopening the college. Miss Hubbard made a campaign for establishing middle class women, especially daughters of clergy men, as teachers in government schools. G.P McGregor notes that “It seems beyond a doubt, therefore, that it was Kay-Shuttleworth who first suggested the project to the Bishop and to Miss Hubbard.” McGregor, \textit{Bishop Otter College}, 89.
Church service at Saint George’s Free Church in Edinburgh dated July 15, 1875 under the care of the distinguished Presbyterian minister Rev. Alexander Whyte, D.D.\textsuperscript{74}

In these notes she recorded the details of the service. She notes the hymns, prayers, Scripture readings, the main ideas of the sermon and the details of a baptismal ceremony held at the end, including details of the mode of baptism and the exhortation until the closing hymn. The Rev. Alexander Whyte, D.D. at this time held the reputation of being one of ‘the most searching and powerful preachers of personal morality in the Church to which he belonged.’\textsuperscript{75} His biographer refers to the early years of Whyte’s ministry in Saint George’s as a time of ‘Revival and Religious Education 1874-1878\textsuperscript{76}’

His preaching followed the lines of the puritan Calvinistic tradition aiming primarily at the instruction and conviction of conscience. According to his biographer, early in his preaching career Whyte had combined revivalist experience and evangelistic fervour with an unusually strict Calvinism. He had no apparent difficulty advocating evangelical and Calvinistic elements in his theology, although his emphasis dwelt on those elements of doctrine which have primary bearing on life and conduct:

\begin{quote}
He had less to say about Election than about the inability of the human will to raise and redeem itself, and the need for, and sufficiency of, the divine work of grace in the heart of man. . . . these early writings . . . are modern in the dismissal of mere
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{74} Charlotte Mason, handwritten notes of a Sermon, 15 July 1875, in a notebook, Box CM1, The Charlotte Mason Archive, the Armitt Library and Museum, Ambleside.

\textsuperscript{75} George Freeland Barbour, \textit{The Life of Alexander Whyte} (New York: George H. Doran company, 1924), 249.

\textsuperscript{76} Barbour, \textit{The Life of Alexander Whyte D.D.}, 162.
speculation, and the endeavour to bring all things to the test of experience.\textsuperscript{77}

His emphasis on practical piety and purity of heart are evidenced in Mason’s notes of the service and sermon in that occasion. Every text and hymn, as recorded by Mason, touches some aspect of the human heart. The sermon was preached expounding the text of Proverbs 4:23 ‘Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.’ It was Whyte’s contention in his exposition that the ‘Bible deals more with the heart of man than with any other subject.’ Mason notes three points in the Sermon. First, that the heart is a ‘polluted source from which flow all polluted waters,’ second, that ‘In order to keep, a man must know’ and the third point dwells on the need for diligence ending with the following application,

Young men, with noble ingenuous impulses take this to yourselves- ask yourselves who is he that most feels his own helplessness, most depends in Christ help, is it not he who through the week has with much diligence kept his heart?

This simple record by Mason’s hand when she was 33 years of age may be taken as representative of many other sermons which Mason must have heard regularly during her younger years. At any rate, the value of chastity and the general care for the purity of the heart remained primary emphasis on Mason’s moral and religious teaching throughout her life. Mason also exhibits a similar emphasis on the practical aspects of theology while avoiding as much as possible the controversial and speculative ones. The second point of the sermon is of particular interest as it coincides with one of Mason’s

\textsuperscript{77} Barbour, \textit{The Life of Alexander Whyte}, 119.
educational principles; that moral conduct requires a well instructed conscience. Mason agreed with Whyte's contention that 'life is a science to be studied experimentally with the data a man finds in his own heart.' As mentioned before, Mason wrote two books, compiled into one volume in 1904, for young people dealing solely with self-knowledge and direction concerning the ruling of the heart and the instruction of conscience.

They also agreed in the notion that the broad knowledge of life which moral conduct requires should be attained from an early age through the wide reading of the best in literature, especially in light of the spiritual challenges of their time. As a student in the 1860’s Whyte had written in a letter to a friend,

I know diligent and far-on students, but they are nothing else. I know good young men, but there heads are light. Their goodness has too narrow a basis for our age and the state of our intellectual life. A few of us have originated a prayer-meeting in the Greek classroom on Friday and Tuesday evenings, when we enter into devotions mutually. We, I at least, have much need of such. Oh that I could meet a young man or woman of deep spiritual life and broad intellectual culture! My heart and head ache for want of living sympathy and intercourse.78

This combination of ‘Deep spiritual life and broad intellectual culture’ characterizes Mason’s own evangelical faith. We will see that Mason avoided the narrower extremes that may be associated with late-Victorian evangelicalism. Both Mason and Whyte shared and promoted the love of the ‘best books’ through their work, and believed that broadness of culture was a necessary feature for a vibrant faith in the midst of the struggles against faith common at the time. They

78 Barbour, The Life of Alexander Whyte, 63-64.
considered ‘good’ literature as an indispensable resource for the spiritual life. They both differed from a narrower evangelical perspective which tended to hold suspect that kind of literary interest as worldly or indifferent to the well being of the soul.

Whyte was known as a ‘young man’s preacher’ who while remaining faithful to the evangelical point of view, ‘showed at the same time an ethical directness and an absorbing love of good literature which were not universal in the evangelical school — or perhaps in any other religious school.’ Among Whyte’s favourite religious works were John Henry Newman’s *Selected Sermons* and his *University Sermons*. It is worth noting that Newman’s sermons, also advocated the ideal of the value of a liberal education for the formation of Christian character in the enlargement of the mind. Whyte became a fervent admirer of the late Cardinal Newman whom he described as ‘the finest of the wheat’ and even paid him a visit in 1876.

It is possible that this fundamental affinity of scope, even in the midst of significant theological differences, was an attracting force between them who were separated in diverse branches of the Christian Church. His respect for Newman and the emphasis in spirituality and literature remained a distinctive feature in Whyte’s ministry. Whyte also used to lead a Sunday Evening service for young people in which he discussed works of literature like the work of

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Jacob Boheme and Dante’s Divine Comedy. The biography mentions Whyte visiting the House of Education during the 1895, and lecturing on Sunday evening about the Divine Comedy, which may have been influential in the process of setting as a basic part of the discipline of the House of Education the weekly Sunday meditations, which became such an essential part of Mason’s work as we will see.

**John Keble’s Christian Year**

Another record of this same period in Mason’s life is found on a notebook detailing walks exploring the countryside of England. In the notes relating her Walks through Hampshire we learn of her visit to Hursley, the village in which the Rev. John Keble, the writer of The Christian Year, worked as a vicar. Although these notes are not dated, her biographer dates her exploration of Hampshire around the year 1874. In her notes Mason presents a careful description of the road to Hursley, where upon arrival she stops ‘to chat with the mistress of the first cottage in the village’ a ‘pleasant mannered intelligent woman.’ The woman had been brought up under the ministerial care of Mr. and Mrs. Keble and related her memories to Mason producing a portrait of the couple that Mason described as ‘the beautiful old pair—curiously alike in sweetness purity and holiness of expression.’ Mason records the commending words of the woman concerning the personal interest they took in their pastoral care, and the profound influence of

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82 Mason, “Walks II, Hampshire” manuscript notes, Box CM1, The Charlotte Mason Archive.
their teaching and life example upon the lives of the people in the village.

Next in her notes Mason records a ‘seemly and sacred’ service of prayer at Hursley’s Church in the summer morning light of May. Which she describes as having:

doors open to let in the sweet pure air - [...] [...] soft harmonious light - all the windows some 20 in number - [...] glass. Shedding a soft [...] varied light in the worshippers. More pleasantly lyrical of the softened highness of the Christian Year - for May represents the proceeds of the Christian Year.84

The notes reflect the purpose of her visit and its deep impression upon her. Mason had a profound appreciation for the ministerial and poetical work of Keble. Her visit to Hursley can be regarded almost as a pilgrimage to explore Keble’s influence upon the parish and the atmosphere which provided the spiritual setting for the writer of the Christian Year. She visits the church and describes in detail many of the windows. Keble had made provision for the embellishment of this rural parish recognizing the importance of these aesthetic elements as teaching and inspirational aids to worship, an idea that recurs in Mason who later commends it in relation to the value of the liturgical services of the Anglican Church in the spiritual life of children.85

After a detailed description of the scenes represented in each window, identifying the characters and the writings, she continues with her visit to the graveyard, and the surroundings of the vicarage and its garden. From the graveyard she records Mr. and Mrs. Keble’s

84 Mason, “Walks II, Hampshire” manuscript notes, Box CM1, The Charlotte Mason Archive.
85 See for example Charlotte Mason, School Education, 179.
respective epitaphs, noting the proximity of the time of their deaths and describing their respective tombs. The notes particularly highlight her respect and appreciation for Charlotte, Keble's wife. Upon visiting the graveyard she notes that:

> the first interest of the pilgrim is the two tombs resting close side by side almost under the shadow of the pair of yews which flank the little gate opening in the rectory. There they rest waiting for the resurrection the devoted husband and wife, she as great as he here - and as great too, in the memory of the villagers... Here rests in Peace The body of Charlotte wife of John Keble who departed this life May 11, Anno Domini 1866.

The notes on the occasion of this visit reveal a sense of cherished reverence and appreciation not only for Keble but also for his wife’s memory. Mason’s discreet recognition of the importance of the role of women is another characteristic of her life work. She continues with a romantic description of the house and garden of the Vicar’s house, describing it as ‘a most sweet place for these sweet pilgrims to walk hand in hand to the end.’ and comments, ‘How that dear lover of nature would rejoice in such a sweet summer noon as this whereon I write.’ She describes the beauty of the surrounding nature scenery and comments ‘how he gave meaning to them all.’ This is a reference to the impression of Keble’s poetry upon Charlotte Mason’s appreciation of nature as an aid to spiritual reflection. These ideals are also reflected in her later choice to locate her residence and training college in the Lake district and the relevance she gave to the value of religious poetry in her method.

These notes reveal the high esteem Mason professed for Keble’s work in *The Christian Year* and her appreciation of its importance in
recognizing the contemplation of the works of nature as an aid to worship by means of poetical expression. In a brief reference to Hursley, writing about Hampshire in *The Forty Shires* she notes,

... we come to Hursley, whose pretty church and vicarage are dear to many who care about the best things. For this is the church and the home of the good Dr. Keble, who wrote ‘Sun of my soul,’ and a beautiful hymn for every Sunday in the year, all of which are to be read in the *Christian Year*.86

She visited the church, the graveyard and garden meditating in the poetic inspiration that Keble was able to derive in the midst of this setting with a romantic and nostalgic appreciation for its beauty and spiritual sensibility. Keble’s religious poetry seems to have served as a model an inspiration for her own. We will see how Mason later tried to achieve with her own poetry, on the life of Christ, a similar goal to that of Keble in *The Christian Year*. They both produced poetry not for its own sake and beauty but as an expression of worship and an aid to meditation, as a means for assisting the spiritual life by promoting the ‘standard of feeling’87 present in the formularies of the liturgical worship of the Church of England and the Prayer Book. According to Mason, Keble had given meaning to the works and beauty of nature by pressing them to the assistance of devotion in his meditative poetic commentary to the collects and lessons of the liturgical year, Mason learned from him to do the same and employed the same principles in her poetic commentary on the life of Christ.

87 John Keble, *The Christian Year*, iii-iv. A copy of *The Christian Year*, is one of the remaining books owned by Charlotte Mason and dates from her birthday on January 1, 1878.
This deep appreciation for the work of Keble is important, not only because it shows his poetical and devotional influence upon her, but also because it reveals Mason’s intimate affinity with the liturgical features of the Prayer Book worship and spirituality of the Church of England, which were constant underlying features of the life of her training college in Ambleside. Mason had affinity with the form of worship and piety represented by this important figure of the ‘Oxford Movement’ who remained faithful to the Church of England after significant figures in that movement converted to the Roman Catholic Church. This movement was an influential, and controversial, force of renewal in the life of the English Church during the earlier part of the nineteenth century by claiming the legitimacy of the more catholic elements of churchmanship within the Church of England. By the 1870’s, the Oxford Movement was not in the centre of attention or controversy as it had been until the conversion of Cardinal Newman to the Roman Catholic Church. But it had made a definite impact in opening a door for embracing ‘higher’ expressions of worship, which in people like Keble were combined with a strong adherence to the Anglican Church teachings and personal devout piety. These features are foundational in Mason’s own life, who may be described as a middle of the road Anglican churchwoman.

Mason, while always remaining a faithful member to the established Church, was careful to avoid open identification with any religious party, aiming to make her educational method and philosophy as inclusive as possible, appealing to the greatest number
of people in the nation. Notwithstanding, this pilgrimage evidences her sympathy with the spiritual ideals embodied in the poetical work of John Keble as reflecting the best of the spirituality and worship within the Anglican tradition.

**My Lady’s Hand**

This early ‘catholic’ sympathy appears to find further confirmation in another of Mason’s unpublished poems corresponding to a time presumably earlier than the two previous references.\(^{88}\) The poem is entitled ‘My Lady’s Hand.’ The poem is a song of praise inspired in the contemplation of the hand of someone Mason calls 'My Lady'. In this poem, instead of choosing to praise the Lady’s ‘eye lids on your rising’ the hand is praised in its beauty, labour and for the soothing power of its touch. It is noted that such power would be considered psychical by learned men, but even they all pay her due worship at ‘another shrine’. She concludes the poem with a loyal spiritual kiss of worship to her Lady’s hand.

A direct interpretation of the religious imagery of the poem makes plausible its interpretation as a piece of devotional poetry inspired by the contemplation of a pictorial representation of the Virgin Mary. Since there is no mention of motherhood in the poem and the names of ‘Mary’ or ‘virgin’ are not present the allusion may not be entirely conclusive. Another plausible interpretation could be as a
poem in honour of Queen Victoria, for whom Mason always expressed the greatest admiration, alluding to the alleged healing power of the Royal Touch.

It should be noted that Mason used various art reproductions of the Madonna and child in her poetry volumes and always went out of her way to emphasize the role of women in the Gospels. Every reference to Mary in her poetry work is always respectful, praiseworthy and deeply inspirational. Although Mason never made these points central matters of contention it is clear from her writing that Mason believed in the Virgin Birth and the perpetual virginity of Mary.89 Taking all these elements into account it would seem that this early poem could be a piece of devotion reflecting piety inspired by the contemplation of the Virgin Mary.90 Either one of these interpretations is possible.

These three unpublished manuscript records are a small sample of Mason’s spirituality during the first half of her life. But since there is so little else information, it is worth to highlight them, as clear indicators of Mason’s early religious inclinations and their intimate relation to her understanding of life and work. They exhibit various definite traits which not only show Mason’s devotional bent but also expose some of the adjacent religious elements which were to remain constantly at work in the background throughout her later life. They

89 See her commentary to John 7:3. "Scale How Meditations," The Parents’ Review 20, no. 4 (April 1909): 305. Mason explains the reference to Jesus brothers as ‘variously surmised to be His cousins the sons of the Virgin’s sister, or the children of Joseph by a former marriage.’ Note also the various allusions to the virgin in the first poetry book “The Holy infancy” in The Saviour of The World 1.

90 Mason, Note Book, Box CM1, The Charlotte Mason Archive.
also evidence the wide range of sources from which Mason was willing to partake and derive inspiration.

In the Next Section we will discuss the most important source from which Mason first obtained the clue to develop her educational method.

**Dr. Carpenter ‘Of Mind and Will in Nature’**

a work of Dr. Carpenter’s was perhaps the first which gave me the clue I was in search of.\(^9^1\)

After her resignation of the post at the Bishop Otter College, Mason was able to publish a series of geography books, which gained for her the reputation of a good writer of children’s books. In December 1885, while living in Bradford, she offered to present a series of ‘lectures for ladies on Home Education’ to support a building project for St. Mark’s Church, Manningham.\(^9^2\) The lectures were printed as a book in 1886.\(^9^3\) It is claimed that *Home Education* ‘contained in essence all the thought which Charlotte developed in her future writings.’\(^9^4\) In her lectures, Mason makes reference to a series of contemporary psychologists, which she found best represented in the work of Dr. William B. Carpenter (1813-1885). In the preface to the third edition of *Home Education* (1898), she clearly declares that the

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\(^{91}\) Mason, *Home Education*, 111.

\(^{92}\) Cholmondeley, *The Story of Charlotte Mason*, 15. There is an errata at the bottom of the same page in which the Church is called St. Mary’s. It is as a typographical error in the book not present in its original typescript (see, Cholmondeley, “The Story of Charlotte Mason, typescript and MSS” Box CM17, The Charlotte Mason Archive.

\(^{93}\) Mason, *Home Education*, 1886.

\(^{94}\) Cholmondeley, *The Story of Charlotte Mason*, 16.
original intention of her lectures was to ‘popularise and amplify the valuable educational hints contained in some two or three chapters of Dr. Carpenter’s work. Unfortunately this clear statement of purpose was removed from the Book when it was integrated to the ‘Home Education Series’ in 1904. By 1885 Mason had become convinced that Carpenter had uncovered physiological facts and principles which placed education at a whole new level. These principles concerning the operation of the mind and the will could potentially revolutionise the future of education. Mason enthusiastically devoted herself to appropriate and propagate Carpenter’s basic insights among Christian teachers and mothers. Twenty years later, as *Home Education*, became the first volume of her *Home Education Series*, the original enthusiasm is toned down but Mason still recognizes, in the preface, her ‘indebtedness to Dr. Carpenter’s *Mental Physiology* for valuable teaching on the subject of habits contained in some two or three chapters of that work.’

Dr. Carpenter is one of the outstanding figures in the history of British psychology. The Dictionary of National Biography, refers to him as ‘one of the last examples of an almost universal naturalist.’ whose ‘views on the relation of Mind and Brain were acute and in advance of his time.’ It also indicates that

He was an active member of the Unitarian Church at Hampstead, at which he played the organ and conducted the psalmody for some years. He regarded miracles not as violations of natural order, but as manifestations of a higher order. His acceptance of Darwin’s views of evolution was somewhat limited

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and reserved. He believed that natural selection leaves untouched the evidence of design in creation. He was well versed in literature and philosophy, and this no doubt influenced his scientific writing, which was always lucid and often highly ratiocinative.\(^97\)

Carpenter’s work, although primarily a scientific treatise, was not devoid of religious contentions. He explicitly acknowledges this in the concluding chapter of the treatise, ‘Of Mind and Will in Nature’. The chapter is devoted to advance his own attempt towards reconciliation between Science and Religion building on the basic ideas propounded in his treaty. He thought that an appropriate scientific understanding of the relation of the mind to the body could provide a solid base for mutual understanding between the theologian and the scientist. A press notice to the first edition (1874) draws attention to its last chapter, and recommends the volume to educators.

Lastly, in a concluding chapter of eloquence and dignity worthy of its subject, Dr. Carpenter grapples boldly with the attitude of Science towards Religion, and with the doubts and difficulties of those who are unable to reconcile a reign of law with a personal government of the universe. In this chapter, as well as in some others, he will probably fail to satisfy the holders of extreme views on either side, but he has done much to reconcile aspects of truth which cannot be in real opposition to each other. We can only prefix to our citation of its concluding paragraph the expression of a hope that this volume may not only be read, but studied, and that it may be studied with especial care by all who are responsible for the education of the young. — The Times.\(^98\)

The notice encourages educators to profit from the careful study of Carpenter’s ideas as they perceived its potential application to the

art of teaching. As lecturer in physiology while training primary school teachers at Bishop Otter College (1874-78), it is probable that Mason became familiar with contemporary discussions on the role of mind and the will. She saw in Carpenter’s work a clear expression of the kind of principles that parents and teachers could profit from understanding and applying to their task of child rearing.

Supplementing these ideas with her own observations, teaching experience and religious devotion, she worked to interpret and propagate her practical application of Carpenter’s principles. The growing interest and response to her presentation shows that Mason was answering a felt need among many parents.

Underlying Dr. Carpenter’s treatise there was a distinctive religious aim. In the preface to the fourth edition (1876) he strongly argues against T. H. Huxley and John S. Mill, in their contention that material causation is the only legitimate agency in the scientific understanding of the operation of the human person. For Carpenter such pretension ran counter intuitive to the general experience of humanity and would imply that the human will as a self-determining agent, and the concept of moral responsibility relative to it, would be necessarily grounded upon an illusion. Man would be an ‘automaton’ and the amoral implications of such a view could not be avoided. His exploration of the relationship between mind and body goes at length to demonstrate why from a physiological point of view the admission of mind and its executive power ‘will’ as efficient causes of movement in the material world is as necessary as the recognition of material
causes of certain changes in mental processes. The relation of cause and effect ran both ways, with mind, if duly exercised and within certain limits, having the final control over matter.

Although it was not possible to fully understand how it happened, there was no doubt that the will power of the mind was exercised in ordinary experience. Therefore, the human immediate conception of its ability to control the movement of body and, through it, the purposeful organisation of the world according to its will as a moral responsible free agent was physiologically justified and provided the psychologist the liberty to,

fearlessly throw himself into the deepest waters of speculative inquiry in regard to the relation between his Mind and its Bodily instrument, provided that he trusts to the inherent buoyancy of that great fact of Consciousness, that we have within us a self-determining Power which we call Will. And he may even find in the evidence of the intimate relation between Mental activity and Physical changes in the Brain, the most satisfactory grounds which Science can afford, for his belief that the phenomena of the Material Universe are the expressions of an Infinite Mind and Will, of which Man’s is the finite representative. (see Chap. XX)99

The analogy between man as a finite mind and will, partially controlling aspects of the material world, and God as an infinite mind and will, controlling the whole of nature according to his laws, was Carpenter’s essential argument concerning the possibility of reconciliation between Science and Religion. The concluding chapter develops his attempt towards a solution of that debate using as a middle term the concept of mental force. He argued that such a conception of power was the point of encounter between the physical

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99 Carpenter, Principles of Mental Physiology, 28.
and the psychical universe which neither camp could deny to the other. That is, mind and matter are so intrinsically related to each other that none of them may be legitimately accounted for if the effective agency of one upon the other is denied.

Moreover, unbiased scientific investigation leads to the conclusion that ultimately the source of all power is mind. As the analogy suggest the relationship between the material universe and the human body would imply that the mind of God is manifest in his works as the mind of men in theirs, therefore the scientific study of nature should be recognized by the theologian as a revelation of God’s thoughts and action, since God is not outside the physical universe but ‘embodied in it.’

Although Charlotte Mason did not follow Carpenter’s argument all the way to his hylozoistic conclusion, his understanding of the relationship between mind and will in the formation of a person’s character provided her with essential insights into the ‘physiology of mind,’ upon which she developed her whole educational method. It also gave her a reputable scientific position answering the materialistic interpretation of nature asserting the primacy of mind over matter. Mason’s appropriation of Carpenter was modulated by her own religious convictions and her intention to communicate his basic principles in a form that would be useful to Christian mothers.

For example, in her lectures Mason makes no reference to Carpenter’s last chapter, where he rejects basic notions of orthodox theology presenting them as one of the sources for the antagonism
between science and religion. He presents the orthodox teaching of eternal damnation of those who reject a piece of ‘unintelligible Dogma’, a reference to the doctrine of the Trinity, as incongruent with the scientific understanding of God as a Righteous Creator or as a Loving Father. Another example is the doctrine of the atonement as a necessary condition for the salvation of a child.\textsuperscript{100} Also, Carpenter’s respectful references to Christ are always in reference to the excellence of his moral precepts but never in relation to the supernatural claims of the Christian revelation.

In contrast Mason, as will be showed, had no trouble to refer this sort of difficulties to the category of mystery and stressed a Christ-centred apologetic and discipleship which overrides the need for that intellectual consistency which in Carpenter figures as the overruling principle. Although, he recognized limitations in knowledge, these were scientific limitations that in principle could be resolved upon the acquisition of better data. Mason on the other hand, is content to avoid theological speculation and recognized mystery as a necessary constituent of the Christian experience in this world. In spite of such important differences, there are many points of contact between them. The primacy of mind over matter, the ultimate harmony between science and religion, the idea that science is a new revelation from God and that scientific enquiry in its search for truth should not be hindered by theological presuppositions are ideas that

\textsuperscript{100} Carpenter, \textit{Principles of Mental Physiology}, 699.
Charlotte Mason cautiously upheld, without rejecting the dogmatic teaching of the Anglican Church.

Regardless of its religious orientation, Mason enthusiastically embraced the scientific work of Carpenter and draw particular attention to its revolutionary educational applications. She thought that he had uncovered the physiological processes which, if rightly understood, could finally provide education with definite means towards its goal. Throughout his work Carpenter had presented a number of educational applications. For example in commenting on the Moral and the Material agencies operative in our mental constitution he observes:

This combination of two distinct agencies in the Mental constitution of each individual, is recognized in the whole theory and practice of Education. . . . every one who really understands his profession will make it his special object to foster the development, and to promote the right exercise, of that internal power, by the exertion of which each Individual becomes the director of his own conduct, and so far the arbiter of his own destinies.\textsuperscript{101}

Carpenter posed the ability of the will to direct attention as the key of its power to exercise self-control over human conduct. The complex input of natural appetites and desires as motivating factors on conduct, like the multiple input of sensory experiences on the mind, were in principle under the control of the will by its ability to direct attention upon them. Attention, by being fixed or not, upon any given desire or thought has the ability to strengthen the relative force of a given sensation or motive diminishing the attractive power of the

\textsuperscript{101} Carpenter, \textit{Principles of Mental Physiology}, 9.
others before the mind. Therefore, by diverting attention to ‘better’ things the comparative force of a desire could be maintained within the threshold in such a way that it would not override the ruling conscience in favour of a ‘better’ impulse. The power to gain such control over the desires, appetites and thoughts could in principle, if regularly applied, result in healthful habits which would make for the production of an accomplished character.

Attention is in principle under the control of the will. It can be trained to respond to its directing power instead of the attractiveness of the desires. In the initial stages of human development attention works in the same way as in animals, entirely under the power of the immediate forces of their natural impulses and desires. For this reason the training of the will should become the primary object of education.

Those ‘strong-minded’ Teachers who object to these modes of ‘making things pleasant,’ as an unworthy and undesirable ‘weakness,’ are ignorant that in this state of the child-mind, the Will — that is, the power of self-control — is weak; and that the primary object of Education is to encourage and strengthen, not to repress, that power. Great mistakes are often made by Parents and Teachers, who, being ignorant of this fundamental fact of child-nature, treat as willfulness what is in reality just the contrary of Will-fullness; being the direct result of the want of Volitional control over the automatic activity of the Brain.¹⁰²

Humans have the ability to take control over attention and in this way are able to intentionally regulate their own conduct. The mind as the body will grow according to the way in which it is exercised. Therefore, there is in every person the potential to take

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¹⁰² Carpenter, Principles of Mental Physiology, 134-5.
charge of its natural development. Natural tendencies may be regulated. Hereditary conditions may be overcome. The will, by focusing attention in the careful regulation of habits of body and mind, could in principle modify a person’s own character.

In this view the training of the will becomes of primary importance in the education of a person, even more important than the education of the intellect. In this connection Mason quotes the work of another scientist akin with Carpenter’s school of thought, Dr. Morell in his *Introduction to Mental Philosophy* had said:

The education of the will is really of far greater importance, as shaping the destiny of the individual, than that of the intellect. . . Theory and doctrine, and inculcation of laws and propositions, will never of themselves lead to the uniform habit of right action. It is by doing, that we learn to do; by overcoming, that we learn to overcome; and every right act which we cause to spring out of pure principles, whether by authority, precept, or example, will have a greater weight in the formation of character than all the theory in the world.\(^{103}\)

A person’s destiny is then to a great extent in the hands of whoever begins its education. There is a physiological ground for habit. Therefore, our habits if well trained could make the work of the will easier or impossible, depending on whether we have been trained in good or bad habits. The effort of the will to accomplish an action diminishes as the action is consistently repeated until it becomes habitual. At that point the will has only to exercise a little effort to deal with it. Habit training was not a new concept, but the idea that the brain itself grows according to the uses it is first and most often put, was. The recognition that there are habits of mind as definite as

\(^{103}\) Mason, *Home Education*, 329, also quoted by Carpenter in his chapter “Of the Will”, *Principles of Mental Physiology*, 424.
habits of body, under the control of the will in principle opened new unexpected possibilities. It meant that hereditary factors, natural disposition and environmental factors were not necessarily final in the formation of a person’s character, but education was.

From the school of psychology that Carpenter represented Mason took the understanding of the mechanism of habit—mental and physical—, its conception of the agency of the will, its relation to attention and the use of distraction as a way to achieve moral control and the implications of the relevance of all of these to a person’s education. She viewed these as new revelations of science; an ‘educational gospel’ in the sense that it presented good news to parents and teacher who now could fulfil their God given responsibility with a definite understanding of what was at stake and what were the primary things to focus upon, in the education of a child and how it could be achieved.

‘I am, I can, I ought, I will,’

‘I am, I can, I ought, I will,’ are (as has been recently well said) the only firm foundation-stones on which we can base our attempt to climb into a higher sphere of existence.\(^{104}\)

Carpenter’s quotation of this statement is the most likely source of the motto which was later adopted by the P.N.E.U. schools following Mason’s method, and is today one of the most distinctive features of Mason’s philosophy. Carpenter does not quote its source with

\(^{104}\) Carpenter, *Principles of Mental Physiology*, 376.
anything more than ‘as has been recently well said’. I have not been able to locate any previous exact reference to the motto. It is possible that the progression of these concepts is derived from the contracted form of a quote attributed to Edward Everett Hale:

I am only one, but I am one. I can’t do everything, but I can do something. The something I ought to do, I can do. And by the grace of God, I will. —

Carpenter appears to follow the succession of these concepts from Hale, or from someone else who contracted them into a motto, and chose to place it for the opening of his important chapter ‘Of the Will’. In this key chapter he explains the will’s relation to ‘attention’. One of Carpenter’s primary objects in the chapter was to stress not only the self determining agency of the will through its ability to direct attention, but also the application of this principle as a necessary condition for the acquisition of knowledge and the development of character.

This understanding became an essential building block in Mason’s educational method. Mason, following closely Carpenter’s basic explanation, took these words, and conveyed them to parents for the education of their children. Attention, which has both voluntary and involuntary motions may be directed by the will to become fixed on the objects that the will and not the appetites or other motives

105 This quotation has been attributed to Edward Everett Hale (1822-1909) a distinguished American Unitarian clergyman and writer. The quote is associated with the motto of “Lend-a-Hand Clubs” one of the philanthropic societies inspired by Hale’s story “Ten Times One is Ten” 1870. See Edward Everett Hale, The Life and Letters of Edward Everett Hale 2, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1917) 171. As noted in chapter one, this progression is not a quotation from St. Augustine. A somewhat similar expression can be found on the poem ‘Agnosticism’: “I am, I can, I ought, I need;’ This consciousness of thine; May teach thee that our human life; Leans on a Life Divine,” William Bright, Iona and Other Verses (London: Rivingtons, Waterloo Place, 1886), 136.
desire. Of course the will could focus on evil things and that is why a well informed conscience is entirely necessary to instruct the will into the ways of right judgment. In proportion to a person’s ability to exercise this self-control in the lines of an instructed conscience she will grow into an accomplished character. From attention, through habit, to character, a definite sequence of a workable program had been laid out for conscientious parents to take advantage of.

**Divine Grace and The Will of the Child.**

*There must be a stretching forth of the withered arm before it receives strength.*

In her presentation of these ideas in the lectures of December 1885, Mason was compelled to clarify the relationship between them and the Christian teaching concerning the need of divine grace and the principal aim of education for the spiritual life. She did not interpret the possibility of the modification of character by the formation of habit as an educational way of salvation independent of the need for grace but as a new revelation of science which provided a further understanding of some of the means by which the grace of God is communicated to all his creatures. The advantage of this new understanding came in the way of opening the possibility for a preventive educational treatment for the evils of human nature, not as a negation of them or of the need for divine grace. This new approach

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opened the door for a preferable course of action to the alternative remedial ones. At a later time she would argue that education is not salvation. But that did not mean education is irrelevant to salvation. A Christian mother armed with the new understanding of how the mind, as well as the body, grows into the ways in which it is regularly used, could in principle guard the development of her children, who have natural tendencies both towards good and evil, by training them into habits of attention. Children could learn that the will is able to rule attention and that both may be strengthened by the exercise of good habits.

Mason explained that this new revelation of science was not a negation of grace but an expression of the way in which the grace of God was manifested in a ‘redeemed world’. Parents and teachers were responsible for using effectively the means provided by the grace of God. It was not wise to neglect these means in the hope that God’s grace would eventually step in to correct the harm caused by negligent parents. Divine intervention was always a possibility but the neglect of basic training would carry its consequences.

All this divine grace may accomplish in the weak unwilling souls, and then they will do what they can; but their power of service is limited by their past. Not so the child of the Christian mother, whose highest desire is to train him for the Christian life. When he wakes to the consciousness of whose he is and whom he serves, she would have him ready for that high service, with every faculty in training—a man of war from his youth; above all, with an effective will, to will and to do of His good pleasure.

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109 Mason, Home Education, 323.
With this quotation of Scripture\textsuperscript{110} Mason suggests the value of child training as a part of the economy of human responsibility in ‘working out their own salvation.’\textsuperscript{111} Mason’s emphasis on this theme of grace and the spiritual life of children in her presentation to mothers distinguishes her appropriation of Carpenter’s ideas, and evidences Mason’s willingness to take over ideas from unorthodox sources and adapt them for use by ordinary Christian mothers and teachers within the Anglican Church.

It is worth noting that even in the chapter concerning theology and science, Carpenter devotes no attention to the subject of Grace, sin or the personal relation of the believer with the Deity. In Carpenter’s discourse the discussion concerning the operations of the will tends to promote the basis of a system of self-improvement by which every individual may overcome the limitations of his nature without any reference or concern to relate this understanding with the concept of grace.\textsuperscript{112} Mason’s use of Carpenter’s ideas serves to illustrate the sort of appropriation which she effected over the thought of many others thinkers with whom she was also in partial agreement. This did not hinder her from enthusiastically using those aspects of their thought she considered true and useful while leaving aside

\textsuperscript{110} “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” Philippians 2:13.
\textsuperscript{111} “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Philippians 2:12.
\textsuperscript{112} See for example Carpenter’s application of his doctrine to the case of an habitual alcoholic, where he suggests it is appropriate to direct these words to him “you can conquer, if you will...” see “Preface to the Fourth Edition,” Mental Physiology, xlvii.
everything else. ¹¹³ In Mason, Carpenter’s ideas acquire a distinct new tone when the same scheme of self-management is referred to the workings of God’s grace in the context of the rearing of Christian children stressing parental responsibility.

I am pressing upon parents the duty of saving their children by the means put into their hands. . . . We live in a redeemed world, and infinite grace and help from above attend every rightly directed effort in the training of the children; but I do not see much ground for hoping that divine grace will step in as a substitute for any and every power we choose to leave unused or misdirected.¹¹⁴

‘we live in a redeemed world’ is an important expression of Mason’s fundamental presupposition concerning the implications of Christ’s incarnation and accomplished work of redemption, which points to the influence of the theology of Frederick Denison Maurice, whose theology laid great stress upon the implications of Christ’s incarnation. The conviction that God sent his Son to save the world, and that this had transforming spiritual implications for the whole life, surpassing human understanding, underlies all of Charlotte Mason’s work. It receives full expression in her poems on the life of Christ and is the background of all her educational endeavours.

Mason’s emphasis on character training by the cultivation of habits and the training of the will is an expression of her view of these as gifts of God’s grace that may be used in the nurturing of a Christian character, not a negation of His grace, but rather a recognition of the kind of provision and responsibility associated with

¹¹³ A similar approach also characterized Rev. Alexander Whyte according to his biographer. See Barbour, The Life of Alexander Whyte, 391.
¹¹⁴ Mason, Home Education, 330.
it, that God entrusts to parents. This presupposition is the basis of her exhortation, marking parental responsibility, for the use of means to secure ends, and serves to avoid misrepresenting her early emphatic stress on parental responsibility as a negation of the necessity of divine grace in some kind of scheme of salvation by education.¹¹⁵

The formation of character is then regarded as a primary concern of education. In order to effect this formation it has been already noted that an instructed conscience becomes of primary importance. It is conscience that counsels the will into the right judgment concerning action. Again the relation between human effort and Divine grace emerges when Mason explains how the conscience is made effective by wise discipline.

It is objected that we are making infallible, not the divinely implanted conscience, but that same conscience made effective by discipline. It is even so; in every department of life, physical or spiritual, human effort appears to be the condition of the Divine energising; there must be a stretching forth of the withered arm before it receives strength; and we have every reason to believe that the instructed conscience, being faithfully followed, is divinely illuminated.¹¹⁶

Here human effort is presented as a necessary but not a sufficient condition to guaranty spiritual results. There is no exclusion between an instructed conscience, faithfully followed and a divinely illuminated one. Human effort is the ‘condition of divine energising’ Therefore education can be a means for spiritual renewal by the grace

¹¹⁵ In the next chapter I will discuss a later expression of this basic idea presented by Mason in an editorial in The Parents’ Review 6, no. 1 (February 1895): 56-7.
¹¹⁶ Mason, Home Education, 341.
of God. All education is ultimately focused in what should be a higher end.

The conclusion of the lectures deals with that ultimate end which Mason describes as the ‘enthronement of the king’. But, before discussing the final end of education let us consider what Mason presents in her first lectures as the beginning of education.

**Christ’s Teaching: The Boundaries of Education**

Take heed that ye OFFEND not — DESPISE not — HINDER not — one of these little ones.\(^{117}\)

Mason begins her lectures expressing a high regard both for mothers and for children. She spoke to mothers with deference quoting the teaching of F. D Maurice, whom Mason regarded as a ‘writer who has searched into the deep things of God’\(^{118}\) and whose theology concerning the Church of England appears to have been deeply influential on Mason. Her biographer notes that during the 1860’s while visiting with a friend in London, she was impressed by Maurice preaching.\(^{119}\) Maurice is quoted by Mason in a few instances to stress particularly important theological principles. In her preface to *Home Education* Mason quotes him to establish one of her primary convictions about the unique role of woman in children’s education:

woman receives from the Spirit of God Himself the intuitions into the child’s character, the capacity of appreciating its strength and its weakness, the faculty of calling forth the one and sustaining the other, in which lies the mystery of education,

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\(^{117}\) Mason, *Home Education*, 12.

\(^{118}\) Mason, *Home Education*, 341.

apart from which all its rules and measures are utterly vain and ineffectual.¹²⁰

In the lecture from which this quote is selected, ‘Plan of a Female College for the Help of the Rich and the Poor’ Maurice argued in favour of the importance of the teaching profession for woman, while strongly defending the traditional roles for each gender as a way to bridge the gap between the classes, performed by women able to teach simply because they realize that ‘they are living in God’s kingdom upon earth, and are inheritors of His kingdom in Heaven’.¹²¹ Maurice stressed education as a spiritual affair, related to the ministry of the Holy Ghost. Mason appears to have embraced his views on these main subjects and refers to him in this context as a ‘wise teacher of men’.¹²² Following his teaching she acknowledges that woman receive from the Holy Spirit the necessary insight to accomplish the ‘mystery of education’.

In Mason’s lecture the child receives also a very high valuation as a being belonging to ‘a higher estate than ours.’ This valuation is first reinforced by quoting Wordsworth, but even more by quoting Jesus’ teaching concerning children in the Gospels. Mason saw in the words of Christ a reversal of the usual values that shape children’s education. Children were held in high regard by Jesus, a fact that grownups usually tend to ignore. She perceived in Jesus' teaching a stress on the sanctity of children’s personality, such that the primary

¹²² Mason, Home Education, 10.
duty of parents and teachers was established by him in the form of the demarcation of limits in what Mason called the ‘code of education’ in the Gospels.

It may surprise parents who have not given much attention to the subject to discover also a code of education in the Gospels, expressly laid down by Christ. It is summed up in three commandments, and all three have a negative character, as if the chief thing required of grown-up people is that they should do no sort of injury to the children: *Take heed that ye OFFEND not* — *DESPISE not* — *HINDER not* — *one of these little ones.*

After stating this code of education, Mason goes on to discuss usual ways in which education, with the best of intentions, may transgress those limits offending, despising and hindering children. Mason observes that children are born with an acute moral sense of right and wrong. An offence against the child is committed when their training is ruled by adult’s arbitrary dispositions instead of by definite moral principles ruling the conduct of all. The precept that ‘Children are persons’ implies that we need to relate to children in principle with the same understanding that we approach adults, the difference being one of degree in capacity but not one in kind, or else we will despise them. The difference between adults and children is not lack of personality but the lack of strength, knowledge and experience.

Another consequence of this high valuation is that children should receive from their earliest years an experience of the best in nature, poetry, literature, music, art and human relations. Because these are the things that enrich the life of a person and children are not different from adults in their ability to enjoy beauty, order and

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love. Also, for this reason children’s faults need to be taken seriously, on a practical level because it is easier to deal with a fault before it becomes a fixed habit than trying to remove it later. But the most fatal way of despising children is to disregard their natural relationship with God. Jesus had said ‘let them come to me,’ and Mason thought this implied a natural tendency of children to turn to God.

the thing they do when they are not hindered by their elders. And perhaps it is not too beautiful a thing to believe in this redeemed world, that, as the babe turns to his mother though he has no power to say her name, as the flowers turn to the sun, so the hearts of the children turn to their Saviour and God with unconscious delight and trust.¹²⁴

This natural tendency to move towards God, in the now redeemed world, is not only characteristic of children but it is also a characteristic of the human heart, as Saint Augustine had said ‘the soul of man is for God as God is for the soul’ but this natural tendency is only evident on what may be called a ‘living soul.’ There is also another side to the human heart which resists and naturally moves away from God. Children as persons also have in their innocence this contrary natural tendency against God. The same principles of conduct exist in the spiritual life of adults as on children. Therefore, children like the rest of humanity combine in their experience the paradox of beauty and horror, love and hate of that which is good characteristic of fallen human nature.

Innocent children are capable of grievous sin. Therefore, guidance is necessary for mothers to help them deal with the

occurrence of actual sin through the application of repentance and forgiveness in the life of their children. The conscience of a child may be afflicted with the conviction of sin. Rather than turning the face away from this reality in the life of children, parents should be able to guide their children, in the path of repentance and pardon. The thought of Christ the Saviour is the key at this point. This is such an essential element in the spiritual life of Children, that Mason suggests that the mystery of the incarnation and the cross should be ideas presented to the mind of children from the earliest stages of their spiritual development, while at the same time, careless familiarity with the name of Jesus and the truths related with his accomplished work should be avoided.\footnote{Mason, \textit{Home Education}, 352.}

The dignity of children as persons establishes the limits of efforts in education even in the context of children’s instruction at their younger age. Charlotte Mason argues that the same principles should be present from the nursery onwards. Bad theology in the nursery may have devastating effects in the life of a person. Basic ideas about God may be implanted in the heart and the mind of a child, and what may be just a joke for an adult, a child may receive as indubitable truth. Mason argues, quoting Pestalozzi, that the woman is divinely qualified for the work of raising children ‘Maternal love is the first agent in education’\footnote{Mason, \textit{Home Education}, 2.} And following Maurice she also argues that the family is the unit of the nation\footnote{Mason, \textit{Home Education}, 5.}. But this does not mean that
individuals should feel free to raise children according to their own whim, or according to the latest educational fad. With Spencer she denounced the 'dreadfully defective' state of children training which ignores the basic psychological facts of development. But she also was cautious to point out that the way towards a solution was not the working out of a system because the person is not a machine.

If a human being were a machine, education could do no more for him than to set him in action in prescribed ways, and the work of the educator would be simply to adopt a good working system or set of systems.

But the educator has to deal with a self-acting, self-developing being, and his business is to guide, and assist in, the production of the latent good in that being, the dissipation of the latent evil, the preparation of the child to take his place in the world at his best, with every capacity for good that is in him developed into a power.  

While stressing the need for a better understanding of psychological development and habit training, Mason resisted the idea of a 'system of education' as it implies, by analogy with the process of a machine, that certain elements may be scientifically engineered to manufacture a determined result; a view inconsistent with the integral mystery of personhood which Mason assumed to be the foundational starting point, limit and condition for all educational endeavour. For this reason her emphasis on habit training was delimited by an educational method built upon principle, rather than precept, in which the spirituality of children needs to be considered as sacred even at their earlier stages, with the greatest care not to transgress

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the limits related to the sanctity of children as persons, since every person is ultimately a mystery to us.

**Nurturing Spiritual Life in Children**

‘How am I to know He is come, Mother?’ When you are quite gentle, sweet, and happy, it is because Christ is within.\(^{130}\)

The conclusion of Charlotte Mason’s first lectures on education deals with the spiritual life of children. The last section of her lecture ‘The Divine Life in the Child’ deals with her simmering thoughts regarding a child’s education. Again, quoting F.D. Maurice, Mason points the aspect of the life of the soul that governs habits, feeling, reason and conscience.

It is a King that our spirits cry for, to guide them, discipline them, unite them to each other; to give them a victory over themselves, a victory over the world. It is a Priest that our spirits cry out for, to lift them above themselves to their God and Father, —to make them partakers of His nature, fellow-workers in carrying out His purposes. Christ’s Sacrifice is the one authentic testimony that He is both the Priest and King of men.\(^{131}\)

The primary theme governing the life of children coincides with the central theme of Christianity. Christ the King is the idea around which Christianity is built. In Christ there is the secret to the true life of the soul. Such a life of communion with Christ, which makes the body a living temple, is the kind of living understanding and experience of God’s indwelling presence which needs to be impressed

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\(^{130}\) Mason, *Home Education*, 352.

upon the life of children. But, how can parents dare to interfere at such a fundamental level in another person's soul? Mason responds that parents hold a God given key to ‘enthrone the King’ and ‘induct the Priest’ in the heart of children. In fact parents have no choice in the matter. It is their duty to try to quicken the divine life in the child. All other care for their health, moral and mental culture is useless unless it serves to make the child ‘fitter for the divine service should the divine life be awakened in him.’

Again the underlying concept of grace indirectly emerges when Mason describes how ‘Here, as throughout his universe, Almighty God works by apparently inadequate means.’ To illustrate the role of the parent in this process Charlotte Mason provides a parable of the bee. As the bee becomes an unwitting instrument into the production of apple trees, in the same way the parent is an ‘inadequate means’ of a wonderful result.

Accept the parable: the parent is little better in this matter than the witless bee; it is his part to deposit, so to speak, within reach of the soul of the child some fruitful idea of God; the immature soul makes no effort towards that idea, but the living Word reaches down, touches the soul, — and there is life; growth and beauty, flower and fruit.

The part of the parent is to present the idea of God to the soul of the child. The inner working of the Word and the response of the child is something on which parents have no ability to meddle. Therefore extreme care should be taken in communicating the ideas about God in the most suitable way to children. Both by example of life and word

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133 Mason, *Home Education*, 344.
the parents represent the life of God to the children. It is the living religious thought that frames and is active in the life of the mother, even if it is just a single idea, which she is able and must communicate to her children. No drudgery of religious instruction, no external compliance with religious mores, should become a substitute for such instruction by example and word in living thought and experience.

After pointing out various other instructions concerning the ideas that should be imparted and the best way of doing so in the living religious instruction of Children, *Home Education* ends with the thought of the indwelling of Christ in the life of children. This indwelling is evidenced in the fruit of good conduct and happiness in the life of children. The idea is reinforced with the concluding verses of one of her own poems, which later was published in full form in Volume IV of *The Saviour of The World*. There the poem figures also as the concluding poem of the book ‘of little Children’ which in the volume series is devoted to the Gospel’s teaching regarding children.

It needs to be noted that one of the peculiarities of Masons’ style is that she often chose to place in the last section of a work what she considered to be of primary importance. Many times the whole preceding discussion has been ordered to culminate in a paramount thought. It is not a coincidence that after various re-editions, her book on Home Education, and her book dealing in verse with the teaching of the Gospel concerning children end with the thought of the indwelling presence of Christ in the life of children. Therefore it is
worthwhile to give some attention to the content of this concluding poem which she quotes at the conclusion of her lecture series.

The poem is titled ‘Letter to a Child’ and is addressed to a little girl named Susie. It is a letter bringing ‘news of a King’. This news is associated with the life of joy the children experience, not in special occasions but in the occurrence of ordinary life. The idea of God’s immediate presence is conveyed not as a frightening thought but as a comforting yet sobering one. The ideas of God’s omnipotence and omniscience are expressed in simple terms and related to the ordinary life of children in the following verses:

‘A mighty King is He,  
and everything He wishes he can do  
So ’tis His pleasure oft to visit you,  
And every little child whose name He knows.

The visit of the king may happen at any time, but he chooses to hide himself from the child’s eyes so he is able to see perfectly what kind of child she is without disturbing her. But more than that, He chooses also to dwell in the smallest of all possible houses; the heart of a little maiden—another instance in which Charlotte Mason exalts the value of the spiritual life of women— This is an idea that may make the child wonder, so Mason explains that The King is so mighty that he may dwell wherever he wishes. In the concluding section of the lectures she points out that mysteries upon which the mind of an adult stumble are perfectly acceptable to the children who live in what she calls the ‘age of faith’.
How will the child and her friends recognize that the King has chosen her heart for his indwelling presence? In answer to this question we have the concluding verses:

> And, if you watch for Him, your thoughts quite still,
> You will find Some One good within your heart,
> Who makes you care to choose the better part,
> To be a gentle, thoughtful, loving child,
> Not selfish, disobedient, cross, or wild.
> And when He comes, he makes your face so fair,
> Your friends are glad, and say, ‘The King is there!’

The two last verses are the ones quoted at the end of Mason’s lectures. In this poem we have an artful example of what and how is the best way to convey religious truth to children according to Mason. The verse form is intended to be an effective way to reach the heart of a little child. Although the message is clear, it does not condescend to children, but aims at presenting difficult and profound theological truth in a way that children may be able to relate in the common experience of their own lives.

Another important element of her teaching is here emphasized; the good in the heart of children is the evidence of the indwelling work of God. As the idea that education is the work of the Holy Spirit, to be discussed later, should be ever present as the guiding principle for the work of parents and children, so the corresponding idea that all good and perfect gifts descends from heaven should be ever present in the mind of children. This idea becomes for the happy child the clear and obvious apologetic evidence that she needs in learning to read the meaning of her experience in the world; that in each and every

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experience of good, beauty and joy in a child’s inner being she has
direct evidence of the presence of Christ the King within her. It is him
in person who cares in her inward being to have her good instead of
evil; ‘Who makes you care to choose the better part’.

We may appreciate here another instance of Mason’s practical
answer to the problem of grace. It is Christ who ‘makes you care to
choose’ the best and reject the worst part. The meaning of ‘makes you
care’ as becomes clear from other passages in Charlotte Mason is not
that of an irresistible grace that overrides the personal will annulling
the possibility of contrary choice. This would make, in Mason’s
opinion, the choice not to be real but illusory and would imply that a
person is not responsible for her character. On the other hand the
absolute necessity of grace is still acknowledged. There is still a
‘makes,’ a compulsion to care that comes from Christ’s indwelling
presence wherever ‘He wills’. It is the Word that gives life. Christ’s
presence appeals to the natural attraction which everything good
naturally exercises upon the human heart. But, in the human heart
there is also a natural aversion towards God, therefore, the possibility
for the contrary choice, the rejection of grace given and its
consequences are presented here in the resulting selfish, disobedient,
cross or wild conduct. We see how the deep mysteries of the Christian
religion are communicated to children avoiding the need to cling to
abstract theological definitions in an attempt to explain ‘how’ all this
may be possible without contradiction. Mason seems to be quite
comfortable in leaving alone that kind of speculative theological efforts
to the specialist and to relegate them in her thought to the category of religious mystery, noting how children enjoy the age of faith. In this way moral instruction is developed upon an absolute religious foundation in which the ultimate question is that of our personal relation to, for or against, Christ as a real person calling us from within and not an external abstract principle or impersonal law.

It would be an error to assume that all this is mere religious metaphor for Mason, intended without regard to its objective truth. The truth of all these religious statements is assumed throughout her presentation as a matter of faith. These ‘inspiring ideas’ were for Mason more than just words, otherwise they would not be able to nurture the spiritual life of children or compel action from parents.

Although Mason’s solution is practical it is not for that reason pragmatic. If a person believed or knew that there is no truth in such statements as that ‘the Holy Spirit is the instructor of mankind’, or that ‘Christ is in us and we in Christ’, or that ‘Christ is a King’, these ideas would drive that person just in the opposite direction. The emphasis on the Christian religion as a relation to a person implies the actual possibility of a real intimate relationship with that person, and this becomes a possibility according to Maurice through the sacramental ministry of the Church. Otherwise Christianity would lose all its value as a religion. It was Charlotte Mason’s intimate conviction that such a relation is possible, and that children may experience it, even if it defies human comprehension.
This is Charlotte Mason’s kernel teaching concerning the ‘supreme function’ of the Christian parent in the education of children. It is an expression of her practical solution to the problem of providing a living religious instruction for them not by outward compulsion but by the nurture and strengthening of the inner life.

At this point it will be apparent the degree of sophistication which was already present at this stage of Mason’s thought. Charlotte Mason was making an effort to present a practical answer to aid parents in the late-Victorian era to convey Christian religious truth to their children in a way that would be true and meaningful to them. There was an underlying apologetic impulse behind her emphasis on ‘living’ religious instruction. Her intent was nothing less than to ‘save Christianity for our children by bringing them into allegiance to Christ the King’, 135 This is the underlying goal at the beginning of her educational project. We will now consider how this apologetic impulse and interest in Christian parenthood led to the creation of a programme for the support of parents in the education of their children.

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Chapter III: ‘A New Departure’ - Hidden Beginnings in Mason’s Educational Project?

‘Who did Cain Marry?’ A hundred thousand such questions are in the air, and we can hardly keep the ears of our children closed against them even whilst they are by our side.\(^{136}\)

May Haliday

‘Questions in the Air’\(^{137}\)

One of the open questions posed by Mason’s educational work is the motive which led a mature spinster in her late forties to undertake the foundation of a society setting a program for the support and education of parents to raise Christian children. All her life until this point Mason worked first as a young unmarried teacher, later as an instructor preparing teachers, then a writer of children’s books, until in 1885-86 she gave her first address to mothers. The year 1887-1888 marked the beginning of a new project which defined the rest of Mason’s life and brought her many important developments and radical changes. This ‘new departure’, late in life, marks the beginning of Mason’s career as a noted educationist.

This chapter will explore the beginnings of this ‘new departure’ following its development from 1887, underscoring the religious and apologetic motivation underlying Mason’s project and highlighting some of its inner tensions. During this time, Mason launched the

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\(^{136}\) May Haliday, unpublished manuscripts, Box CM3, The Charlotte Mason Archive, 10.

\(^{137}\) ‘Questions in the Air’ is also the name of a section written by Mason dealing with the religious education of children, in which she points out the problem generated by questions in regard to the authenticity of Scriptures, by higher criticism. See Mason, \textit{School Education}, 138.
P.N.E.U. and began the *Parents’ Review* in February of 1890 as the official organ of the society. In August, 1890 Mason began to publish a series of articles called *Parents and Children, a sequel to Home Education*\textsuperscript{138} published in book form in 1896 – In December 1890 Mason announced the beginning of the ‘*House of Education*’.\textsuperscript{139} In 1891 she moved to Ambleside and started a training course for governesses within Mason’s own house which eventually became Charlotte Mason’s College. In November 1891 Mason announced the development of a three year reading program for mothers with monthly examinations which became the Mother’s Educational Course.\textsuperscript{140} All this work growing in quick succession was directly tied to the promotion of Mason’s Parents’ National Educational Union.

So far in the official story the turning point in Mason’s career is related to the success of her 1886 publication and the interest her writing generated among parents addressing a common felt need. But, in choosing to promote the education of parents, Mason, not being a parent, placed herself in a very awkward position. Why would a forty-eight years old spinster undertake the establishment of a society with a program to educate parents?

There is no doubt that Mason saw the society as a suitable means for her to create a platform to promote her ideas. Societies were common respectable instruments to attempt reform and influence social and religious life in late-Victorian England. So it is not

\textsuperscript{138} Mason, *The Parents’ Review* 1, no. 7 (August 1890): 514.
\textsuperscript{139} Mason, *The Parents’ Review* 1, no. 11 (December 1890): 821-822.
\textsuperscript{140} Mason, *The Parents’ Review* 2, no. 10 (November 1891): 797-8.
surprising that Mason pursued a society as a vehicle. The only problem is that Mason was not a parent. Why not establish a society for the education of teachers, or governesses or the foundation of private schools following Mason’s lead?

**The Apologetic Duty of Parents**

One of the reasons which explains Mason’s focus on Parents and home life is expressed in no uncertain terms in the final lecture of the original set of lectures to ladies of 1886 focusing on the education of girls at home: ‘The training of the Young Maidens at Home’ concerning ‘the formation of Character and opinions’.¹⁴¹ This is a very important lecture in which Mason reveals her understanding of the ‘proper’ role of women in relation to the social and religious crisis being faced at the time. Mason thought that the answer to the crisis was to be found in the formation of character within the realm of intimate relations provided by the home. A set of wise parents could nurture the self-culture of their children, specially a mother to her young girl, so that they could rescue society from both revolution and unfaith:

> It is true that a life of stirring action and great responsibility is the readiest means of developing character—better or worse: but not one woman in a thousand leads such a life; and then, not until she has reached maturity. Put into the hands of the girl the means of doing for herself what only exceptional circumstances will do for her; teach her, that is, the principles and methods of self-culture, seeing that you cannot undertake

¹⁴¹ In 1906 this lecture was removed from the first volume and placed in the last volume of the series at that time. Vol 5 “Some Studies in the formation of Character” p. 236. It is nevertheless the culmination of the original set of Lectures reflecting its main purpose to instruct mothers concerning formation of girls at home.
to provide for her the culture of circumstances. To point out these principles and methods in detail would be to go over the ground we have attempted to cover in the former lectures.¹⁴²

This is the primary focus of the whole set of lectures. The elaboration of the principles and methods of self-culture was the primary means devised by Mason to answer a very practical question. What is to be done with the girls?¹⁴³ How can the Christian mother help her daughter to succeed in life, either if the girl returns home from the school or has stayed at home, she has ‘yet to learn to live’? The answer is the culture of character by instruction and by training in practical affairs upon the basis of liberty and responsibility, which would provide for the girl such a solid foundation that appropriate conduct would take care of itself:

A woman’s success in life depends on what force of character is in her; and character is to be got, like any other power, by dint of precept and practice: therefore, show the girl what she is, what she is not, how she is to become what she is not, and give her free scope to act and think for herself.¹⁴⁴

As we will show in chapter five, this aim would be answered in a complete way by means of the books Ourselves in conjunction with Mason’s poetry volumes on the life of Christ. Mason held strong opinions concerning the importance of providing working opportunities for women which would enable them to develop their character in freedom without stepping out of the ‘proper’ boundaries of their traditional gender roles. More than that she saw in this an answer to the more general and pressing question of the time.

¹⁴³ Mason, Formation of Character, 263.
Social and Religious Crisis

In the section dealing with ‘opinions’ of this same final lecture Mason lays out her perception of the social and religious crisis mothers and daughters were called to face:

That we are in the early stages of a revolution, is patent to thinking persons; and whether this revolution is to be bloodless, unmarked by the horrors which have attended others we know of, rests, more than they realise, with the women of Britain. It is time for them, at any rate, to away with the frivolous temper which ‘cares for none of these things.’

Mason instructed the mothers to allow their daughters to read and be well informed concerning economic and social issues and saw a special mission to be played by well educated women in the current situation acting as mediators between the upper and lower class, without stepping beyond their proper boundaries of submission to male authority. They could ‘persuade the master to endure the conflict with gentleness’ and

open the eyes of the men to the difficulties and responsibilities of the masters; and this mediator, the lady, with her tact, sympathy, and quick intuitions, is fitted to become, if she will take pains to get the necessary knowledge. Not that she need step out of her proper sphere to meddle with public matters; only that she should qualify herself to speak an understanding and kindly word on these subjects to the wife, if not to the husband, in her cottage visiting. A single sentence, showing a mastery of the subject in question, spoken in one cottage may go far to turn the tide of feeling in a whole community of workpeople.

Here once more is evidence that Mason’s approach to social and religious questions was thoroughly conservative at the time that it attempted to avoid narrowness. Mason recognized the fact that

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145 Mason, Home Education. 3rd edition (1899), 288.
146 Mason, Home Education. 3rd edition (1899), 287.
women’s struggle for their rights had opened new doors of responsibility for them to play an important part, but she never intended women to go beyond their traditional feminine role. This introduced another subtle tension in Mason’s work which would influence it continually. How to present the new knowledge she was advocating without being perceived as a woman stepping beyond her proper boundaries. I believe this is one reason why Mason never went beyond the boundaries of public lecturing and writing, and her direction of the P.N.E.U. was exercised at a distance keeping as often as possible men in the positions of chairmen and examiners; it may also explain in part why she developed her later work outside of the formal educational structure of the Church of England, in order to be able to secure enough control without directly challenging male authority. The original scope of Mason’s educational movement was limited to the direct training of mothers and daughters, without ever pressing a word of authority upon husbands or men.

*The Black Offense of Unbelief*

Mason also felt herself to be facing an impending religious crisis in which the very fundamental beliefs of Christianity and even the very notion of the worship of God were being put to trial:

The judgment to come, the resurrection of the body, the life everlasting,—these fundamental articles of a Christian’s faith have come to be pooh-poohed; and this, not only amongst profane persons and ungodly livers, but amongst people of reputation both for goodness and wisdom.
And how are the young girls to be prepared to meet this religious crisis?147

This crisis of faith is one of the primary features of the late-Victorian period. Practically everyone had something to say about it. The need for a practical and thorough answer to the previous question gave to Mason’s entire philosophy and work much more than an abstract interest in education. For Mason this issue was a matter of the life or death for Christianity. This gave her work in the early stages a sense of urgency and a strong apologetic motive, which does not come across as clearly for contemporary readers and which I have tried to highlight in order to present the religious foundation of Mason’s project and how it changed over time.

While addressing this issue Mason presents an idea which is important for the later parts of this chapter. She asserts that it is unwise to keep young girls in the dark concerning the challenges to faith of the time, but rather it is better to take the opportunity to instil zeal and love in defence of Christianity against the danger of infidelity:

But let their zeal be according to knowledge. Lay the foundations of their faith. It matters less that the lines between Church and Dissent, or between High and Low and Broad Church, be well defined, than that they should know fully in Whom they have believed, and what are the grounds of their belief. Put earnest, intellectual works into their hands. Let them feel the necessity of bracing up every power of mind they have to gain comprehension of the breadth and the depth of the truths they are called to believe.
Let them not grow up with the notion that Christian literature consists of emotional appeals, but that intellect, mind, is on the other side. Supply them with books of calibre to give the intellect something to grapple with—an important consideration, for the

danger is, that young people in whom the spiritual life is not yet awakened should feel themselves superior to the vaunted simplicity of Christianity.

At the centre of Mason’s solution was the promotion of a thorough grounding of the truth of the fundamental teachings of the gospel faith through personal commitment to Christ by means of the sound reading of quality books. Girls should be taught the fact that sound knowledge was not necessarily in the side of the sceptics, and that their moral uprightness was not a sufficient proof of the validity of their unbelief. Christianity must be based on more than just a sentimental appeal; they must explore and possess sound reasons for their faith. She recommended the works of Bishop Butler and Paley as showing ‘how many plausible arguments have long ago been answered’. But, she did not press the need for proof in defence of the faith for according to her, ‘Every pulse that beats in the universe is, if we will have it so, a witness for God, being inexplicable without Him; but who goes about to prove that the sun is shining?’

Girls should be instructed to be tolerant of religious opinion in secondary matters, but not so with the fundamentals of the faith. The future of the children hinged upon this responsibility:

For the sake of the children yet to be born, let the girls be brought up in abhorrence and dread of this black offence of unbelief. On points not vital, let them think gently and tolerantly, having a firm grasp of the truth as they hold it themselves, but leaving others to choose their ways of approach and service. But on questions that trench on the being, nature, and work of Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and our relations of love and service towards Him, there is no room for toleration of adverse opinions.

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How a Spinster becomes the Founder of a Parents’ Association

We have seen that an essential part of the answer for Mason’s step of instructing mothers was her apologetic concern which she thought mothers were in a unique position to fulfil. But at this early stage apart from the romantic suggestions Mason put together to guide the ideal mother in the formation of character of her children at home, incorporating Carpenter’s insights concerning the physiology of habit, there was not much more than hope and anticipation of the possibilities opened by this new insight. This left untouched the problem of how could Mason claim authority to speak to parents without the personal experience of parenthood and little in the way of personal family life? There is no obvious answer to this question, but it is clear that Mason overcame this obstacle by means of the establishment of the society.

Not being married, lacking professional higher education and only with the basic academic credentials she needed the endorsement of other authorities to entitle her the possibility of addressing parents indirectly. As an unmarried experienced teacher there was no contradiction for her to engage in the training of young, generally unmarried, women to become teachers or governesses. When she offered to deliver lectures at church for fund raising, the limits were clear and appropriate. She would share her teacher’s training expertise and ideas with mothers educating daughters at home. But
now a new step drove her beyond the sphere of school training and church service to try to promote the education of parents and children addressing family life directly. It is not hard to notice the uneasy tension created by this development in Mason’s work.

This tension is reflected in the first issue of the *Parents’ Review*, February of 1890, where the purpose of the publication is disclosed only at the end. The rationale for the publication and the society is briefly presented there to the public for the first time by relaying a process which began three years before on the summer of 1887, leading to an organizing meeting in autumn 1887 for the foundation of a society for the education of parents:

> It was hazarded that education of parents was the object of the society, a suggestion which did more than touch the truth, but which met with a disclaimer all the same; because a proposal to educate parents sounds a little like an offer to teach the doctors — to the non-parent, at any rate, who has a great respect for parents, *per se*.¹⁵⁰

Here we see how Mason writing behind the cover of her editing role, for the society she had set up, is able to relay her views by telling the story of the society and its beginning at a distance from her person. The society becomes the front from behind which Mason would be able to promote her ideas without embarrassment.

In her presentation of the early discussion of autumn of 1887 Mason justifies the rationale for the creation of a society of parents, to be called Parents’ Educational Union, by saying that the ‘idea was, so to speak, ‘in the air’.¹⁵¹ In this report, the oddity of a spinster taking

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the initiative to promote the establishment of a parents’ association is
mostly glossed over. I have found evidence suggesting the possibility of
another hidden answer to this question, which may also shed some
light on Mason’s unwillingness to bring straightforward details about
her life prior to the foundation of the P.N.E.U. It appears that the
original idea to conceive a program for the training of parents through
a course of reading in order to address the challenge to faith at some
point in time was directly related to Mason’s own personal experience
as a wife, and at least prospective mother of children, within the
sphere of her hidden private life.

*Mason a Wife?*

The evidence for the previous assertion surfaced for the first
time during the course of this investigation, when I found a draft of a
letter in Mason’s archive among her unpublished papers.152 The draft
was found among many of her other manuscripts all written in the
same type of paper with the same handwriting, so that there cannot
be any doubt about Mason’s authorship. This previously unreported
manuscript provides a very rare view into the ‘behind the scenes’ of
Mason’s private life in the later part of the year 1888.

The quotation at the beginning of this chapter comes from this
very interesting draft. This manuscript appears to be the draft of a
personal letter addressed to an intimate friend. It is fourteen
numbered pages long, missing its first and fourth pages. The

152 Mason, unpublished manuscripts, 15 July 1875, Box CM3, The Charlotte Mason Archive.
document was found at the archive stacked along other original manuscripts, under the heading ‘unpublished manuscripts' from 1870-90. Missing its first page, it was easy to be bypassed as belonging to some other work.

The letter is signed by ‘May Haliday' in Mason’s handwriting. The handwriting and the type of paper used are the same kind and size of many of Mason’s original manuscripts found in this and other boxes at the archive containing Mason’s signature. Therefore we shall consider ‘May Haliday’ as a pseudonym Mason used for this occasion as there can be little doubt that this draft is in fact one of Mason’s writings.

As we will show briefly, the main ideas and the language proposed in this piece are thoroughly consistent with Mason’s style and thought in tune with the other writings we have belonging to the same period, except for the tone of a personal letter. There is only one major inconsistency. In this draft Mason, signing as May, writes as a married woman and reports to her friend the thoughts she and her husband have been sharing in relation to the rearing of their children.

The destruction of Mason’s personal papers

The document bears the marks of a personal letter written to an old friend. It appears that this draft somehow survived the intentional destruction of Mason’s personal papers. The document probably survived the purging of the record from personal references because it was hard to identify without its first page and became interlaced,
accidentally or intentionally, between other documents. In her investigation of 1975 Valerie Hetzel noted the following concerning the destruction of Mason’s personal correspondence after her death:

Mrs. Grovenham was at College with Miss Mason and they corresponded every week for sixty years. At Miss Mason’s request most of the letters were destroyed at her death but a few have survived and are in an uncatalogued collection at London University.\footnote{Hetzel, “A History of the William Davison Church of England High School for Girls, Worthing,” 35.}

No reason is provided for the destruction of the personal correspondence. Hetzel transcribed one of the surviving letters of this correspondence dated 1861\footnote{Hetzel, “A History of the William Davison Church of England High School for Girls, Worthing,” 65.} to Mrs. Grovenham, Mason’s old friend. She also includes in her work the transcription of some other drafts found at the time in the London collection.\footnote{Today, thanks to Dr. John Thorley’s research, Mason’s papers have been collected at the Armitt Library in Ambleside nearby St. Martin’s College, previously Charlotte Mason College.} Hetzel explains that these drafts ‘were in a blotter Charlotte Mason used and were overlooked when her other letters were destroyed. The Handwriting is Miss Mason’s. Unfortunately it was impossible to photocopy them.’\footnote{Hetzel, “A History of the William Davison Church of England High School for Girls, Worthing,” 67.}

Therefore some drafts in Mason’s handwriting are reported to have survived the destruction of Mason’s personal letters, which make it possible that this draft letter could be one of those few surviving samples of the intimate correspondence between Mason and her long life friend, Mrs. Groveham. The internal evidence of the letter seems to confirm this possibility.

The draft identifies the recipient of the letter as someone who shared Mason’s experiences at age seventeen: On page 2 to 3 the draft reads:

Oh dear! how I am prosing! you will think of those wonderful palavers of our seventeenth years! when there was nothing above or below which our philosophy could not settle, was not equal to!

This allusion to ‘our seventeenth years’ corresponds to the age relationship which existed between Groveham and Mason which were born the same year. They became intimate friends some time around 1859 while students at the Home and Colonial Society for the training of teachers. If Mason’s birth was presumed to be in 1842 at that time both of them could have been around seventeen years old.

The intimate friendship between Mason and Groveham was carried through the years. The 1881 British Isles Census taken on the night of 3 April 1881 reports Charlotte Mason, age 39, living as a Boarder in the Groveham’s House in Bradford. Her condition as to marriage is reported as ‘unmarried’, her occupation as a School teacher. F.C.A Williams is also recorded as living in the same address. According to the census record, Groveham and Mason were born in 1842. The coincidence of these factors highlights Groveham as a likely intended recipient for this personal letter.

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158 The uncertainty surrounding Mason’s actual Birth date should be noted, for a detailed discussion of difficulties surrounding Masons’ biography see Beckman, “Lessons to Learn,” 106.
Mason’s biographer also mentions the life-long correspondence between Mason and her intimate friend noting in passing its unfortunate destruction:

The other and more intimate friend was later Mrs Groveham. Charlotte for many years wrote long letters to Mrs Groveham. On thinnest sheets of paper covered across and across with swift-flowing handwriting. How much they might have revealed had they not been destroyed. Surely in these letters were the answers to many questions about Charlotte’s early womanhood. Did romance enter her life once or several times? Were her interests wide? Was it at college while visiting London picture-galleries, that her love of pictures came to life? Was she a gay companion, a friendly tease, as later friends describe her? Did she sometimes escape from London into the Kent or Hertfordshire countryside? 160

Cholmondeley regretted not having access to details concerning Masons’ personal life in writing her biography. Mason’s reluctance for her biography to be written, the destruction of her personal correspondence and the fact that the biography came to be published almost 40 years after her death, when most of the witnesses to these events had passed away, suggests the possibility, first highlighted by Margarett Coombs in her 1984 thesis,161 that Mason may have had strong reasons to keep details of her personal life out of the official record of her work.

The destruction of Mason’s life-long correspondence creates a significant vacuum of information in regard to Mason’s young adulthood and the first part of her life. Of the second part, the majority of surviving personal correspondence are a set of type-transcribed letters collected and edited by Henrietta Franklin, first

161 Coombs, “Some Obstacles to the Establishment of a Universal Method of Education for Parenthood”. 
and life long General Secretary of the P.N.E.U. in London, who became Mason’s right hand in London’s society from 1894 onwards. By this time Mason’s life became that of a public figure completely immersed within the official story of her educational movement until her death.

It is important to consider that all the major witnesses to Mason’s personal life correspond to people who knew her after her ascension as a public figure from 1890 on, after she was already 48 years old. The official story, following Elsie Kitching’s lead, who became Mason’s personal secretary and right hand in Ambleside since 1893, attributes the omissions regarding Mason’s personal life to her Christian modesty. Coombs, on the other hand, suggested the possibility that Mason may have had reasons to conceal part of her past deliberately creating, ‘significant gaps in the record, such as the skilful expunging of all traceable references to Miss Mason’s early life’\(^\text{162}\) describing Mason’s official biography as ‘... a graceful essay in hagiography’.\(^\text{163}\) Based on the lack of official records,\(^\text{164}\) Coombs raises the hypothesis that Mason could have been born out of wedlock and tried to conceal this fact in order to gain a chance of achieving respectability within late-Victorian society,

Be that as it may, the content of this draft letter presents an even stronger argument to support Coomb’s contention that there was an intentional attempt to expunge the record of Mason’s early life,

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\(^{164}\) Only the name of Mason’s father is mentioned in the biography.
presumably, to discard and cover information which would have been disastrous to Mason’s reputation and claim as a Christian educational reformer. But more important to our investigation, this draft letter directly identifies the religious and personal motives behind her new educational project late in life, suggesting a new answer to the puzzling inconsistency of a spinster jumpstarting a program for the education of parents.

This draft strongly suggests the possibility that Mason may have had a relationship in which she was married and at least contemplated motherhood during the formative years leading to the creation of the P.N.E.U. 1887-1889. If so, this was kept off the official record of Mason’s life for unknown reasons.

Before focusing our attention in the content of the letter, it is worth to keep in mind that although the draft appears to be that of a personal letter fitting well with the little we know about Mason’s early life and correspondence, the possibility that it could have been written for other unknown reasons, for example as an odd fictional piece, cannot be discarded. The limitation of the evidence should be kept in mind. If this letter reflects actual events intentionally kept from the public record, its survival is probably an accident and it would be hard to find external confirming evidence as measures would have been taken to erase traceable records to keep this information secret. If on the other hand it was an odd piece of fiction there will not be any evidence supporting its factuality.
Therefore, apart from the internal evidence, little can be expected one way or the other as a corroboration of its factuality. But, the internal evidence strongly supports the conclusion that the draft corresponds with Mason’s language and thought, and therefore the facts reported probably correspond also with hidden facts about her life. Regardless of the draft reporting fact or fiction it does present Mason’s intimate thoughts concerning the idea of parent’s education which thoroughly coincides with the ideas we have highlighted at the beginning of this chapter as presented in the lectures on *Home Education*. Therefore, in light of the internal evidence, we will presume in the following discussion that the draft is a piece of Mason’s own writing disclosing at the most intimate level of experience her personal thought.

**The Draft Letter’s Date**

As noted before the draft letter’s first page is missing, but its approximate date can be deduced by the content of the letter. In the draft Mason is reporting to her friend, her reflections with her husband upon the challenges and solutions for rearing Christian children in the difficult spiritual climate of the time. The second page of the manuscript begins with a consideration about the rearing of ‘our children’ which could be read as merely hypothetical or in general terms, but then the third page gives us the following unexpected turn:

Next, my husband and I promise ourselves to read steadily, such books, old and knew, as tend to make their mark on character, and give some idea of the progress, in whatever
direction going on about us. Are you laughing at the idea of parents with such a mighty programme? But, I think we can manage to work through some of it at any rate by eschewing most second rate story books and that sort of thing.\textsuperscript{165}

In a surprising turn, this otherwise typical writing links the idea of a reading program for parents with Mason’s own personal experience as a married woman planning the education of her children. This would be the only place in Mason’s writing where she writes in a personal style as an actual or prospective parent planning the rearing of her own children, hypothetical or actual, by means of a good reading program. As noted before, the reading program is one of the prospective ideas set at the foundation of the PEU, and eventually was materialized in the Mother’s Education Course established by Mason, by the end of the Year 1891.

The program would be designed by selecting books helpful for the development of character, and abreast of the ‘living thought’ of the time –one of Mason’s commonly used expressions\textsuperscript{166}– for parents, willing to be prepared for the education of their children by being well informed concerning the ideas defining their times. These notions are all essential ideas within Mason’s work. After this revelation the letter goes on to make explicit its main object:

I begin to suspect that all this is by way of preface, and now for the real object of this letter, Have you read ‘Robert Elsmere’? Of course you have. All this year everybody has been asking

\textsuperscript{165} Mason, unpublished manuscripts, Box CM3, The Charlotte Mason Archive, 3. Since this document bears no title, not having a first page, for future references I will identify it as the “Draft Letter”.

\textsuperscript{166} See, Mason’s introduction to Eugene Bersier’s Sermon: “The Imperative Demand,” in The Parents’ Review 2, no. 7 (August 1891): 482; also Mason, “P.N.E.U. Psychology in Relation to Current Thought,” The Parents’ Review 9, no. 7 (July, 1898): 424. ‘Living thought’ corresponds with the idea of ‘living books’ which contain them. See Mason, School Education, 228.
everybody that one question. We have just read through 'Robert Elsmere' for the second time. It has done us much good, and made us look at many difficulties in the face, I truly think it will help us in the bringing up of the children.\textsuperscript{167}

This statement allows us to pin the date of the letter not earlier than the year 1888, less than a year after the PEU alleged first steps of organisation.

\textbf{Robert Elsmere}

The main purpose of the letter was to present Mason's response to the novel \textit{Robert Elsmere}.$^{168}$ This famous novel was written by Mrs Humphry Ward, Matthew Arnold's niece, presenting the crisis of faith in Late-Victorian society. It was published in 1888 becoming a bestseller surrounded with much controversy. It tells the story of a young Anglican clergyman who turns away from traditional orthodox belief and converts to a liberal form of idealized unorthodox religion.

The novel created a significant stir as it portrays the crisis of faith suffered by traditional Anglicans with the advance of doubt in the struggles of the life of the young priest. Curiously enough the story begins situated in the Lake District and portrays the isolated country life style that still characterized that region by the end of the nineteenth century and ends with the foundation of a society for the religious instruction of the working class.

The novel was published in two volumes six hundred pages long in February 1888. Since the draft's actual date must provide enough

\textsuperscript{167} Mason, “Draft Letter,” 3. The strike through words represent the changes actually visible in the draft.

time after the publication of the novel for it to become the focus of popular attention and Mason claims to have read it through twice with her husband it is safe to assume that the draft was written some time during the later part of the year 1888 or the beginning of the year 1889. The draft reflects the historical stir the novel created upon its publication. In response to it, Mason presents her interpretation concerning its meaning and importance, giving us a first hand intimate look connecting Mason’s frame of mind to the religious discussions of the time, her views on education and her plans as wife and, at least prospective, mother. Mason sees the novel as an ‘educational nut’ to be cracked, she says:

> It is more than a story; it is a remarkable study of the rise and progress of unfaith; and is, I should think a most true picture of what is going on today in many an ardent nature. This is why Edward and I have set ourselves to analyse it as carefully as if it professed to be the true story of a real man. For don’t you think that every now and then there are spiritual epidemics in the air as catching as measles and that it is the business of parents to keep their eyes open and take measures to preserve their children from infection?

The draft reveals Mason’s response to the perceived challenge to orthodox Christianity presented in the novel which traces what she calls the ‘the rise and progress of unfaith’ i.e. the transformation of a young Anglican clergyman from a naive orthodox minister into a social religious activist; the founder of his own version of a universal society

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169 The public events taking place during the year 1889 are summarized in one paragraph of the biography in page 26. There Mason is reported as spending the year in Bradford and London where she gave a series of public presentations. Nothing is said about activities in Bradford. The table of dates tracing the chronology of Mason’s life leaves the year 1889 without any information. See Cholmondeley, “Appendix II, Table of Dates,” Story of Charlotte Mason, 291.

170 Mason, “Draft Letter,” 5-6. It is noteworthy that this is not the only instance in which Mason analyses works of literature, fiction and non-fiction, to derive educational and religious principles. She believed that ‘every intimate and penetrating book has something of the nature of an autobiography’. Mason, The Formation of Character, 299.
for the lower classes, with a version of religion devoid of miraculous claims.

The name given to the husband is ‘Edward’. He appears to agree with Mason in the appreciation of the value of this story as if it presented the actual story of a real person and in the interpretation of the situation as if it were an epidemic disease assaulting society against which parents must protect their children. The writer proceeds to analyze the causes involving the loss of orthodox faith in the story and takes it as an educational failure in child rearing against which she reveals her own alternative cure in agreement with her husband.

Now, Edward says we think that there are two things we parents should keep well in view; The spiritual epidemics of the day; and the tendency of human nature to follow the lead of the foremost; These outbreaks, we must of course, wait for, and deal with as they come. But certainly, we can accustom our children to look contemporaneous authority, scientific or historical, fully in the face, and take it for what it is worth.¹⁷²

In the draft Mason strikes through some words, allowing us to read interesting details reflected in her choice of words, like the substitution of ‘we think’ for ‘Edward says’, which reveals how influential this relationship may have been in triggering her own thoughts. The ‘we parents’ is a unique instance in Mason’s writing; the only place where she includes herself within that group on behalf of which she will develop not only a society but an educational

¹⁷¹ The strike through font corresponds with the discarded words still visible in the draft letter, revealing the choice of words of the writer.
philosophy sharing the same apologetic zeal, reflected in this personal letter.

One of the key issues triggering the evolution of the young clergyman’s faith in the novel was the problem of miracles. Robert Elsmere was driven away from orthodox Christianity because he became convinced that doubts concerning the possibility of miracles present legitimate objections to the historical veracity of Christian claims. Mason responds to the problem of skepticism in relation to miracles:

They must learn physical science, not only for the joy of reading the open secrets of nature, but that they may know and go safely in the knowledge, —how extremely little is open as yet to the most patient investigation; how soon we come to a blank wall in any field we follow; how we know nothing yet of fundamental truths—where and what is life? for instance the life of a man or a plant. In protoplasm, which consists of this and that? Yes, but put this and that together in due proportions to make (life) protoplasm, and — life is not there. Not impossibly the next turn of the wheel will find us spending our strength in renewed search for that elixir— the hope of the past. Then, for the miracle of resurrection, who shall say that it is impossible whilst science knows so little of the miracle of birth; Laws of nature? How few of them we know! And who is to determine therefore, what is, or is not a miracle?

We will see later that this idea about life is repeated in other of Mason’s writing, but note that here Mason presents the same solution she gave to mothers in her final lecture of Home Education, where the reading of books and the knowledge of the ideas current in the air is presented as a necessary ground to uphold the faith of the young. It was not possible or desirable to shelter the young from doubts. Later in this chapter we will see other instances in which this same thought

173 This same point is presented by Mason in one of the “Scale How Meditations,” no. 2.
is also developed by Mason. She continues her reflection with the notion about the limitations of our scientific understanding:

This ground at any rate, the most advanced (and skeptical) of our scientist have abandon reached: they decline to say that miracles do not happen: and affirm only that the Bible miracles have not been proved to their satisfaction: a quite different matter and by no means the last word on the subject— for those who have read much of the eclectic literature proper to the most advanced thinkers. Here are miracles of today which make the outsider (believer) smile remembering the old charge, that skepticism and superstition go hand in hand. There are other vistas open — into the laws which govern the workings of the human mind for example — into which I hope to penetrate someday under Edward’s lead (—see the advantage of having married a doctor! but all going to show that we are only on the threshold of such knowledge as could conceivably enable us to measure revelation or report the testimony of experience.174

This quote reflects Mason’s acknowledgment of the limitations of our understanding and openness to the results of scientific discovery presenting solutions to the objections of the skeptics. Mason believed that the advances in discovery and truth would shed more and more light in the understanding of some of the mysteries of revealed religion. The opposition to miracles in general, in her view, had been already weakened by new discoveries in science. The more is known the more miraculous the existence of ordinary things appears to the faithful person, the more conscious we become of the limitations of our understanding while we gain capacity to understand new aspects of previously undisclosed mysteries. This point of view will be later articulated as part of the teaching of the P.N.E.U. concerning the relationship between science and religion.

In the previous quote, towards the conclusion of the letter, Mason mentions the husband’s occupation. ‘Edward’ is a Doctor whose expertise includes knowledge concerning the physiology of the brain and the work of the mind. The quote also suggests a relatively early stage in marriage as she is looking forward to the future when He would guide her to further knowledge on the field of psychology.

Echoes of the Draft Letter in Mason’s Official Writings

According to the official account of 1890, Mason had already begun to work towards developing a program for the instruction of parents in 1887-88,¹ which would culminate in the foundation of the Parent’s National Educational Union and the publication of the Parent’s Review in February, 1890. As mentioned before, the main source for information concerning the life of Mason for this period comes to us through Elsie Kitching, Mason’s personal secretary from 1893 onwards, who after Mason’s death in 1923, wrote a report tracing the life and work of Mason, called ‘the beginning of things’.² According to Kitching,—who is the main source for Cholmondeley—during 1887 Mason took the first steps to begin a local parents association in Bradford.

¹ In August-September of 1887 Mason spoke at a meeting of the British Association in Manchester, advocating “associations or other efforts for the further education of parents” Mason, “Home Education in its Bearing on Technical Education,” in Report of the Fifty-Seventh Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science August-September 1887 (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1888), 846-7.

² Elsie Kitching, “The Beginning of Things,” The Parents’ Review 34, no. 6 (June 1923): 386.
At the beginning of 1888 Mason delivered a lecture in London titled ‘A Hundred Years Later’ where Mason stresses the development of character as the key for an educational revolution which would come after a hundred years of the adoption of the principles she was promoting. This educational revolution is presented as the key for the renewal of the Anglican Church and the nation of the future. As ‘Dean Priestly’, a fictional character in this lecture, asserts by the conclusion of this dialogue placed in 1990:

A century ago, our Church was supposed to show some signs of decadence; to-day she is quick to her remotest extremities. And why? Simply because she has gone with the times in following up the advances of educational thought. She, with the rest of you, perceives that the world has ever one great thing to do—to bring up the young in advance of the generation before them; that the sole valuable inheritance of the present has to leave behind is—exalted national character. Wherefore, she has laboured assiduously on the two lines Dr Bernton emphasizes to-night—‘that Habit is ten natures’; and, that the spiritual life must flourish or decay as it is duly nourished and exercised, or allowed to lie idle and unfed. Therefore is every clergyman instructed, above all, to minister to the young of his parish—of all classes. The growing soul cannot thrive upon husks—therefore must the truth be divested of the husks of the past, and clothed upon with the living thought of the present. The young soul must be taught its work, the spiritual exercises of prayer and praise, the bodily exercise of service; and as no man can teach what he does not know, the ministers to the young must be qualified and ever active in these. Seeing these and kindred truths, our clergy are raising up about them a body of ardent young spirits to whom self-devotion is a law; labour in spiritual uplands a necessity. And for much of this progress, I say, we are indebted to the labours of the Educationists, whom we therefore gladly hold up with both hands.\(^\text{178}\)

Apart from the self-congratulatory note put in the mouth of the clergy recognizing the labour of the Educationist, it is worth noting...


\(^{178}\) Mason, *Formation of Character*, 172.
how this fictional character, representing the future clergy of the Church of England in 1990, stresses the formation of national character as the principal aim of education. Education holds the key for the progress to be reached in the future and the revitalization of the church. This quote reveals the scope of Mason’s vision, by placing ‘National Character’ as the central goal for both Church and State in their educational endeavours. The identification of nation and church is a notion belonging to the Anglican tradition in which the confessional state was considered as called and entitled to regulate the affairs of the established church in temporal matters. Although the state had by this time moved away from requiring allegiance to the Anglican religious confession as a requisite for participation in positions of power, it nevertheless retained its functional role over Church affairs, and in the mind of many members of the Church of England, it was not uncommon to identify the growth of the kingdom of heaven with the Christian ‘civilizing’ influence of the English empire over the world.

The aim of the elevation of ‘national character’ would be achieved by giving the young ‘the living thought of the present’ an idea which is echoed in the draft letter in response to the decadence of faith perceived as a spiritual disease afflicting late-Victorian society. The draft reads:

but then, when they come to ask these searching questions, I think we should be ready to give them not the formulae of our youth, but the fresh living thought of the day, as it supports the truth we hold. Let me tell you the three or four practical
conclusions we have come to anent the spiritual history of Robert Elsmere.\textsuperscript{179}

Notice how close the language of the priest and the writing of Mason in the personal draft letter are. In both instances the young are to be given the fresh ‘living thought’ of the present instead of the ‘husk of the past’ or ‘the formulae of our youth’—which points to the fact that the author of the letter does not consider herself a young person anymore—as the best way to tackle the spiritual challenge of the age to the Christian faith.

Mason goes on to summarize her, and her husband’s, conclusions in regard to the problems of expert authority, Bible difficulties, the grounds for asserting the truth of the Bible, how to answer doubts concerning miracles and the limitations of scientific knowledge. All the arguments of this section have echoes in Mason’s official writings, although only here are they set in a personal tone and simple form. In her other writings these are elaborated and presented in a less personal style. For example, in another instance, Mason, dealing with the Christian attitude towards scientific discovery recommends caution in the evaluation of scientific results, in ‘Parents and Children’ she wrote:

Two points should be kept well to the front –the absolute silence of the oracle on all ultimate questions of origin and life, and the fact that, all along the line, scientific truth comes in like the tide, with steady advance, but with ebb and flow of every wavelet of truth; so much so, that at the present moment, the teaching of the last twenty years is discredited in at least a dozen departments of science. Indeed, it would seem to be the part of wisdom to wait half a century before fitting the discovery

of to-day into the general scheme of things. And this, not because the latest discovery is not absolutely true, but because we are not yet able so to adjust it—according to the 'science of the proportion of things'—that it shall be relatively true.\textsuperscript{180}

The 'silence of the oracle' concerning all ultimate questions of origin and life, gives Mason pause to receive with caution the 'new revelations of science'. This caution towards scientific knowledge the draft allows us to trace back to Mason's own childhood. In the draft Mason tells us how as a child she had been able to spot a logical inconsistency in an article written by a learned scientist concerning the origin of life:

I am always thankful that as a girl I read a certain magazine article written by a scientific man of great eminence; for I have never since been taken off my feet by the authority of a great name. The writer had the wit to see, that Science had not a word to say about the origins of things until it could track life to its sources. The crucial question, which science had not touched, was to him, how came there to be life, animal or vegetable, upon our globe. And now for his solution, a solution which should do away with the needs for a creator. Some elder planet; passing Earth in its course, had cast off a rocky fragment; which lodged upon Earth. This fragment, had contained the germs, at least of life animal and vegetable, lodged in its crevices, and lo, the rest follows! A world clothed upon with verdure and sustaining innumerable living creatures. It was truly a shock to me at the time to find that an ignorant girl like myself could put her finger on the weak place in this clever paper, written by so eminent a man. 'And if it were so', I asked myself, 'if this lucky windfall had brought life to our planet, from whence did the other derive the life it bore? Or the others, or the others, or whichever was the first to sustain living things? Obviously the difficulty was removed only by a single step, and the great man's ingenious theory went to prove no more than the life came to us at second hand.\textsuperscript{181}

The writer uses this example of her childhood to illustrate how a child may be able to raise valid objections and see things clearly even

though lacking the knowledge and experience of an expert, and that one need not be impressed just by the authority of a name. The practical advice she derived from this, which Mason reiterates elsewhere was:

Never let children pin their faith to any infallible teacher. Accustom them to think, that father and mother, nurse and governess, know a great deal, and therefore claim a great deal of respect; but that any of them may easily be wrong in any one point, and so too, may be their ‘print books.’ This is more important than one is apt to think. It’s the nature of us to crave a pope who will save us the trouble of thinking. We have popes many, political, social, literary, scientific, religious, and woe to the excommunicate who presume to think their own thoughts in their own lines. As for the children, their popes are household gods, mother and father above all. They are so sweetly loyal, and it is so good for them to reverence those in authority over them that it is not quite easy to say to the curious child, ‘I do not know’.

To keep the children’s reverence, and at the same time, decline the infallible role, seems to Edward and me, all we can do in this direction while the children are quite young. 182

Our natural tendency to crave for infallible ‘popes’, the rejection of claims of infallibility, the possibility of errors in ‘print books’, the openness to think one’s own thoughts and the importance of children’s reverence towards authority are all basic tenets of Mason’s educational philosophy, expressed in other places with very close expressions to the ones of this draft. In the beginning pages of the first number of the Parents’ Review, Mason expresses her rejection of an educational pope, encouraging people to learn to think ‘their own thoughts’:

. . . in proportion as the urgency of educational effort presses upon us, will be the ardour of our appreciation, the diligence of our employment, of those truth which the great pioneers Froebel

and the rest, have won for us by no less than prophetic insight. But alas, and alas, for the cravings of lazy human nature we may not have an educational pope; we must think out for ourselves, as well as work out, those things that belong to the perfect bringing-up of our children.\textsuperscript{183}

Again we can appreciate the parity between Mason’s public statements and the content of the personal letter. Another example of the recurrence of this same theme with very similar language in Mason’s writing with the draft is found in ‘Parents and Children’

The notion that any contemporary authority is infallible may be steadily undermined from infancy onwards, thought at some sacrifice of ease and glory to the parents. ‘I don’t know’ must take the place of the vague wise-sounding answer, the random shot which children’s pertinacious questionings too often provoke. And ‘I don’t know’ should be followed by the effort to know, the research necessary to find out. Even then, the possibility of error in a ‘printed book’ must occasionally be faced. The results of this kind of training in the way of mental balance and repose are invaluable.\textsuperscript{184}

Both the draft letter and this section recommend that parents avoid the position of infallible authority and express simply ‘I do not know’. The draft letter continues to express her basic idea about reading and interpreting the Bible which reflects the same ideas that are characteristic of \textit{Home Education}, for example that the children should read the Old Testament with some ‘necessary omissions’.\textsuperscript{185}

The letter concludes:

\begin{quote}
Even so deception narrow is our outlook upon life and immortality; so deceptive our conclusions, when we will assume the position of Mrs. Gatty’s ‘caterpillar’, and always believe what we are told when it is ‘reasonable’. Anyway it will be good for the children to know that when their father and I cry ‘To the Law
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{183} Mason, \textit{The Parents’ Review} 1, no. 1 (February 1890): 3-4.
\textsuperscript{184} Mason, \textit{Parents and Children}, 43-44.
\textsuperscript{185} Mason, \textit{Home Education}, 250.
and to the testimony’ we know what we are saying and have even ‘rational’ grounds for the position we take up.

The allusion to the ‘caterpillar’ is a reference to the work of Mrs Gatty, *Parables of Nature*, a collection of stories interpreting nature with religious and moral teaching which Mason recommends elsewhere. In the first parable a caterpillar rejects the news that it will become a butterfly based upon its limited experience. The possibility of a metamorphosis seems unreasonable while it only believes everything it is told as long as it is reasonable. Mason notes that our experience is similarly narrow in regard to matters of life and immortality.

All these instances show the high degree of overlap between the ideas sketched in this personal draft and Mason’s more polished public educational writings, suggesting that the additional information highlighted in this draft also corresponds with Mason’s actual unofficial experience.

*Mason a Mother?*

The exaltation of motherhood, at least a deep longing for it and perhaps actual child bearing are suggested also in other manuscripts by Mason. In the same set of papers where I found the draft letter

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186 The book *Parables of Nature* would be included in Mason’s curriculum and carried in the Lending Library for the P.N.E.U.

187 “Mrs. Alfred Gatty [Margaret Scott Gatty], 1809-1873. This self-proclaimed amateur was the daughter of Admiral Horatio Nelson’s Chaplain and was raised by her widowed father in a Yorkshire vicarage surrounded by books. She demonstrated an early talent for art and writing and married Reverend Alfred Gatty in 1839. In addition to the popular and influential *Parables from Nature*, Gatty published a two volume History of British Seaweeds to great acclaim. An opponent of Darwin’s theories of evolution, Gatty used the natural world to illustrate the divine in everyday life.” Women and Nature: Authors’ Biographies “University of Wisconsin-Madison,” [http://specialcollections.library.wisc.edu/womennature/sectionpages/biographies.html](http://specialcollections.library.wisc.edu/womennature/sectionpages/biographies.html) (accessed 11 January 2006).
there was a series of undated manuscripts containing more poems under the title: ‘Childhood’s Estate and Other Poems’ after a brief preface signed with the usual C.M.M, expressing some ideas concerning the value of poetry which are incorporated in the introduction to the poetry volumes. Mason wrote three poems dealing with motherhood: ‘Motherhood,’ ‘At the Cradle’ ‘Diffidence’. All three of these poems present motherhood from a very personal point of view the writer writing as a mother. The most clear in this regard is ‘At the Cradle’ which reads as follows:

\[
\text{At the Cradle} \\
i \text{sat by my sleeping Babe,} \\
\text{at the feet: sat low of my Boy,} \\
\text{Much pond’ring the high born air he wore} \\
as \text{of native claim on joy.} \\
\]

\[
\text{Sure not of his father or me} \\
w\text{as he made thus free of the earth;} \\
\text{Were we at large!- but the hours confine-} \\
\text{knows he a loftier birth?} \\
\]

\[
\text{Great is the mystery yea-} \\
\text{How little o babe, art thou mine!} \\
\text{A halo surrounds and divides thee} \\
\text{Living words about thee Shine!} \\
\]

\[
\text{All faith and hid knowledge Thine-} \\
\text{My little one, how can it be?} \\
\text{When sing’st-Thou those perfect praises} \\
\text{The Father, O where dost see?} \\
\]

\[
\text{Thy guardian waiteth ever} \\
\text{on the face of our God for light.-} \\
\text{O little Son, how high thy estate!} \\
\text{Thy Mother, alas, her plight!} \\
\]
This poem without the title and other minor alterations was published along with others in 1901\textsuperscript{188} as reflections for the Christmas season under the title of ‘Mother and Child’. The other poems also reflect motherhood as a personal experience with a strong reverential tone. Although these could be no more than pious devotional reflections on the experience of the virgin Mary, one wonders about the possibility that Mason could had experienced motherhood at some point of her life. The Poem titled \textit{Diffidence} warns about hazard and pain, in taking ‘a man from the Lord’:

As they are variest guides who most have met
Mischance themselves, thy mothers slips may yet
Shew thy feet; Daughter, places to eschew.
Ah, sweet the mother -walk, but perilous!
and flowers do cheer the progress hazardous,
Tho' heedless pilgrims chance on bitter rue!
But thou, my daugther, meekly-glad has ta'en
A man from the Lord: thy joy hath wholesome pain
of diffidence- thy welfares pledge for here,
Danger avoids , assurance keeps in fear.
Then spread thy soul before heaven as April earth,
Waiting the fall of counsel; nor in vain-
Who had so grace thee to a blessed birth
Will not his wisdom waterings restrain!

These poems by Mason read in a mundane light, and taken together with the draft letter may point to some of the reasons why Mason preferred to leave her early life undisclosed. Any failure in family life, a failed marriage, any doubts about Mason’s chastity would have been completely devastating for her to have any chance of gaining the degree of respect which was indispensable for her to be able to address late-Victorian society from within the evangelical side

\textsuperscript{188} Mason, “Poems of Mother and Child,” \textit{The Parents’ Review} 12, no. 12 (December 1901): 905-912.
of the Anglican Church. Ironically among people who professed faithfulness to the gospel of Christ in reconciliation and forgiveness, regardless of the quality of her thought, or the greatness of her achievements, any such disclosure would have disqualified Mason from sharing with others the fruits of a life time of work and achievement, and she would have never been able to become a respectable educational reformer, trainer of ladies, teachers or governesses.

The official story presents many gaps on Mason’s early life. Two work appointments as teacher were followed by a period of ‘illness and travel’ in 1871 and then again in 1878 when Mason resigned her post at Bishop Otter Training college. Cholmondeley reports Mason spending the year 1889 in Bradford and in London giving a series of undated addresses of which little else is recorded elsewhere.\(^{189}\) The official story comes back inline in February 1890, with the foundation of the *Parents’ Review* and from then on the story of Mason becomes the official story of the development of the P.N.E.U. and its educational reform.

At this time we have not been able to find any additional independent record verifying this possibility, since it appears that measures were taken to keep such events, if they ever happened, out of the official record.

In conclusion, there can be little doubt that Mason was the author of the draft letter, as it is her hand writing and her ideas. And

the draft clearly expresses she was writing as a married woman. Therefore, this suggests the possibility that Mason may have contracted a secret marriage during the formative years of the P.N.E.U. If this was the case this would explain her original enthusiasm for going ahead with the creation of a Parents’ association. We can only speculate concerning what went wrong. But, once set in motion the parents’ association opened a new door of opportunity which became too valuable to be missed. Also, the draft letter clearly links Mason’s educational project for the education of parents with the perceived spiritual crisis of her times, revealing the novel Roberts Elsmere as an invaluable book helping to understand Mason’s point of view at the time, marking very clearly the apologetic religious impulse guiding her program for the renewal of the Church of England and the elevation of national character, at the religious foundation of her educational thought, in secret as a Christian wife and at least prospective mother, publicly as a concerned educator working for parents.

_Apologetics and Education_

_They alone are truly independent who are able to resist the current of their age!_¹⁹⁰

Éugène Bersier

One further relatively unknown source serving as witness to the overriding apologetic impulse underlying Mason’s original project is

¹⁹⁰ Eugène Bersier, “The Imperative Demand,” _The Parents’ Review_ 2, no. 8 (September 1891): 578.
found in her translation and recommendation to parents of an apologetic sermon by Eugène Bersier, pastor of the Reformed Church of France, which Mason published in the *Parents’ Review* in August 1891.¹⁹¹ This work was appended to the 2nd and 3rd editions of *Home Education* and republished in the *Parents’ Review* during the war in 1915.¹⁹² As this translation of Bersier’s sermon was not included in the ‘Home Education Series’ 1905, it stopped figuring prominently as part of Mason’s educational cannon, making the original apologetic emphasis less prevalent as the school stage of the P.N.E.U. movement became more and more pronounced. The Sermon is not mentioned in Mason’s biography, and has passed unnoticed until today among Mason’s contemporary readers.¹⁹³

Mason’s translation of this Sermon was first published in the *Parent’s Review*, under the title ‘The Imperative Demand’. The sermon presents answers to some critical objections raised against Christianity. According to Mason it provides direction for parents in the training and education of children facing the wider context of the spiritual challenges of the age. As we have seen during this chapter, Mason perceived a need for parents to have helpful answers to the spiritual challenges their children faced in the late-Victorian Era.

In the preface to her translation, Mason, stressed the importance of Bersier’s arguments. She described him as ‘one who

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¹⁹¹ *The Parents’ Review* 2, no. 7 (August 1891): 481.
¹⁹² *The Parents’ Review* 26, no. 2 (February 1915): 103.
¹⁹³ This important sermon was not included in the 4th edition of Home Education in 1905, therefore it does not figure in the *Home Education Series* republication of 1989, which is the most readily available source for contemporary readers of Mason’s work.
has set himself to the solution of the anxious question of the age with profound insight and triumphant faith.’194 Eugene Bersier (1831-1889) was a distinguished preacher who contributed to the organization and enrichment of the worship of the Reformed Church of France, one of the first protestants to recognize the fundamental role of liturgical order in worship.195 In 1854 he presented a thesis for his Baccalaureate in Theology on La Méthode de l’apologetique.196 He also wrote about historical subjects like the history of the Huguenots and ‘Coligny and the religious wars.’

The Sermon presents a Christ-centred apologetic discourse against the liberal interpretation of the life of Jesus. It systematically deals with a series of objections resulting from a reinterpretation of Christ and his message. For both Mason and Bersier, the key to Christianity is found in the person of Christ. All the building stands or falls depending on our response towards him. Bersier’s sermon fits perfectly well with the emphasis Mason gave in her Home Education lectures to the idea of Christ the king as the very essence of the Christian faith.

Mason recommended Bersier to parents, as a ‘prophet who is able to lift the veil and give them a living thought of Christ.’ She saw apologetic teaching as an essential part of the kind of home education demanded by the times. As in the draft letter, here Mason also

stressed that the best education needs to interact with the spiritual questions ‘in the air’. As seen above, this demand presented a significant challenge to her educational aims. The last decades of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, in which she built her reputation as an educationalist, were upsetting times for Christian believers in the Anglican tradition because of the erosion of dogmatic certainty which was transforming the tenor of the religious interpretation of life previously unchallenged in England. The climate of this time has been described as:

one of adjustment, slow and at times painful, to intellectual and social conditions of a kind increasingly to render the religious interpretations of life difficult in a way that it had never been before. Religion was no longer conceived as a set of ideas and aspirations which society, or at any rate its more responsible section, was bound to maintain as a matter of conscience. The attitude of faith had now to be defended — explained and if possible justified in terms which to the less sophisticated were bound to seem remote. Indeed the moral prestige of faith passed to science itself, whose primary virtue was intellectual integrity and respect for evidence. ‘Agnosticism,’ it has fairly been said, ‘had the temper of the age on its side’

The traditional certainties of the old order of things was being subverted or revised. In her preface to the sermon Mason acknowledged that at the time many ‘serious souls’ were freeing their minds from the dogmatic boundaries of the creeds of Christian religion. There were many learned persons who had little objection to the external expression of Christianity, but which could not hold with

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integrity of conscience the traditional beliefs as these appeared manifestly opposed to the results of scientific enquiry.

This difficulty lingered behind Mason’s educational work. Charlotte Mason’s relation to the current of religious thought of her age is built upon the tension of a paradox of acceptance and resistance. She wanted to remain faithful to traditional belief while open to the new knowledge offered by the ‘new revelations’ of science. Her solution was not defensive retreat, nor offensive opposition, nor submission to heterodox trends of religion or education. Rather her approach was one of reserved openness, based upon a belief in a fundamental agreement between religious and scientific truth. She resisted the current of agnosticism while taking the advancements in science as offering potentially valuable insights which should enhanced the understanding of truth by faith. This openness towards new knowledge, while keeping a commitment to old dogmatic knowledge and values, led Mason to produce an educational method aiming at a synthesis of religious and educational thought and experience, which tries to be both, progressive and orthodox, conservative and liberal. The resulting educational philosophy and method is her special contribution to the history of Christian education.

*The Uses of Doubt*

Doubt could not be avoided. How then could it be pressed into the service of truth and faith? A Christ-centred apologetic provided the
answer of faith for those who considered Christ to be ‘all in all’. Doubt must not be ignored or denied.

This attitude of many thoughtful minds need not fill us, to whom He is all-in-all, with despair for the cause of Christ. Above all, we need not keep a dark closet where lies, *perdu*, the possibility of ‘Doubt.’ If we do this, if we go about with a secret unnameable dread lest, if we open our eyes to all that is to be known, we, too, may pass over to the ranks of the Unbeliever, why, perhaps we may ‘save our own souls’ if we care about it, but we have sold birthright and blessing, we have nothing to pass on to our children of the golden heritage of Christian hope. No man can give what he has not got; and this is true, above all, of the certainties of the faith.¹⁹⁹

A certain faith was the only ground upon which parents would be able to give their children the benefits of the birthright and blessing of ‘Christian hope’. It was necessary to equip the young with a powerful answer to doubt. In describing the role of parents as inspirers Mason asks:

How to fortify the children against the doubts of which the air is full, is an anxious question. Three courses are open: to teach as we of an older generation have been taught, and to let them bide their time and their chance; to attempt to deal with the doubts and difficulties which have turned up or are likely to turned up; or, to give children such hold upon vital truth, and at the same time such an outlook upon current thought, that they shall be landed on the safe side of the controversies of the day, open to truth, in however new a light presented, and safe guarded against mortal error.²⁰⁰

The solution here is the same as in the draft. Openness to truth in a new light will safeguard children from mortal error. A vital presentation of the truth is needed better than the old system of teaching given to the previous generation. A firm apologetic ground was a preliminary foundation to Mason’s educational aims. The times

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¹⁹⁹ *The Parents’ Review* 2, no. 7 (August 1891): 481.
demanded clear and vital expression of the gospel faith. Mason believed in principle that the questions and anxiety of the times could receive a suitable answer. Such answer should not be an anxious rejection of doubt in advocacy of blind faith. It should not come in the manner of a technical treaty which would hinder the possibility of being conveyed to children by their parents and teachers.

For Mason, the family was the optimal setting for this training to take place. Parents have a call to be ‘revealers of God to their children’\textsuperscript{201} School and church both had important but secondary roles to play concerning the spiritual and intellectual culture and formation of Children.\textsuperscript{202} Mason wanted to gather and put in the hands of parents a sound defence of the faith in terms that would not seem remote to the less sophisticated, for the instruction of their children in faith. To understand the importance of such an apology as a living force in the education of their children was an urgent matter for Christian parents especially those of young persons, to save them against the dangers of the times.

\textbf{Science also is revelation}

It was necessary to gather the best in every realm of knowledge, learning from the experts and translating their achievements and discoveries in terms that would be helpful to parents and children alike. Behind these efforts lay a firm conviction of the unity and universality of truth. The core truth of the Christian claims of the

\textsuperscript{201} Mason, \textit{Parents and Children}, 41.
\textsuperscript{202} Mason, \textit{Formation of Character}, 212.
gospel’s truth is such that it will withstand every test. For Mason, faith must embrace truth, even when at times the limitations of our knowledge would present irreconcilable differences to faith. As she expresses in ‘Parent’s and Children’:

To perceive that knowledge is progressive and that the next ‘find’ may always alter the bearings of what went before; that we are waiting, and may have very long to wait, for that last word, that science also is ‘revelation,’ though we are not yet able fully to interpret what we know; and that ‘science’ herself contains the promise of great impetus to the spiritual life—to perceive these things is to be able to rejoice in all truth and to wait for final certainty.203

The problem is one of human perspective and not of the truth itself. Sometimes it would be necessary to hold apparently contrary truths waiting for a further revelation of Science that would solve the discrepancy. Therefore, careful openness to new knowledge is a requirement, even if it would imply at times a redefinition or reinterpretation of previously conceived ideas. But, due to the limitations of scientific knowledge it is wise to wait until the proper perspective may be attained concerning the relationship of a new ‘revelation’ of knowledge to the rest of received knowledge according to the ‘science of the proportion of things.’

Personal faith cannot close itself to knowledge and the anxieties that it may pose, for, even if it survives, it will lack the ability to be transmitted in power to the next generation. The falling away of the next generation was a principal concern for Charlotte Mason. Every Christian, and specially those dealing with young persons has

203 Mason, Parents and Children, 45.
according to Mason a responsibility to answer critical questions in a satisfactory way, resulting from a careful study of the Gospel.

A young person fortified with this kind of teaching, having such arguments by heart (in the best sense), will not be carried away by every wind of doctrine. The shame of having nothing to say for the faith they profess is the real cause of the falling away of many an ardent young soul. We absolutely must face the questions that are in the air. However much we elders choose to shut our eyes and say we see no danger, it is certain that no young person of education and intelligence will escape the necessity of having to contend for or deny the faith. Surely education should make some provision for this exigency.204

The defence of faith against ‘the questions in the air’ in the context of rapid social change was for her an ‘imperative demand.’ Charlotte Mason perceived her work not as that of educational reform for its own sake, but as a more essential task of which the reform was just one aspect. Her educational work begins and ends conceiving education as a means to a higher religious end. This end was not just temporal but eternal. For Mason education was essentially a spiritual task.

**The Objective Character of Christianity**

Education was the key tool against the erosion of confidence in truth. Therefore Mason was anxious to help parents impart to their children, and to teachers who worked with children, the heritage of Christian belief to face the difficulties of the era with a sense of hope for the future. If Christianity could recover its objective sense, she thought, by such clearing of the ground as education could provide for

204 Mason, Preface to “The Imperative Demand,” in The Parents’ Review 2, no. 8 (September 1891): 572.
essential Christianity, it would become the means by which a new era would dawn:

But we are in the dark hour before dawn; such as Christianity is coming upon us as neither the world nor the Church has ever dreamed of; even now we begin to see our way out of the darkness, because we begin to see why it has fallen upon us. To use the language of philosophy, ‘religion,’ as we know it, is subjective, not objective; that is our religious idea is directly opposed to the genius of Christianity. Oh, the appalling egoism of ‘Christian’ literature! While, of that name,

Which whoso preacheth
Speaks like music to the ear.205

Of that enthralling Personality which is capable of ever-fresh unfoldings to meet the needs of all the ages, we hear, only, as it is subservient to our poor uses. ‘Form me’ is the key-note of one great school of religious thought; ‘by me’ that of another; but how seldom is Christ Himself, for Himself—not for what He is for us, or has done for us, or worketh in us—placed in the foreground of religious thought!206

That ‘objective’ aspect of Christianity is defined in terms of what she understood to be the corner stone of religion, i.e. Christ himself, for himself. Mason’s apologetic stance was from beginning to end a ‘Christ-centered’ apologetic aiming at a Christ-centred objective educational philosophy and method. The problem of the age was that it had taken the social results of religion to stand in the place of religion itself, while the actual Christian religion was essentially the absolute claims of a living person. The attempt to present Christianity primarily in subjective terms; ‘what religion can do for me,’ or, what ‘the Church may do for the world,’ misses the key point of the absolute claims of Christ for himself in the life of every disciple.

205 This is a quote from the Hymn ‘To the Name or our Salvation’ a Latin 15th century hymn Translated in Hymns Ancient and Modern, 1861.
Education should aid in the recovery of the Christ-centered objective religion and therefore become an instrument for the renewal of Christianity. Mason thought that the loss of that passionate commitment to Christ as ‘all in all,’ was the defect rendering Christianity less and less appealing to the age.

Possibly it is for this that many consciences are in revolt against religion as it is taught. ‘What think ye of Christ?’ is the question that is searching all hearts, and it is only as we are able to ring out our answer in the clear glad tones of passionate conviction, that we have any sure and certain hope to communicate to the children. 207

Bersier’s value for parents who perceived themselves as ‘the conservators of Christianity for the children’ consists in his ability to tackle the main objections raised against the Christian faith based upon the notion of the kingship of Christ.

**Christ the King**

Once more Mason comes back to the notion of the kingship of Christ as the key to apologetics. The idea of the kingship of Christ is the predominant theme of Bersier’s sermon. It was primarily designed to answer the modern reinterpretation of Jesus as a moral religious teacher bringing forth a religion of humanity while negating all the supernatural claims of the gospel account. Bersier argues that such views are inconsistent with the gospel record, unable to explain it satisfactorily and of little appeal to our human condition. Jesus claimed to be not only a guide but a King. His teaching presupposes

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207 Mason, Preface to “The Imperative Demand,” in *The Parents’ Review* 2, no. 7 (August 1891): 482.
his unconditional authority to command and judge the conscience of man. Also, Jesus makes himself the centre of his teaching, commanding the first order of love from his disciples. This would be an idolatrous demand if he is not truly the King and Son of God. An ordinary man with such claims could not be hold in reverence as a great teacher unless such unique claims were thoroughly justified. Christ also presents himself as the master of hearts and exercises supernatural power which he claims to possess.

Bersier answers the objection to the admission of the supernatural as a foundation for religion with the assertion that God could and need not have intervened with his creation in any other way. Nature and super nature are relative categories which describe our perception of experience of the world. If God is God, his revelation of himself in the world could not avoid appearing to us as supernatural. The fact that human superstition shares an openness to the supernatural, does not necessarily imply that if God revealed himself supernaturally our belief in such revelation would have to be superstitious.

**Mind over Matter**

This element of Bersier’s sermon reinforces what already has been shown regarding Mason’s rejection of the materialistic hypothesis in connection with the work of Dr. Carpenter. Bersier exposes materialism rejecting liberalism’s prejudice against the possibility of the supernatural. In the sermon it is argued that
‘Reason’ informed by the methods named ‘positive’ by Auguste Comte, finds itself in a contradiction. It can explain everything but the idea of moral and religious destiny. A consistent materialistic system is in trouble to justify belief in thought, freedom and spirit. Mason recognized that mechanistic and materialistic views would tend to distort the spiritual nature of the educational task. Against such views she stressed the primacy of mind over matter which is another of the underlying principles of Mason’s educational philosophy.

The last part of the sermon deals with the kingship of Christ as it has become manifest in the workings of history and ends with the proclamation ‘Regem Habemus’ we have a King. Bersier’s sermon is full of interest and relevance for the thought and work of Charlotte Mason. She endorses every point of his message with enthusiasm as is clear in her preface and the short summaries presented in the publication of the Sermon in three parts in the *Parents’ Review*.

Also, there are in this sermon some other important connections to Mason’s educational method, which she may have gathered from other sources but which, at any rate, are part of the presuppositions of her reflection and work. An idea mentioned in the sermon is that Christ’s teaching to his disciples and example should be the model establishing the boundaries and the principles for the best possible education. In speaking about the teaching of Christ to his disciples centered upon himself, Bersier describes how,

Little by little, he reveals to them all the grandeur of his office and of his person. By that slow method of education which is his own, and which consists not in imposing the truth by means
of formulas, but in giving it birth in the hearts and the minds of his followers, he prepares them to comprehend that which he is. It is only after a year and a half of teaching that he poses them with this decisive question, ‘Whom say ye that I am?’ He directs upon his own person the regards, the attention, the faith of this disciples; it is to him they must come, it is in him they must believe, it is him they must love.\textsuperscript{208}

This pattern of ‘slow education’ in devotional matters is characteristic of Mason’s philosophy which stresses the formation of Christian character over and above more dramatic spiritual experiences, to which Mason pays very little regard. Also, the fixing of attention upon the person of Christ is one of the principal motifs in Charlotte Mason’s educational method. As we will see in the next chapter, she also agrees with the primary importance of meditation on the person of Christ and makes her own method one in which ‘imposing the truth by means of formulas’ has no part. She believed in a living education; one which aimed at giving birth to truth in the hearts and minds of children.\textsuperscript{209} The life and teaching of Christ and the disciples established the ultimate measure and guide of what the best education is and should be. As we saw in the previous chapter, the same idea was presented at the beginning of her lectures on \textit{Home Education}, where Mason defines the limits of children’s education upon the teaching of Christ and again, in her emphasis on meditation upon the life of Christ as the backbone of the life of the \textit{House of Education}.

\textsuperscript{208} Bersier, \textit{The Parents’ Review} 2, no. 8 (September 1891): 573-574.
\textsuperscript{209} The same idea expressed in the work of ‘a thoughtful writer’ who ‘has done us good service by carefully tracing the method of our Lord’s education of the Twelve’ a reference to \textit{Pastor Pastorum} a book which presents in its introduction a number of very relevant affinities with Charlotte Mason’s educational project. Henry Latham, \textit{Pastor Pastorum or the Schooling of the Apostles by Our Lord} (Cambridge: Deighton Bell and Co. London George Bell and Sons, 1890). The book was presented as a gift to Elsie Kitching form Charlotte M. Mason, Christmas 1902.
His Creed must be True Whose Life is in the Right

A final important point of the sermon is its response to the objection presented by the inconsistency between practice and principle exhibited by so many followers of Christ when compared to the moral uprightness of many who have broken company with the Christian faith. In the draft letter, Mason had expressed that the moral rectitude of those who rejected Christ was one of the major difficulties encountered by a young mind, and the same thought is presented in Home Education. In a brief reference answering this objection Bersier comments,

You point me to men of eminent intellect who have openly broken with Christianity, and who seek sincerely in the inspirations of their conscience for the rule of their conduct and the direction of their life. I recognise these facts, convinced beforehand that I am not permitted to call evil that which is good, and that I am required to salute integrity of life wherever I may meet with it, whether which I have often seen —it ally itself to superstitious ideas which I condemn, or on the other hand, to the negations which desolate me. Bersier’s full response to this objection need not here concern us but the import of the statement that he was ‘not permitted to call evil that which is good’ regardless of the context in which it may be found is a principle that will figure as an important element in Mason’s apologetic views. As will be discussed in the next chapter, she argued that to negate truth in any context was a rejection of the work of the Holy Spirit in the education of mankind. This ideal, that all good

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210 In the 1906 republication of the final lecture VIII of Home Education, now separated from its original context, Mason adds the following words “though we may have much cause to esteem the holders of such opinions.” His (creed) must be true whose life is in the right,’ is precisely one of those fallacies which young people should be taught to examine.” Mason, Some Studies in the Formation of Character, 290.

things are from God, will have important repercussions in Mason’s views on education and will be further discussed in the next section in connection with her views on the work of the Holy Spirit.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have examined some of the religious foundation of the early stages of Mason’s teaching, showing its initial overwhelming emphasis upon the apologetic and discipleship role of education in defence of the faith for the young and as a primary task for Christian parents carried out ideally in the context of the home. In subsequent chapters we will trace the development of these ideals, in the next two stages of development, first in the *House of Education*, then in its adaptation to fulfil the demands of a growing national educational reform movement; slowly shifting the focus from the apologetic role of parenthood, to the civic role of education performed by parents and teachers by means of the school. I will show how these original emphases were adapted and some of the seeds of tension here laid developed into paradoxical results over time as Mason’s philosophy ambiguously aimed at being both a home gospel centred philosophy and an educational reform movement for the whole nation.

The year 1891-1892 marked the beginnings of three important developments following the work of the *Parents’ Review* and Mason’s move to Ambleside: the launching of the ‘Parents’ Review School’, the beginnings of the ‘*House of Education*’ and the ‘Mother’s Educational Course’. These projects shared the same spiritual emphasis informing the vision laid down in *Home Education*, requiring strong personal commitment, but at the same time, after the foundation of the P.N.E.U., these projects marked the beginning steps in what may be identified as a process towards the institutionalization of Mason’s religious ideals.

The goals and interest of Mason were wide and far reaching as shown in the scope of subjects addressed through each of these new endeavours. With the development of these projects the philosophy of the P.N.E.U. began to require a definite statement providing a more general religious ground applied to the expanding spheres of influence from the family, to the school, to the nation. The primary idea of the ‘Kingship of Christ’, emphasized in *Home Education* as the key idea for the nurturing of spiritual life in children by their parents, was complemented by the notion of the Holy Spirit as ‘educator of mankind.’ Mason had already dealt briefly with the problem of the role of the Holy Spirit in relation to the claims of her educational

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gospel in the *Draft Proof*.213 As the role of the Holy Spirit began to receive greater emphasis moving closer to a centre stage, this had two main effects. This new emphasis brought a new dimension of universality to the scope of Mason’s thought, while it also served to accentuate the spirituality of its inner core, as an indispensable element for educators, both parents and teachers, and children.

This emphasis also began to generate a new unresolved tension underlying the change of focus from the limited scope of the family, Christian mothers and daughters, to the wider sphere of school and later national life. Mason’s educational project presupposed, without conflict, the reconciliation between the demands of a universal liberal teaching of the spirit abstractly defined and the particulars of an education based upon a commitment to the particular dogmatic statements of the Christian faith, emphasized in *Home Education* as the essential goal of education at home as a means to defend the Christian faith against the threat of unbelief.

The second part of the chapter will explore the practice of meditation as it became a central feature of the life of the ‘*House of Education*’. I will explore the spirituality of the movement by highlighting the origin and meaning of the practice of meditation in Mason and its intrinsic relation to the spiritual atmosphere of ‘The *House of Education*’. These fundamental aspects will allow us to note

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213 The *Draft Proof* was a document Mason wrote delineating her plans for the establishment of a parents association during 1888 in her way to Cambridge to discuss her plans with Miss Anne Clough, principal of Newnham College. Mason also met there with Miss Frances M. Buss, founder of the North London Collegiate School for Girls, and eventual vice-president of the P.N.E.U. Both of these women were considered pioneers of women education and Mason seems to have aspired to emulate their legacy. See Cholmondeley, *The Story of Charlotte Mason*, 22.
the rise of the tension and polarity between the clearly evangelical Anglican discipline of ‘The House of Education’ in Ambleside and the abstract ‘religious’ narrative that the P.N.E.U., centred in London, began to adopt, where the Christian-Anglican overtones of Mason’s thought and practice could be played up or down, as necessary, as the movement procured growth in influence over public opinion in contrast to the evangelical Anglican atmosphere promoted in Mason’s House and inner circle in Ambleside.

**Mason’s Ideas and Anglicanism**

Contemporary readers of Mason can easily miss the Anglican ethos underlying the outer superstructure of her educational philosophy and method. An important aim of this research has been to bring this to the forefront by pointing out from the historical record some of the various witnesses and points of contact it has with it, which now lie hidden from modern view. From the beginning of Mason’s P.N.E.U. project a number of prominent Anglican clergymen and churchmen were involved with it as supporters, lending respectability to the society. Although this does not mean that her philosophy as such was ever endorsed by a majority within the church, it shows the clear affinity of her thought with strands of Anglicanism common in the late-Victorian era.

A witness to this affinity can be read in the official report of the Anglican Church Congress held at Hull in October 1890. Among the papers presented under the general heading of ‘Reverence,’ the
Archiepiscopal of East Reading and Canon of York, The Ven. Richard Frederick Lefevre Blunt, D.D., presented a lecture under the title: ‘The Holy Spirit in Young People and Children,’ in which the principles of Mason’s *Home Education* are recognized and encouraged as a wholesome way to train Anglican children. It was the expectation for the average children that they would grow in the faith from baptism to confirmation, being instructed in the Catechism of the Church upon the basis of the teaching of the Gospel, learning about the Church and the Sacraments. Introducing the subject of reverence for the child, Blunt states:

The reverence we would pay is in full view of the revelation, both of God’s holiness and of man’s fall, for the cardinal doctrine of the Christian Church is not human corruption, but human redemption; not the Fall, but the Incarnation; not the omnipotence of Satan, but the universal fatherhood of God; and the application of this doctrine is found for us Churchmen in the unequivocal assertion of the Church Catechism, which teaches each baptized child, however ignorant, however thoughtless, however sinful, to acknowledge that he is ‘a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.’ I take it therefore that the reverence due to Christian childhood is the expression of faith in the covenant relation of each child to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. On the face of each little one we may trace some ray of ‘the light coming into the world, which lighteth every man,’ some likeness to the King who says not less of children in English nurseries than of those in Galilean homes—‘Of such is the kingdom of heaven.’ To suggest some thoughts concerning this reverence for the Holy Spirit in our children, especially in little children, and some ways of showing it in our treatment of them, is the duty that has been entrusted to me.214

According to Blunt the teaching of the official formularies of the Anglican Church implies the recognition that redemption, not the fall,

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and the universal fatherhood of God are the key to human anthropology in the Christian religion, a statement which reflects the influence of the theology of F.D. Maurice, as we will see in a later section.\textsuperscript{215} From this perception and the Gospel declarations concerning children and the kingdom of heaven there springs a universal duty for paying due reverence to each child in general, and especially to the English-Christian child, in light of the faith in God’s covenant and his redemptive work. According to the Gospel children require reverence as persons. The baptized child enters through that sacrament into a covenantal relationship with God and should receive the highest regard in the kingdom according to the teaching of Jesus, but the Church has been too slow to acknowledge the implications of such teaching.

After this starting point Blunt, following Mason, begins to explore the same exhortations of the Gospel, ‘offend not, hinder not, despise not,’ —first highlighted by Mason in \textit{Home Education}, who appears to have been the first to raise the point explicitly that the teaching of Christ implied boundaries to education upon the grounds of the sacredness of children’s personhood. This recognition ought to have concrete application and direct bearing upon Christian education.

Blunt pays no attention to the condition of children outside the covenant, i.e. the unbaptized. From beginning to end he only explores

the question ‘What is the religion of a Christian child?’ Blunt’s reflection is intended to deal with the condition of the ‘average childlike Christian child,’ not with the ‘child of exceptional weakness or wickedness, who needs exceptional treatment.’

These views are entirely consistent with the educational philosophy Mason was originally promoting by means of the P.N.E.U. for the general English public. Blunt’s article was promptly reproduced in the *Parents’ Review*, November 1890.\textsuperscript{216} The difference between Mason’s new ‘P.N.E.U.’ teaching and Blunt’s presentation is that he spells out openly what Mason and her P.N.E.U. audience usually presupposed in regard to their understanding of the ‘average Christian child’. These presuppositions only come to the forefront as necessary, and therefore can be easily missed by contemporary readers of Mason’s work. The ‘average Christian child’ was an English child, baptized in the Church of England under the care of conscientious church going parents.\textsuperscript{217} These baptized children, as they prepare for confirmation, being well trained, should become worthy bearers of their inheritance as English churchmen and citizens within the British kingdom.\textsuperscript{218}

Blunts’ exposition helps to illuminate the underlying Anglican presuppositions of Mason’s educational thought, which combined in


\textsuperscript{218} Eventually, non-Christian British subjects of the higher class, embracing the consonant ideals of English citizenship, fostered by Anglicanism, would also benefit from the P.N.E.U. education although they would lack its particular religious foundation in favor of a more abstract one. See Henrietta Franklin and Mason’s correspondence showing how Mason helped her intimate friend, who was a Jew, with the training of her children.
one, religious and civic duties, reflecting the influence of the
theological interpretation of Christianity and Anglicanism proposed by
F.D. Maurice, in his emphasis upon, the Fatherhood of God, the
incarnation and redemption, and the notion of a Universal Kingdom
resulting from it, as the focal points of the Gospel in light of which the
rest must be understood.\footnote{See, Janet E. Courtney, \textit{Freethinkers of the Nineteenth Century} (New York: E.P. Dutton &
Company, 1920), 11-65.}

When Mason spoke about children, without excluding all others,
she ordinarily had in mind a middle-to upper-class English child who
should have been baptized, would be catechized and confirmed, would
be taught to pray with the Prayer Book, would keep Sunday as a day
of rest and would attend a liturgical service following the church
calendar for the Christian year.\footnote{See for example “Some Aspects of Religious Education,” by Mason, \textit{School Education}, 137-
47.} Although Mason did not exclude
from her movement anyone coming from other religious backgrounds,
these presuppositions were shared by many of her original followers
and would eventually create conflicts with members of the
organization who did not take the evangelical overtones of its Anglican
foundation as an essential part of the original goals of the P.N.E.U.;
which was originally presented as an association promoting the
education of parents concerning the latest developments in
educational theory, including religion as just one of its general
interests, as Mason herself stressed in her attempt to create the
association.\footnote{Mason, “Home Education in its Bearing on Technical Education,” \textit{Report of the Fifty-Seventh Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science} August-September
In spite of these tensions, there are many instances in which Mason’s underlying Anglicanism comes to the forefront, although easily bypassed by contemporary readers. Lack of familiarity with middle-of-the-road late-Victorian Anglicanism is not the only reason these presuppositions are little known. Mason used a strategy of playing up or down the explicitly Anglican aspects of her thought as necessary in order to universalize P.N.E.U. work as much as possible.

That these presuppositions were intentionally toned down in the setting up of the P.N.E.U., as it strove for a wider audience, can be appreciated early on, upon the set up of the P.N.E.U. According to Henrietta Franklin, the Bishop of London, Frederick Temple, later Archbishop of Canterbury, who presided over the first organizing meeting of the Union in June 3rd, 1890, is said to have proposed that the word ‘religious’ should be put in place of the word ‘Christian’ in drafting the constitution of the society, a development for which, according to Franklin, Mason often expressed thankfulness, as it allowed the eventual incorporation of people like Franklin, a liberal Jew, into the direction of the movement. Franklin became an enthusiastic collaborator, a life long intimate friend of Mason and life long General Secretary of the movement in London. This friendship

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224 The intimate character of this friendship is reflected on a set of letters preserved, transcribed and edited by Franklin. This personal correspondence between Franklin and Mason was selected and transcribed, the originals were not shown, by Mrs. Franklin and produced in the midst of a controversy which erupted in 1927 concerning the admission of a Jewish candidate, endorsed by Franklin, into the *House of Education*, which Ellen Parish, appointed by Mason as principal for life of the *House of Education*, strongly opposed. See “Mrs Franklin’s papers: correspondence and notes re ‘L’Affaire Marofsky’ (the exclusion of a Jewish
and Franklin’s influence will eventually play a decisive part in the
direction the P.N.E.U. would follow towards an institutionalized
schooling movement away from Mason’s original spiritual roots, as we
will see in our next chapter.\footnote{Jack Beckman has presented a thorough account of Franklin’s influence upon the P.N.E.U. before and after Mason’s death, where may be read the subsequent story and result of the tensions which we begin to highlight here. See “The House of Education (1892-1923) – The Patterns That Are School,” in Beckman, “Lessons to Learn,” 170-1.}

The meaning of ‘religious’ is made explicit in a comment Mason
inserted before the publication of an article by J. S. Mills, Religious
Education in 1893:

> We gladly insert this article, not as expressing P.N.E.U. feeling
on the subject of education; our readers are aware that our
whole superstructure rests upon a religious, or more precisely
upon a Christian basis, but we are glad to be enabled to lay
before our readers so temperate and lucid an exposition of the
educational thought of the day, on this momentous subject. If
the great body of public educators feel that religious education
is outside their province, this greatest of all responsibilities is
thrown back solely upon the parents. We shall be very glad to
have the subject discussed in this magazine, with a view to
suggesting some definite line of action for parents, whether in
the way of influencing public opinion, or of giving connected
definite religious teaching to their own children of whatever
age.\footnote{Mason, “Editor’s Note,” The Parents’ Review 4, no. 7 (August 1893): 526.}

Here the ‘precise’ meaning of ‘religious’ is made explicit.

According to Mason, the society saw itself as providing the Christian
content of religious education back into views of education, which
were inclined to exclude it. But, at the same time, since the inception
of the P.N.E.U., the work of Charlotte Mason strove to gain universal
appeal and to influence public opinion. This created a tension between

\begin{marginnote}[0.15\textwidth]{student from a place at Charlotte Mason College, 1926-27” Box CM11, Charlotte Mason’s Archive.}
the underlying evangelistic, gospel-based presuppositions of the work, and the personal commitments to faith it required, versus the official version designed for general consumption, which stressed the language of ‘religion’ in abstract terms while the explicit commitment to the furtherance and defence of the Christian faith as defined within the formularies of the established Church of England became attenuated.

As shown in the previous chapter, the adoption of a national society as a means to promote the thoughts of a spinster upon parents put Mason in the awkward position of having to tailor the expression of her thought in an indirect form, adapting and developing her ideas to make them work within the context and limitations of a propagandistic society. One of the means Mason used to overcome this obstacle was through her role as editor of the *Parents’ Review*, where she began to define her thought under the new label of a ‘P.N.E.U. philosophy.’

**P.N.E.U. Philosophy**

In July of 1892 Mason published her first attempt to define what she called the ‘P.N.E.U philosophy,’ which was nothing else than her thought as promoted by the organization, although not all its

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227 The evangelistic goals of the P.N.E.U. were sometimes expressly stated in *Parents’ Review* articles. For example: “The one aim of mothers’ meetings must be nothing less than making the Lord Christ so attractive to them that they shall yield themselves to Him. There is much less difficulty in helping a Christian mother to train her children than one who is not.” Isabella Copeland, “How are the principles of the P.N.E.U. to be Spread amongst those we designate ‘The Poor’?” *The Parents’ Review* 4, no. 11 (December 1893): 849.
members would necessarily concur with it. Her article takes a question and answer catechetical form and lays down Mason’s emphasis at the time. At the end of this presentation Mason codifies the idea of the ‘Work of the Holy Spirit’ that had been highlighted since the foundation of the P.N.E.U., now coming to the forefront in the following terms:

Then the spiritual sustenance of ideas is derived directly or indirectly from other human beings?

No; and here is the great recognition which the educator is called upon to make. God, the Holy Spirit, is Himself the supreme Educator of mankind.

How?
He openeth man’s ear morning by morning, to hear so much of the best as the man is able to bear.

Here is the first expression of the ‘great recognition’ which would provide the universal scope required for this new stage of expansion, which paradoxically would eventually contribute to the institutionalization of Mason’s ideals. This concept sets an important correlation between the work of the Holy Spirit, the parent and the child, defining parenthood and teaching as means by which the child receives ‘spiritual sustenance’ of ideas from the Holy Spirit. This

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228 See for example the leading role of Lady Isobel Margesson as honorary secretary of the Belgravia Branch of the P.N.E.U. When the Central office in London was established, Lady Isobel began to work as honorary secretary for a very short time. In the Spring of 1894 her attempts to amend the constitution of the P.N.E.U. to identify it with the thought of noted male educational philosophers like Pestalozzi, Froebel and Spencer was successfully dwarfed by Mason’s strong and decisive opposition. This resulted in Margesson’s resignation and the placing of Henrietta Franklin as Honorary secretary, a position she held for the rest of her life. In this capacity Franklin became Mason’s controlling hand over the movement at a distance and a primary contact with the higher class of London life. Cholmondeley, Story of Charlotte Mason, 52-53. See also Mason, “Letter to Franklin 12.2.1904”, in Letters to N. Franklin from CMM, Box CM44, Charlotte Mason Archive. An analogous secession happened in 1904 upon the adoption of Mason’s Synopsis as the official definition of the philosophy of the P.N.E.U. which resulted in Dr. Schofield’s resignation as chairman of the P.N.E.U.


central emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in education was early reflected in the choice of name for the Parent’s Association as the ‘P.N.E.U.,’ —an acronym which spells the Greek root for the word ‘spirit’— and the ‘House of Education’ which, as mentioned in chapter one, Mason would have initially called ‘the House of the Spirit’ had it not being for inconvenient connotations potentially attached to this name.²³¹ The tenor of this project was clearly underlined by enthusiastic personal commitment of faith and missionary zeal, which viewed itself as following the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the fulfilment of a divine calling.²³²

In 1923 as part of the tributes given upon Mason’s death, one of the original founding members of the P.N.E.U. remarks of the spirituality of Mason’s life and work as it was reflected in the life of the ‘House of Education’ as much more than a teacher’s training college:

I have often thought that the initials which form the familiar title of the union [P.N.E.U.] are a fortuitous combination for a work which the Founder so ardently yet humbly regarded as a channel for the manifestation of the Spirit. The House of Education was to those who knew its true inwardness, a dedicated Temple of the Holy Ghost and surely no one ever more adequately expresses the sevenfold gifts in her sphere of influence than Charlotte Mason, The spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, of Council and Might, of Knowledge and true Godliness and of Holy Fear; none more truly illustrated the charge of St. Paul ‘If ye live in the spirit walk in the Spirit.’²³³

²³¹ Mason does not declare what these connotations were. But it is clear she had no intention of portraying herself as a new sect in England.
²³² See for example Mason, “Greetings” The Parents’ Review 4, no. 10 (November 1893): 748-9, in which Mason identifies the work of the P.N.E.U. as carrying forth “a Gospel for the world, that Gospel of Education, in the wide sense of the formation of character, which is, perhaps, the special evolution belonging to our day of the Gospel of Christ.’ as a divine calling.
This ‘fortuitous’ combination of letters points to a philosophy claiming, as modestly as their high estimate of the importance of their own work could allow them, to be working under the guidance of the Spirit of God, yet not in an exclusive sense. Mason extended the claim of inspiration to each and every instructor and learner of truth.²³⁴ By the conclusion of the year 1893, the role of the Holy Spirit as ‘educator of mankind’ received greater emphasis and primary focus as Mason developed the notion identified as the ‘Great Recognition’ in order to provide the P.N.E.U. with a respectable universal religious foundation for a liberal education. These ideas would have a decisive influence in the life of the *House of Education*.

**Beginnings of the ‘House of Education’**

After the launching of the *Parents’ Review*, the next step in the development of Mason’s educational project was her move in 1891 to Ambleside where she established within her home an educational program for young unmarried women. Mason had anticipated the idea of a ‘*House of Education*’ in the prospectus, describing the work of the Union under the name ‘The Draft Proof’ in 1888.²³⁵ The prospect of a ‘*House of Education*’ is originally explained as a place where young ladies could be trained as nurses, i.e. caretakers of young children, and governesses to work in families and where mothers could come for a short time of rest and instruction. But this scope rapidly evolved.

²³⁴ Again in terms very consonant with those of F.D. Maurice, although Mason does not quote him in this regard. See for example, F.D. Maurice ‘What is Revelation?’ *A Series of Sermons on the Epiphany* (London, Macmillan & Co., 1859), 2-12.

Early in 1891 Mason reports that the primary object of the House would be to meet the ‘urgent demand’ for governesses and nurses trained to deliver an education along the lines of the principles laid down in *Home Education*.

Mason opened ‘The *House of Education’ in January 1892, and soon the training of women to work as governesses teaching and caring for children of school age became the dominant purpose of the program, while the direct instruction of mothers would be channelled through the more distant means of a correspondence course. The change in target on these series of advertisements and change in program goals and length is evidence of the fluidity of Mason’s project at this exploratory stage. The original goal of explicitly training parents gave way to the growth of a governess training house, which would eventually evolve into a teacher training college in response to the growth of a school movement based upon the respective demands for these services and the need for producing a stable economic situation with a self-sustaining project.

**Mason’s House**

Mason did not set out to establish an ordinary teacher training institution. She already had that opportunity at Bishop Otter College. The *House of Education* may be interpreted as the fulfilment of Mason’s long held desire to exercise personally the role of mother, she had so romantically envisioned in detail for so long, but which she had not had the opportunity of experiencing in her own personal life.
In its origins, the *House of Education* was not a college, not even a training school; it was really a home for Mason’s adopted daughters, some of whom through the means of the house became her lifelong devoted companions, defining there what may be identified as the inner core of Mason’s philosophy and movement.

This intimate atmosphere can be appreciated in the story of Elsie Kitching’s entrance into the house in 1893 instead of finishing her final London University examination for a degree. Mason was staying at Kitching’s house at a time when Elsie was deciding what to do:

> my mother was not at all anxious that I should go on to take the final examination for a degree and I gladly accepted Miss Mason’s invitation to go back with her to Ambleside in September 1893.\(^{236}\)

Mason had entered into a conversation with Kitching’s mother about Elsie’s future, when she was twenty three years old:

> On the last day of her visit, Mrs Kitching took Miss Mason into her confidence about Elsie’s future. ‘What am I to do with her?’ ‘Let me have her,’ said Mason ‘Let her come to Ambleside with me.’ Elsie travelled to Ambleside and found there her life’s work; ‘my real life began then,’ she said. .. Her life became completely devoted to Charlotte Mason and her work.\(^{237}\)

Mason applied to the *House of Education* all the counsels of wisdom she first delivered in her lectures to mothers. By means of her newly trained governesses, Mason’s ‘House’ would expand to reach boys and girls in far away places. The *Parents’ Review School*, at this time began to take concrete form. It offered parents at a distance a

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\(^{236}\) Cholmondeley, *The Story of Charlotte Mason*, 47.

term reading course and examinations with complete direction from Ambleside. This ‘school’ provided the members of the union with a practical instrument to educate their children, but it was one step removed from the personal intimate contact which her initial goals demanded, the natural locus of which was the home and family life, which had an open curriculum, at the discretion of parents. This soon changed as the PRS began to develop its own curriculum, which made this subtle but important switch complete. Apart from the Bible there was no set curriculum stressed in Mason’s original lectures, while the importance of the P.N.E.U. curriculum would become paramount as the movement developed.

We have here the first steps towards the institutionalization of Mason’s ideas. As we will see in the next chapter, Mason attempted to bridge this gap, first by means of the personal influence of her *Home Education* trained governesses and then by putting in print as much as she could of her own spiritual sensibility in the books *Ourselves*, through her ‘meditations’ and finally by means of her poetry volumes on the life of Christ.

Mason established her *House of Education* as an opportunity to exercise and practice the role of a mother teaching her adopted disciples at her home, sharing with them her insights concerning the art of living upon the basis of a rich spiritual life, lying at the core of her educational vision of discipleship. As long as such influence could be positively exercised it was possible in principle to somewhat satisfy
the conflicting particular and universal demands of the developing P.N.E.U. philosophy.

**The House of the Holy Spirit**

Mason would have called the ‘House of Education’ the ‘House of the Holy Spirit’ if not for the potential misinterpretation such a name could carry. She wanted to avoid the appearance of a sectarian claim to special inspiration or that she was promoting a separate religious alternative to the established Church. Upon graduation, the students of the House received a leaflet presenting three ‘life-giving’ ideas, which together formed what was called ‘The Threefold Cord’.\(^{238}\) This was a summary statement of the ideals informing the philosophy and life of the training college. The first idea was humility, poetically presented in a quotation from Dante’s *Divina Comedia*, in which humility is represented by a rush described as a ‘humble plant’, which became the name of the badge of the *House of Education*.\(^{239}\) This humble plant, ‘L’Umile Pianta’, became in 1895 the symbol for the alumni association and name of their publication. The second idea was ‘The Great Recognition,’ which was illustrated by means of a brief explanation written by Mason of a medieval fresco representing the descent of the Holy Spirit. This image was identified by the students as the pictorial creed of the house. The third ‘idea’ was an exposition

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\(^{238}\) Expression alluding to Ecclesiastes 4:12, “And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

\(^{239}\) Miss Dorothea Beale made this suggestion while she was visiting *The House of Education* in Easter 1895 when the old students were collecting suggestions to select a badge for the House and the Old Student Association. See “In Memoriam,” *The Parents’ Review* 17, no. 12 (December 1906): 951-52.
of the meaning of the graduation certificate in the words of its own designer.

**The Great Recognition**

In 1893, while travelling through Florence with Miss Julia Firth, a personal friend of John Ruskin who had revised and edited a work which she translated, Mason visited the chapel attached to the Church Santa Maria de la Novella, following Ruskin’s guide book *Mornings in Florence.* The Chapel contains among its art work a fresco to which Ruskin devoted two chapters of his book. The fresco is seen as a representation of the Descent of the Holy Spirit in the day of Pentecost. Ruskin calls the fresco on the northern part of the vault of this Chapel ‘the most noble piece of pictorial philosophy and divinity existing in Italy.’ He argues that there is no other comparable piece of art of such quality, which can be read as a book, teaching a scheme of ‘human spiritual education.’ He attributed to the painter of this work not only a reading of ‘the Gospels with a quite clear understanding of their innermost meaning’ but also the merit of having ‘pictorially represented, the system of manly education, supposed in old Florence to be that necessarily instituted in great

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241 “The Vaulted Book” and “The Strait Gate” In a note to this chapter Ruskin writes: “I have revised the text of this edition with care; holding it one of the most important minor letters I have written, in its aphorisms of principle with respect to education.” John Ruskin, *The Vaulted Book*, vol. 4 of *Mornings in Florence: Being Simple Studies of Christian Art, for English Travellers*. 2d ed., (Orpington, Kent: George Allen, Sunnyside, 1882), 121.
242 In a note Ruskin points out: “There is no philosophy taught either by ‘the school of Athens’, or Michael Angelo’s ‘Last Judgment,’ and the ‘Disputa’ is merely a graceful assemblage of authorities, the effects of such authority not being shown.” Ruskin, *The Vaulted Book*, 105.
earthly kingdoms or republics, animated by the Spirit shed down upon the world at Pentecost.\textsuperscript{244}

Figure 1: The Descent of the Holy Spirit, by Taddeo Gaddi and Simone Memmi, according to Ruskin.

\textsuperscript{244} Ruskin, \textit{The Vaulted Book}, 118.
Mason embraced Ruskin’s interpretation of the work and received with great enthusiasm his appreciation for the supposed educational value of this ideal pictorial representation, making it an emblem of the basis of her own philosophy of education and promoting the implications she derived from this recognition.

**Unity, Sanctity and Universality of all Knowledge**

Mason regarded the interpretation of this picture as a true revelation. For her, it portrays a unified, universal, true and profound scheme of education reflecting a true ‘measure of the thoughts of God’. The key implication of this ideal representation of education in the fresco is the fundamental unity and sanctity of all human knowledge and educational practice resulting from the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. All knowledge is equally sacred in its core, ultimately springing from the same source; therefore there should be no separation between secular and religious knowledge and life. In later writings, Mason reaffirms how this idea became a driving force for her educational philosophy and relates it to what should be the ultimate aim of education:

This idea of all education springing from and resting upon our relation to Almighty God is one which we have ever laboured to enforce. We take a very distinct stand upon this point. We do not merely give a religious education, because that would seem to imply the possibility of some other education, a secular education, for example. But we hold that all education is divine, that every good gift of knowledge and insight comes from above, that the Lord the Holy Spirit is the supreme educator of mankind, and that the culmination of all education (which may, at the same time, be reached by a little child) is that personal
knowledge of and intimacy with God in which our being finds its fullest perfection.245

Mason takes Ruskin’s interpretation of this fresco as standing for the conception of education held by the medieval church and connects it with her evangelical view of a personal relationship with God. The figures representing the seven liberal arts and the pagan men under them were supposedly recognized by the Church as ‘divinely taught and illuminated’ eliminating the distinction between secular and religious knowledge while the culmination of all education is ‘that personal knowledge of and intimacy with God’ in which it is presupposed that each human person may attain the ‘finest perfection’ which also may be the possession of a little child.

Mason claims that this interpretation is one and the same with that of the medieval mind, illustrated in the fresco. In this view, ideas are received by humanity as a gift sent from God at the appropriate time when particular persons in differing cultures, including pagans, are ready to receive them by the inspiration of the same Spirit of God. This implies that education should be an open, comprehensive liberal endeavour with universal scope.

At the middle of the painting St. Thomas Aquinas is prominently seated in a centred throne, slightly bigger than every other figure. He is portrayed holding an open book in which the following inscription, a quotation from the book of Wisdom, is written:

Figure 2: The Triumph of St Thomas, lower part of the Fresco

According to Ruskin this inscription reveals the meaning of the whole picture, which is important ‘not only as the statement of the experience of Florence in her own education, but as universally descriptive of the process for all noble education whatever.’ The Holy Spirit is seen as the giver of wisdom, which is the precondition for all knowledge, which comes as a gift of grace to all human kind. Mason

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246 “I willed, and Sense was given me. I prayed, and the Spirit of Wisdom came upon me And I set her before, (preferred her to,) kingdoms and thrones.” Wisdom 7:7-8;
247 Ruskin, The Vaulted Book, 123.
adopted Ruskin’s reading for the educational and spiritual universalizing value of this pictorial representation.

Early in 1896 she wrote an article for the *Parent’s Review*, which she also included towards the conclusion of her next book *Parents and Children*, published later in the same year, called ‘The Great Recognition.’ Presenting the picture Mason remarks that not withstanding that ‘the thoughts of God are broader than the measures of man’s mind’ it presents:

> The wealth of minds so wide in the sweep of their intelligence, so profound in their insight, that we are almost startled with the perception that here we have indeed a true measure of the thoughts of God. ...\(^{248}\)

This picture represents for Mason an inspiring ideal that should guide all educational understanding and practice as a spiritual endeavour. One aspect of the picture which neither Ruskin nor Mason cares to pay much attention to is the prominent position and size of the figure of St. Thomas placed at the centre, which when factored into the whole explains why this picture is referred today as ‘The Triumph of St. Thomas’ and not as the ‘Descent of the Holy Spirit’ or the ‘Great Recognition’. The centred position, the relative size and the quotation in St. Thomas’ hand, can be read to express the Dominican perspective concerning the authority of Thomism. It would then portray the triumph of the whole Roman Catholic medieval system of dogmatic theology sitting under divine inspiration, in triumph over every other source of knowledge. Then submission to the authoritative

teaching of the Church would become the vehicle for its interpretation harmonizing the whole by the unique wisdom of God given through the dogmatic teaching of St. Thomas as Doctor of the Roman Church. From this point of view the picture would present a quite different system of education from the interpretation of Ruskin which Mason so willingly embraced, reading into it the ideal of a liberal education providing grounds for freedom of enquiry, while the other would provide grounds for the dogmatic teaching authority of the Church.

Nevertheless, regardless of this anachronism, Mason promoted Ruskin’s liberal interpretation of this picture as a revelation which provided her general scheme for a universal and liberal education, a means of reconciliation of its inner personal evangelical spiritual roots with its outer universal scope, harmonizing the demands of a personal commitment to dogmatic truth with the freedom of conscience to investigate all knowledge upon the basis of faith in the sacredness and universality of all knowledge and truth.

**The Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life**

The ‘great recognition’ also remains implicit throughout Mason’s philosophy and work, informing the whole, wherever the adjective ‘living’ is used to describe the various fundamental aspects of education. This is due to the creedal relation central to Anglican worship which identifies the Holy Spirit as the Lord and giver of life. This demanded the educational enterprise to be conceived as more than just the acquisition of knowledge as a living experience.
The educational creed of the great recognition, continued to be at the centre of the ‘House of Education’ and the source for meditation on Whitsunday throughout Mason’s life and after. Students would come to the House to learn the art of living. Mason often used the adjective ‘living’ to describe the education she was striving for. A good education brings the intellect alive. Dry, dead, boring lessons and textbooks are signs of the absence of the ‘Spirit’ in education. She requires that ‘all the thought we offer to our children shall be living thought;’ because children are ‘spiritual beings of unmeasured powers’\textsuperscript{249} They are capable of receiving and constantly enjoying intuitions directly from the Holy Spirit through an intimate spiritual relationship.

Education has as its foundation an element of mystery that eludes systematization. Mason spoke of ‘living ideas’ and ‘living books’ set against the use of stale and second-hand knowledge and the use of textbooks, which generally lack this ‘spiritual’ quality of life. Since these are matters of the Spirit, education ought to be a personal endeavour in which parents, teachers and children personally interact with each other upon the same vital principles of life. What is true for an adult is also true for a child; whatever is dull and flat for adults must be dull and flat for children also. Every subject will have a living way of approach opposed to a deadening one.

Are we teaching geography? The child discovers with the explorer, journeys with the traveller, receives impressions new and vivid from some other mind which is immediately receiving

\textsuperscript{249} Mason, \textit{Parents and Children}, 277.
These impressions; not after they have been made stale and dull by a process of filtering through many intermediate minds, and have found at last their way into a little text-book. Is he learning history? His concern is not with strings of names and of dates, nor with nice little reading-made-easy stories, brought down, as we mistakenly say, to the level of his comprehension; we recognise that his power of comprehension is at least equal to our own, and that it is only his ignorance of the attendant circumstances we have to deal with as luminously as we can.\textsuperscript{250}

This is the reason why Mason’s method puts great emphasis in the use of the ‘best’ literature. The best writers are best because they are able to convey ‘living’ thought in the most effective manner; highly polished, well selected language expressing the best ideas in the best form, to which the spirit of children naturally responds without any effort. Second rate authors or forced contact with lesser minds is discouraged.

There is no material formula to identify a ‘living book’ but by the fruits it produces upon the reader. It should not come as a surprise that the ‘living books’ of Mason are mainly composed by the classic authors of English literature and Greek and Latin works translated into English. Mason argued that children possess greater ability than usually acknowledged to interact with the best literature from an early age:

We recognise that history for him is, to live in the lives of those strong personalities which at any given time impress themselves most upon their age and country. This is not the sort of thing to be got out of nice little history books for children, whether 'Little Arthur's,' or somebody’s 'Outlines.' We take the child to the living sources of history—a child of seven is fully able to comprehend Plutarch, in Plutarch’s own words (translated), without any diluting and with little explanation. Give him living thought in this kind, and you make possible the co-operation of

\textsuperscript{250} Mason, \textit{Parents and Children}, 278.
the living Teacher. The child's progress is by leaps and bounds, and you wonder why. In teaching music, again, let him once perceive the beautiful laws of harmony, the personality, so to speak, of Music, looking out upon him from among the queer little black notes, and the piano lesson has ceased to be drudgery.\textsuperscript{251}

All these are implications of the faith expressed in the ‘Great Recognition’ informing Mason’s method at all these various levels showing how an Anglican spirituality, combining evangelical fervour with liberal culture, i.e. based upon scripture, tradition and reason, advocating free enquiry with emphasis on a personal relationship with God, claiming to follow a Catholic medieval insight to further the universal kingdom of Christ, lies at the heart of the fundamental propositions of Mason’s educational philosophy and work.

There are further important consequences deriving from the adoption of this ‘Great Recognition.’ The work of the parent and teacher in all educational efforts is defined as an act of cooperation with the work of the Spirit of God. Good teaching invites that cooperation while bad teaching excludes it. Even a grammar lesson would be accompanied by the ‘illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, of whom is all knowledge.’\textsuperscript{252}

The ‘great recognition’ also allows Mason to address the discord between religious and secular life resulting when the spiritual life is separated by definition from valid ‘secular’ interests. Out of this conception of separation emerges an unsolvable battle which forces a person to choose between competing and mutually exclusive interests.

\textsuperscript{251} Mason, \textit{Parents and Children}, 278-9
\textsuperscript{252} Mason, \textit{Parents and Children}, 274.
Mason rejects in principle this separation which in practice implies that men must live between two separate words producing grounds for doubt and spiritual unrest.

We believe that this is the fertile source of the unfaith of the day, especially in young and ardent minds. The claims of intellect are urgent; the intellectual life is a necessity not to be foregone at any hazard. It is impossible for these to recognise in themselves a dual nature; a dual spirituality, so to speak; and, if there are claims which definitely oppose themselves to the claims of intellect, those other claims must go to the wall; and the young man or woman, full of promise and power, becomes a free-thinker, an agnostic, what you will. But once the intimate relation, the relation of Teacher and taught in all things of the mind and spirit, be fully recognised, our feet are set in a large room; there is space for free development in all directions, and this free and joyous development, whether of intellect or heart, is recognised as a Godward movement.\footnote{Mason, Parents and Children, 265.}

The Great Recognition is tied also to the original apologetic impulse that set Mason’s educational work in motion. The solution to the dilemma of having to choose between secular and religious knowledge is the recognition that there is only one spirituality, and that there is an intimate relation between all things of the mind and the spirit, all ultimately linked to one and the same source. The result is the defence of a personal freedom of enquiry allowing the person to develop her thought in every direction, to pursue interest of every kind without worries concerning their spiritual value. In other words, this conviction provides the ground for a ‘liberal’ education. Since there are no two spiritualities, every interest for the good is ultimately related to God, and every field of enquiry is open.
This does not mean that there is no intellectual sin; Mason clearly defined the danger of intellectual confusion of the good with evil, of truth with untruth, and carefully guarded people from the notion that subjective human understanding be poised as the Supreme Court and ground for truth. Revealed and dogmatic religion provides for Mason the benefit of dogmatic certainty, in spite of the many mysteries spiritual truth and revelation bring before reason. For Mason this situation should promote humility rather than doubt.

There is according to her, both intellectual as well as moral sin, and the Great Recognition allows the person who embraces that recognition to rejoice in ‘the expansion of heart and the ease and freedom of him who is always in touch with the inspiring Teacher, with whom are infinite stores of learning, wisdom, and virtue, graciously placed at our disposal.’

In this view the source and unity behind all knowledge is based upon the direct work of the Holy Spirit, giving learning both an inner personal and universal scope, which not only overcomes the division between secular and religious knowledge but also transforms the task of everyday children’s education, by making both the teacher and the learner equally ‘inspired’ and working in co-operation with God, who is the Divine Teacher of even the most simple truthful idea in all regions of knowledge and learning, with the same ultimate goal, the personal knowledge of God. Every subject is under the direction of the Holy Spirit as divine teacher.

254 Mason, Parents and Children, 276.
The child’s faith and hope and charity that we already knew; his temperance, justice, prudence, and fortitude that we might have guessed; his grammar, rhetoric, logic, music, astronomy, geometry, arithmetic, this we might have forgotten, if these Florentine teachers had not reminded us; his practical skill in the use of tools and instruments, from a knife and fork to a microscope, and in the sensible management of all the affairs of life these also come from the Lord, which is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working. His God doth instruct him and doth teach him. Recognising that ‘his God’ doth cooperate with us in the act of giving knowledge to a child, we approach the work of teaching with simplicity, sincerity and reverence.  

This understanding gives teaching and learning a sacramental and sacred nature as well as an universal character. The act of teaching becomes in this scheme more than a profession: a divine calling.

**F.D. Maurice and the ‘Great Recognition’**

Mason does not make any direct link between her ‘new’ insights about the great recognition and the theology of F.D. Maurice, but it is important to understand that these ideas were not new or alien to the making of an Anglican world view and that in fact Maurice’s thought had an important formative influence for late-Victorian Anglicanism, providing for some an effective answer and alternative to the crisis of faith many were experiencing by this time in England, by means of emphasizing the universal fatherhood of God, its concomitant idea of

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256 For example note how an Anglican pastor attempted to calm the doubts of the notorious Annie Besant in the midst of the struggle which eventually led her to declare herself an atheist. A priest and friend recommended the work of Maurice as capable of removing every obstacle to faith of their age: ‘I am saturating myself with Maurice, who is the antidote given by God to this age against all dreary doubtings and temptings of the devil to despair.’ See Annie Wood Besant, *Annie Besant: An Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus, 1893), 95-6.
the universal brotherhood of man, and the importance of the
incarnation and redemption as establishing the universal kingdom of
Christ. This also implied universal inspiration in terms very congruent
to those endorsed by Mason.

Although Mason makes no reference to this, one of the key
features of the theology of F.D. Maurice is his interpretation of the
Church of England, which helps readers to understand why Mason’s
theological presuppositions placed great emphasis upon the
universality of truth and the universal consequences of redemption, as
we saw earlier in Blunt’s exposition. One of the primary ideas
developed through Maurice’s *The Kingdom of Christ* is the notion that
there is an element of truth in every sect and religious expression.
Truth, as revealed in the prologue to John’s Gospel, was tied in the
views of some of the early fathers to the universality of the logos, the
‘light which shines upon every man coming into the world,’ giving to
the English Church, as a faithful expression of that truth in its
formularies, constitution, sacraments, Prayer Book and essential
features, a valid claim to the universal scope of the faith, and a
legitimate membership within the universal kingdom of Christ.
Maurice also pointed out the importance of spirituality in education,
in his efforts to provide for the education for the working man in his
‘Christian Socialism’ by the mid-nineteenth century.

These theological presuppositions provide a framework in which
the work of personal education can be readily harmonized to coincide
with the demands of membership within the Anglican Church and
citizenship within the British kingdom without ever questioning the possibility that the inner spirituality of the person with its personal freedom of inquiry, given by this direct inspiration, could enter into conflict with the dogmatic claims and moral requirements of these institutions. The presupposed harmony between personal freedom and religious and civic duty also provides the locus of the family a primary importance as it is the sphere in which the person first may receive a sense of duty to uphold the harmonious order essential for this conception of life.

**The Spirituality of Parents and Children**

During 1890, the first year of the publication of the *Parents’ Review*, Mason began to write a sequel to *Home Education*, published in a series of articles under the title *Parents and Children*. These articles closely reflect and elaborate upon some of Mason’s key ideas, as revealed in the ‘draft proof’ in 1888. The scope broadened, now the role of ‘parents’, as opposed to mainly mothers at home, received attention in the broader context of the family and its relationship with the school and the nation.

The spirituality of children, which will grow to become a foundational principle of Mason’s philosophy, here continued to be emphasised. Children’s spiritual nature must be taken seriously in education. Exploring the theme of ‘Parent’s as Inspirers,’ Mason begins to emphasize the role of parents as instruments of the Holy
Spirit for nurturing the spiritual life children already possess as persons.

Children are alive to a real and significant spiritual life; and the seriousness of their spiritual awareness is not to be underestimated, as adults often tend to do. Children have a higher sensibility to spiritual things than adults. ‘The spirit-world has no mysteries for them’. For children God is not a cold abstraction but a warm, breathing, spiritual Presence about his path and about his bed—a Presence in which he recognises protection and tenderness in darkness and danger, towards which he rushes as the timid child to hide his face in his mother’s skirts.  

This awareness of the exceptional spirituality of children, as compared with that of adults, will be consecrated eventually as the cornerstone of Mason’s philosophy in the principle ‘children are persons’.

We have seen that in *Home Education* Mason laid the ground for considering the family as the primary locus for the spiritual nurture of children. This emphasis will continue to be developed in *Parents and Children*. But now Mason begins to explore the external role of the family in its social function. Mason identifies a tension which exists between the demands of democratic rule and communistic societies which require absolute rule. She sees the family as the ideal place in which these potentially conflicting demands are harmonized in the role of parents as mediators able to exercise absolute rule in the

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government of the household while also satisfying the demands of the wider social order required by the interest of the nation.

The family must serve the nation. Parents have a duty to train their children beyond the selfish scope of individual benefit into social relations with other families geared toward the welfare of the nation.

‘The family is the unit of the nation’, a saying attributed by Mason to F.D. Maurice, serves to define the scope of the Divine social order which sets the context for the role of education. The nation is conceived as an organic whole, ‘a living body, built up, like the natural body, of an infinite number of living organisms.’ The family is complete only in relation to its contribution to national life. It must place public interest before private interest or like a cell working out of harmony with the body injures a living organism, so it would become injurious to it. This reflection allows Mason to present her view of the Divine order of the family in relation to the universal scope of the relationships between nations contributing to the progress of humanity towards the ideal of the fraternity of Man:

Nor are the interests of the family limited to those of the nation. As it is the part of the nation to maintain wider relations, to be in touch with all the world, to be ever in advance in the great march of human progress, so is this the attitude which is incumbent on each unit of the nation, each family, as an integral part of the whole. Here is the simple and natural realisation of the noble dream of Fraternity: each individual attached to a family by ties of love where not of blood; the families united in a federal bond to form the nation; the nations

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258 This motto could be a combination of Aristotle’s dictum: “the family is the unit of the social fabric” and FD Maurice “The sanctity of the home is the safeguard of the nation. Take care that the ornaments of the home do not become mere ornaments, pictures to be gazed at and worshiped, not living powers to purify and hallow.” See Hester M. Poole, “The Philosophy of Living,” Good Housekeeping 6, no. 7 (February 1888): 158-159.

259 Mason, Parents and Children, 6.
confederate in love and emulous in virtue, and all, nations and their families, playing their several parts as little children about the feet and under the smile of the Almighty Father.  

The family has a unique calling to fulfil this divine order. The nature and obligation of the family bond gives it a grave responsibility defining the primary place and use of every person in answer to a universal calling and divine order ruling over all life. As with the role of the Holy Spirit as ‘educator of mankind’, here the ‘Fatherhood of God’ over the whole of humanity serves as a means to establish a universal ideal reconciling the spiritual demands imposed upon the family presupposing a general harmony and continuity from the inner levels of human existence, in the spiritual life of a child, through the growing spheres of influence of the family, the nation and all of humanity. This ‘divine order’ rules over all nations, the unit of the family is not only the unit of the nation but the unity of the kingdom of God universally established upon earth. This vision of a universal divine order against which the particular demands of the spiritual life of persons is to be organized presupposes the harmony of the organic whole. It gives education a proper function as a means to enable each person to find his proper place and fulfil this divine function contributing to the universal progress of humanity and the fraternity of man.

Mason develops the practical implications of this vision without ever raising the possibility of a conflict between the interest of the individual person and the ‘divine order’ for which she is supposed in

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need of training to fulfil. The harmonious vision of this divine order working upon the nation as a ‘living organism’ imposes the abstract concept of the ‘progress of humanity’ over the concrete needs and choices of each person, family as against other persons and families and nations.

It can be seen that the identification of the Church of England as the established Church of the British Empire provided the grounds for this unproblematic ideal universality of duties. It presupposed perfect harmony between the personal faith of each churchman and woman and the noble character of a true British citizen, without ever recognizing the possibility that the principles of the Gospel, lying at the foundation of her educational interpretation, could require a radical transformation upon the other spheres, whenever a manifest conflict between the two could be found, generating a potentially unsolvable crisis of mutually exclusive demands and interests.

Anglicanism provided then both the soil for a fresh spiritual interpretation of education, recognizing the sanctity of Children, based upon evangelical principles at the time that it promoted the notion that the interest of the nation ought to prevail upon the freedom of the individual person. This unacknowledged tension presents a serious blind spot on Mason’s educational project, which I argue drove Mason’s educational project further and further away from its relatively open original home education model to one of greater subordination to the demands of an education designed to meet the requirements of the nation. We will see in the next chapter the
paradoxical development of these two polar demands. At the time that Mason made ‘Children are persons’ the foundational principle of her educational philosophy the growth of her schooling movement was eventually led to deemphasize the inner evangelical spirituality characteristic of home life and promoted in Ambleside. The importance of the gospel centred spirituality of the inner circle of Mason’s movement becomes evident in the importance the practice of meditation received in the training program of the ‘House of Education’.

**Meditation**

The emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit gave the life of ‘The House of Education’ a strong personal religious atmosphere, which found explicit expression each Sunday kept as a day of rest, in which all students were required to attend the local Anglican parish church, walking as a group following their teachers, and later would gather for ‘meditations’, lead by Mason, in the afternoon at the House.

The preceding discussion on the role of the Holy Spirit in education serves to identify Mason’s overriding emphasis upon the need for the personal nourishment of ideas as the most fundamental level of education. This need was primarily supplied by the discipline of meditation as it was promoted in the inner circle of the movement in Ambleside. Meditation was the key instrument for the nourishment of the spiritual life and education.
Mason defined meditation as a process of reflective contemplation essential for the acquisition of profound knowledge and therefore essential to Christianity:

Christianity is not merely the following of Christ, but is chiefly, the knowledge of Christ, to be attained by a constant, devout contemplation of the Divine Life. Hence, the primary importance of meditation for the Christian soul. We cannot grow into the likeness of that which is unknown to us, and we cannot know except by that process of reflective contemplation which we name meditation.  

Mason’s views on meditation should be distinguished from elaborate ways of increasing spiritual awareness that may be associated with contemporary uses of the word unrelated to traditional Anglican spirituality. In Mason’s terms meditation simply means devotional contemplative reflection upon the meaning of the word of Scripture and its relation to the truth with a view to nourish the soul with ‘heavenly’ thoughts or ‘life giving ideas,’ the most important of which is the work, life and words of Christ.

When Mason first presented the ‘great recognition’ in 1892 she made reference to the ‘spiritual sustenance of ideas’ that lies at the heart of education and is not limited to the direct influence of a person teaching another, but can be received through various means from the ultimate source, which is the Holy Spirit.

The practice of meditation appears to have been a primary discipline throughout Mason’s own life. It also became a primary aspect of her teacher training method, requiring all students to

261 Mason, “Meditation” The Parents’ Review 17, no. 9 (September 1906): 707.
262 This is an idea which Mason said was “not possible to repeat too often or too emphatically” Mason, School Education, 121.
participate from the discipline of guided meditation in the midst of Sunday rest. Since Mason left almost no autobiographical record it is not possible to trace the original sources of her views on meditation and the application of this discipline in her personal life. But an early reference in her work helps to identify this emphasis on meditation within the English tradition of noble Christian education.

**Digesting the Word**

Mason’s first book, *The Forty Shires* (1881), quotes a letter written in 1566 by Sir Henry Sidney to his son Philip Sidney, then twelve years old with a word of advice concerning his education:

> Let your first action be the lifting of your mind to Almighty God by hearty prayer, and feelingly digest the words you speak in prayer, with continual meditation and thinking of Him to whom you pray, and of the matter for which you pray.

According to Mason’s account, Philip Sidney plentifully fulfilled the desire of his father so that ‘Never was Englishman more beloved or more mourned for than he. Three hundred years have passed since his early death, and his name is still dear to English people.’ This passing reference to the letter gives us the first instance in Mason’s writing where meditation is linked to the notion of feelingly digesting the words spoken in prayer. Mason never proposed elaborate schemes for meditation beyond providing a simple and regular space for

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devotional reflection upon the meaning of the words of scripture and
the works of nature in prayer and literature, from where the spirit
receives the ‘sustenance of ideas’ with a view to deepen in the soul the
impression of their truth. In fact her working definition of meditation,
although she never quotes him in this regard, is consistent with the
exhortations given by the famous puritan minister of mid 17th
century, Richard Baxter, who speaking on the ‘Nature of Heavenly
Contemplation’ in the 13th chapter of his classic work on spirituality
‘The Saints Everlasting Rest’ says:

As digestion turns food into chyle and blood, for vigorous
health: so meditation turns the truths received and remembered
into warm affection, firm resolution, and holy conversation.267

For Baxter the most important subject for meditation is death and
eternal life, the subject of his book. He also recommends Sundays, the
day of rest, as the ideal time, especially sundown, to meditate upon
eternal life. The analogy between digestion and reflection and food for
the body acting analogously to ideas as food for the soul appears to
have been a common notion shared by some of Mason’s close
associates.268 For example, Robert Dunning, who years before at the
Home and Colonial Training College trained and helped Mason
become a teacher, relates this notion to the education of Children.269

Another source from which Mason derived inspiration
concerning the nature of ideas and the importance of ‘reflection’ is the

267 Richard Baxter, Saints Everlasting Rest (Boston: Perkins and Marvin, 1833), 302.
268 See also, T.G. Rooper, “A Study of the First Psalm,” The Parents’ Review 3, no. 12 (January
1893): 887-92. Rooper recommends the work of Bishop Jeremy Taylor composing a prayer
about meditation based upon Psalm 1 as an example of a devotional exercise useful for older
students.
269 Robert Dunning, “Characteristics of Childhood,” The Parents’ Review 4, no. 1 (February
1893): 53.
work of S.T. Coleridge, who also influenced F.D. Maurice. In her 1892 catechetical question and answer defining P.N.E.U. principles Mason follows the ‘great recognition’ with the following question:

Are the ideas suggested by the Holy Spirit confined to the sphere of the religious life?

No; Coleridge, speaking of Columbus and the discovery of America, ascribes the origin of great inventions and discoveries to the fact that ‘certain ideas of the natural world are presented to minds, already prepared to receive them, by a higher Power than Nature herself.’

Mason’s notions regarding meditation follow Coleridge’s lead regarding the habit of ‘reflection’ in relation to the formation of a methodical mind which is built up by the discipline of meditation. Indeed, the principles upon which Coleridge’s Aids to Reflection was built contain many seminal ideas which are consistent with Mason’s views on the value of the study of words and the need for reflection upon the words of revelation for the development of a Christian mind, which she aimed at with her educational philosophy.

The ‘scriptural’ emphasis on knowledge and inquiry, peculiar, according to Coleridge, to the Judeo-Christian Scripture’s view of inspiration, requires a corresponding emphasis on reflection—which Mason prefers to call meditation—viewed, not as an emptying of the mind to receive enlightenment beyond thought, but as a filling of the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{270}}\text{Mason, “P.N.E.U. Principles,” The Parents’ Review 3, no. 5 (June 1892): 357.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{271}}\text{Mason, Parents and Children, 35.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{273}}\text{See Coleridge, Preface to Aids to Reflection (Liverpool: Edward Howell, 1873), xv-xxi and “Aphorism XI”, 5.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{274}}\text{Mason makes a distinction between reflection and meditation, suggesting that reflection is the act of ruminating on information received in the past while meditation grows beyond it searching for new insights following ideas to develop new connections and discover new relations of thought. See “Aspects of Intellectual Training” in Mason, School Education, 121.}\]
mind with truth, which received in a humble heart, and pursued in a continuous discipline, will lead the soul to grow in knowledge and faith. Also, Mason acknowledges Coleridge’s influence on her views of the nature of ideas as a ‘live thing of the mind’ or ‘a spiritual germ endowed with vital force with power’ which grows like a seed and acts like ‘meat to the mind’ Mason developed her educational method built upon these premises, linking these insights directly with the teaching of the Gospel:

Does this doctrine of ideas as the spiritual food needful to sustain the immaterial life throw any light on the doctrines of the Christian religion? Yes; the Bread of Life, the Water of Life, the Word by which man lives, the ‘meat to eat which ye know not of,’ and much more, cease to be figurative expressions, except that we must use the same words to name the corporeal and the incorporeal sustenance of man. We understand, moreover, how suggestions emanating from our Lord and Saviour, which are of His essence, are the spiritual meat and drink of His believing people. We find it no longer a ‘hard saying,’ nor a dark saying, that we must sustain our spiritual selves upon Him, even as our bodies upon bread.

Here we have in the strongest possible terms an identification of Jesus as ‘the Word’ with the meaning and ‘sustenance’ of every other ‘word,’ implying the unity of truth linked to the person of Christ, which provides nourishment for the soul and conveys unity to the whole of existence, corporeal and incorporeal, relative to its spiritual foundation in him, as a presupposition to understand all life and knowledge. This is why meditation upon the words of the Gospel came to have such a prevalent emphasis on Mason’s House and her poetry on the Gospel, to be discussed in the next chapter, takes its lead.

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As noted in chapter two, Mason also highly treasured the work of the Rev. John Keble. His poetry devotionalally surveyed the lessons of the Christian Year following the Sunday lessons and collects of the Prayer Book. In developing a pattern for Sunday meditation for her ‘House of Education’ Mason incorporated these various insights, catholic and evangelical, informing the Anglican spirituality of her time. Mason connected the inner side of her educational work with the worship tradition of moderate Anglicanism, emphasizing the practice of meditation on Sunday afternoons, observed as a day of rest which was a characteristic feature of the moral influence of evangelicalism upon England even during that time of doubt.

**Meditations at The House of Education**

Early in the life of ‘The House of Education,’ on each Sunday afternoon the whole college would gather to participate in a class exercise that the students called ‘meds.’ This was a time in which Mason directed the group on a series of talks upon the Gospels, which

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278 Another source which appears to have influenced Mason’s views on meditation is Alexander Whyte, who visited the House of Education during the summer of 1894 and taught on Sunday afternoons sharing his work on Dante’s Divine Comedy, William Law, and the mysticism of Jacob Behmen. Whyte had previously taught on these in his young adult Sunday evening class for which he prepared books presenting his research on these subjects. Among the surviving books in Mason’s personal library we found two books by Whyte, Characters and Characteristics of William Law and Jacob Behmen an Appreciation which Whyte gave to Mason as a present in 1895. Also there is one book given by Mrs I. E. Whyte dedicated to Mason in March 1903 in Ambleside: A Little Book of Life and Death, selected and arranged by Elizabeth Waterhouse, which begins with one of Baxter’s poems concerning Death which Mason quotes in Volume 3 of her poetry on the life of Christ.

279 “There is hardly a more precious inheritance to be handed on than that of the traditional English Sunday, stripped of its austerities, we hope, but keeping its character of quiet gladness and communion with Nature as well as with God.” Mason, “Some Aspects of Religious Education,” School Education, 144.

she called ‘meditations.’ This directed Bible study was in place at least since 1895 and continued after Mason’s death.

Cholmondeley, relating her own experience as a student during the years 1918-19, presents a detailed picture of a Sunday in ‘The House of Education’, stressing its reservation as a day of rest. Sundays were not for walks and out-door activities:

There was a complete rest from ordinary duties. It was not to be a day for letter writing, nor a day for making up for lost time. No strenuous expeditions were allowed or social events. Its restfulness depended upon seemingly trivial arrangements within the house itself. The students used different rooms and had access to books of poetry, essays, biography and works of art and travel. Fine Sunday afternoons were spent in the college garden and along the Terrace Walk. The day was well filled. Church going was compulsory and for an hour in the afternoon Miss Mason held her ‘Meditations’ or ‘Meds’.281

Cholmondeley explains that the talks were a way to learn to ‘read the gospels dwelling upon our Lord’s words and works,’ to derive fresh inspiration for the educational work. Although students were accepted from any denominational background they were all required to attend the local Anglican parish each Sunday morning,282 following their teachers walking as a group to and from Church, keeping very little contact with the rest of life in Ambleside.283

We have further witness to the content and atmosphere of these meditations in the early years and their impact upon some of those who attended. Frances Blogg, who later became Mrs. G.K. Chesterton, was the Secretary of the Parent’s National Educational Union in

282 Some students were personally instructed for confirmation and in the use of the Prayer Book by Mason. See Mary Yates’s diary, January 1907, Box CM17, Charlotte Mason Archive, 3.
283 “There was little social connection with Ambleside itself” John Inman, The Story of Charlotte Mason College, 29.
London in 1895. In 1923 as part of the tributes to Mason’s memory she recalled her first visit to ‘The House of Education’ in Advent 1895 and the long lasting impression she derived from it, reflecting her anxiety as a new-comer to the House she spoke about Masons Sunday afternoon talks:

We assembled in the drawing room, it looked so countrified to my London eyes, and the trunk and branches of a cherry tree outside the window held my attention—as well as a portrait of Matthew Arnold on the wall. Trees and Arnold might help me I thought to keep my nervousness within bounds. I remember Miss Mason and her gentle smile and voice as she explained my presence to the others there. The actual words of her talk I have forgotten, but I hope not the spirit. ‘That thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed’ was the stone upon which she built a complete ‘House of Education’ for us that afternoon—explaining how thoughts could be translated into action when revealed, and like young plants bear fruit in due season in the lives of the young children who were to carry on the work.

This description illustrates the typical tenor of these talks. A text of the Gospel was read in connection with the season of the Christian year and principles of education and life would be derived from it. Mrs. Chesterton goes on to tell how the teaching received that afternoon made a mark upon her memory and life. She compares Charlotte Mason with a prophetess, whose prophecy would be fulfilled ‘slowly and surely,’ delivering a ‘wealth of thought’ to her disciples that they in turn would put into action in the service of others.

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284 “Netta ascribed much of her peace of mind to her domestic staff and to her secretaries. Frances Blogg had been General Secretary of the P.N.E.U., but after a time abandoned that arduous task to take up the still more arduous one of being wife to G.K. Chesterton.” Gibbon, Netta, 175.


286 A reading from Luke 2:34, telling Simeon’s prophecy on the occasion of Jesus presentation at the temple. This is a lesson appointed for the period of Advent in preparation for the celebration of Christmas in expectation of the Second the Coming of Christ.

287 Frances Chesterton, “An Impression” in In Memoriam, 83.
In this way the spiritual foundation of the educational work was regularly emphasized creating a long lasting impression and investing the work with the imprint of a sacred calling.

We can all say of Miss Mason’s work for children and true education, that it dealt with those primary conceptions of the intense value of every human soul that nothing of God’s gifts given direct by God Himself, or through the instrument of his creatures could be too good for it. I think I had the impression that this was the thought in her heart that Sunday that she was revealing to us, and that we on our part were earnestly desiring that it might be the spirit in which the work could be accomplished and the only way in which it could ever be accomplished. 288

Although Frances Blogg’s commitment on Charlotte Mason’s philosophy and movement have been overlooked, this tribute clearly reveals the impact of Mason’s teaching upon her, who in turn was instrumental in G.K. Chesterton’s conversion. 289 In 1896, Miss Blogg was acting as Secretary of the P.N.E.U. in London, and shared with many of the P.N.E.U. members an Anglican commitment which set them apart from the skepticism common in the culture of the time. Frances commitment to the P.N.E.U. and its ideals continued throughout her life; although her direct involvement with the movement decreased with time. 290

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288 Frances Chesterton, “An Impression” in In Memoriam, 84.
289 For example, see Adam Schwartz, “The Road to Rome: Chesterton’s Spiritual Journey,” Christian History Magazine 21, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 10. “In 1896, he met and became enamored with Frances Blogg, an officer of a London debating salon. Chesterton admired her confidence and discovered that it was rooted in her devout High Anglican faith. Her religion was ‘the unique quality that cut her off from the current culture and saved her from it.’ Chesterton credited Frances with leading him from his vestigial Unitarianism to Anglicanism.” This article identifies Frances Blogg as an “officer of a London debating salon” The “debating salon” is more likely the Office of the P.N.E.U. in Victoria Street, London, which GK. Chesterton used to visit while he was courting Miss Blogg during 1896.
290 GK Chesterton was invited in various occasions to read papers at meetings of P.N.E.U. branches and made contributions to The Parents’ Review. See “The Nativity” a poem By G.K. Chesterton in The Parents’ Review 8, no. 12 (December 1897): 749 and “P.N.E.U. Notes” The Parents’ Review 13, no. 4 (April 1902): 317-318. This is a review of his presentation to the Harrow branch. In that occasion he spoke “On the Neglect of Aestheticism in Education.”
In Frances Blogg’s personal account we see the basic pattern of the method of meditation led by Mason, in which the Gospel was read with the challenges and problems of education in mind, as to inspire and give guidance to the application of the principles revealed in them, applied to Mason’s philosophy.

‘Scale How Meditations’ on the Gospel of St John

A first record of the ‘Meditations’ was printed in *The Parents’ Review*, January 1898\(^{291}\) in order to recruit subscribers to receive a printout of the meditations by mail. This service lasted for a year. In spite of reiterated calls for support, the service never received enough subscribers to afford its continuation, which suggest that not all subscribers of the P.N.E.U. were as enthusiastic concerning this aspect of the movement as were closer members of the Ambleside circle. There were various degrees of commitment to Mason’s ideas and projects among the readers of *The Parents’ Review*, especially in its religious overtones.

In February 1899 it was announced that the service would be discontinued for lack of sufficient subscribers.\(^{292}\) It is interesting that at the time Mason did not use the *Parents’ Review* to continue the

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291 Mason, “Simplicity a Bible Study” *The Parents’ Review* 9, no. 1 (January 1898): 46. Mason remarks following this article: “Our readers will perceive that we have tried to “catch them with guile,” by publishing the substance of two or three “Meditations” as an article under the heading of *Simplicity.*” Mason, “Our Work”, *The Parents’ Review* 9, no. 1 (January. 1898): 55.

distribution of the meditations, but rather waited until later, when the rest of the surviving meditations of 1898-99 were published.²⁹³

The written prose meditations were never printed together in book form and although Cholmondely makes reference to them²⁹⁴ as the foundation for Mason’s poetry,²⁹⁵ they have been so far overlooked as a primary source shedding light upon Mason’s spirituality and theological views. In Charlotte Mason’s Archive there is a collection of the original 1898 documents that belonged to Elsie Kitching. The collection, which we will refer to as ‘Scale How Meditations’,²⁹⁶ is found among the surviving books of Mason’s library without any indication as to who wrote them or of what they represent. The documents are numbered and placed in chronological order under the title invocation of Dominus Illuminatio Mea,²⁹⁷

This important collection of prose meditations allows us to follow Mason’s Sunday teaching for almost a whole year of instruction in the early period of ‘The House of Education’. This series has been overlooked in every major study of Mason’s philosophy until now. The collection of ‘Scale How Meditations’ contains a verse-by-verse

²⁹³ Mason reproduced parts of the introduction of 1898, for an article on meditation in 1904 and a republication of the meditations from 1906-1909 in The Parents’ Review. Mason, “Meditation” The Parents’ Review 17, no. 9 (September 1906): 707.
²⁹⁴ Cholmondeley quotes a section from the first meditation naming the text as a “Preface to Prose Meditation on St. Johns Gospel,” Cholmondeley, The Story of Charlotte Mason, 186.
²⁹⁶ The collection is bound with no title or pagination or date of publication. The text corresponds with the description given by Cholmondeley and the articles that appeared during 1906 in The Parents’ Review attributed to Mason. The heading of each of the 30 meditations of the original series bears the title “Scale How Meditations”, the number in the series and the chapter and verses discussed. Some of them also identify the date including the name of the Sunday in the liturgical year in which they were read. At the end of Meditation 2, we find a note explaining that for the Sunday of February 6th 1898 there would be no meditation as Charlotte Mason was sick.
²⁹⁷ This is the Latin title for Psalm 27 in the Prayer Book’s Psalter corresponding to the opening sentence of the Psalm ‘The Lord is My Light’.
commentary on the Gospel of Saint John from chapter one to chapter seven verse fifty. It reveals Mason as a theological thinker and confirms the process of reading and interpretation of Scripture which Mason used as the primary ground to inform her educational views. All the chapters of the book of John on which the meditations are based have their counterpart in her later poetic works. It is possible, therefore, to compare these two sources to see in detail how Mason’s theological thinking evolved from prose to poetry over time, suggesting many interesting insights which we cannot fully explore within the length of this exploration.

The Meditations provide detailed discussions of the teachings of this Gospel in relation to Mason’s educational views and general religious opinions and the challenge to faith of the times. She deals with many issues of importance included in the beginning chapters of the Gospel of John, like: ‘In the beginning was the Word’, the ministry of John the Baptist, the new birth, the sacraments, Christ as the Bread of life, the doctrine of election and others. For example, the first meditation, taken from the notes of a student, explains Charlotte Mason’s view of the relevance of meditation for the spiritual life and the value of Saint John’s Gospel as an answer to the perplexing questions affecting the spiritual life of her generation. Mason begins by stressing the relevance of meditation as a necessary discipline for the spiritual life which cannot be dependent on one’s own effort to uplift our spirits. The spiritual life depends upon the nourishment of the soul with new ideas from God.
This meditation provides a direct window into the inner spiritual climate characteristic of ‘The House of Education’. More clearly than almost anywhere else, it reveals Mason’s thorough attachment to Anglican spirituality and the value and formative effect of its formularies upon devotional life. Mason points out that the early church had a better understanding of the importance of the practice of meditation than the contemporary Church and then identifies plainly meditation as ‘a spiritual process analogous to that of digestion,’ pointing out how the Anglican Church has made provision for this:

It is not what we read or what we hear that sustains us, but what we appropriate; what we take home to our minds and ruminate upon,—reading a passage over and over, or dwelling, again and again upon a thought, rejoicing in a ‘fresh thought of God’ as a thing to be thankful for, a quickening influence to make us alive and active when a palsy of deadness and staleness appears to be creeping over us. We all have a spiritual life to sustain and we all need the periodic nourishment of new, or newly put, thoughts of God. We do not always sufficiently recognise how our Church has provided for this need in the weekly portion set before us in Collect, Epistle, and Gospel. In these we find, year by year, new thoughts and new teachings unfolding themselves whereby we might well advance to the statures of the perfect man.298

Mason refers to the collects of the Book of Common Prayer and the Church’s liturgical calendar appointed readings for each Sunday as a primary source for meditation in order to grow in discipleship, referring to the Anglican church as ‘our Church’ when addressing the students and teachers of the House. Once more a lesser known record of her writings reveals the enthusiastic gospel-centered Anglican and

298 Mason, Scale How Meditations, no. 1.
apologetic character of Mason’s thought within its inner circle in its original stages.

Mason also stresses the reading and meditation upon the Gospel as the most important reading for meditation, from which to interpret the rest of the Scripture, which appears to be another sign of the influence of John Keble.299 Again a Christ centred apologetic is emphasized. St. John’s Gospel presents, for Mason, the final revelation of Christ in the words of one who knew Jesus with the kind of knowledge which only comes from deep love, for: ‘insight, comprehension, is the privilege of love,’ John provides an appropriate message for the age of spiritual perplexity and doubt they were living at. Mason identifies the spiritual climate of her time with that in which St John wrote, answering the conflict between philosophy and religion by emphasizing the person of Christ, which, she argues, provides a paradigm to follow in order to find a solution to the conflict between Science and Religion of her own time. Mason hoped for a new prophet like him, able to reconcile the two ‘revelations’ then in apparent unsolvable conflict. In the meanwhile one must learn to wait with patience, holding two apparently contradictory truths until further light may be granted to solve the difficulty, by trusting in Christ as the Word of God, who was in the beginning.

299 “Principal Shairp has singled it out as one of the special characteristics of Keble that, combined with devout reverence for the Person of our Lord, there is in him, first perhaps of his contemporaries, a closer, more personal love to Him as a living Friend. Again, Dean Church has said that one result of Tractarianism was the increased care for the Gospels and study of them as compared with other parts of the Bible.” Walter Lock, John Keble (London: Methuen & Co., 1905), 69.
Mason’s sets the teaching of ‘the Word’ as a paradigm for the answer to the difficulty posed by the theory of Evolution, pointing to an origin opposed to biblical revelation:

‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.’ Here we have, in a single wonderful sentence, deliverance from harassing perplexities of the intellect, a satisfaction for the inmost cravings of the heart. In these days, when Evolution has changed the basis of human thought, when if we trace ourselves back to the beginning, we find our origin in some low form of life, when, if we look forward to the end, we find if we have lost our first faith, no place for angel or spirit or any such thing, what a rest of soul it is to know that ‘in the beginning was the Word and The Word was God.’ With this knowledge we can face the beginning and the end. Our painful curiosity about our origin and our end is not satisfied, but our thoughts are diverted, and we find rest in the divine Person with whom is all knowledge.300

Upon this declaration of faith, Mason goes on to emphasize ‘The Word’ who is God as the source to satisfy our spiritual hunger, quoting Hebrews 4:13, highlighting the theological implications of St. John’s preface, the ‘perfect love of the divine Son and of the divine Father was there through all eternity’. Mason also suggests that the name of Christ, as ‘the life’ could be the key to achieve the reconciliation between science and religion, as ‘the logos’ had been the name to address the perplexity St. John allegedly addressed between philosophy and religion.

**Scale How Meditations and the Draft Letter**

Another interesting feature of these meditations is that they also reflect the language and primary thoughts appearing in the ‘draft

letter’ of 1888 discussed in the previous chapter. There are some remarkable coincidences of themes, language and emphasis between the ‘draft letter’ and the record of *Scale How Meditations*, which help to confirm the ‘draft letter’, as an authentic document written by Mason revealing the intimate side of her personal life, thought and experience. For example, in the meditations Mason addresses the problem of how to deal with family conflict arising when the views of parents and children grow to differing convictions. The problem and solution is the same presented in the draft letter from the perspective of the parents\textsuperscript{301} and in the Meditations from that of the young person;\textsuperscript{302} the solution being to talk frankly and accept plainly the differences, respecting each other’s honest point of view avoiding the need for a breach of personal relationships.

Also, the same argument is used to illustrate the limitations of scientific knowledge by focusing upon the ‘mystery of life’ in very similar terms. In this regard the meditations state:

> Again (v.4), we come to another of those problems for which no solution has yet been found—the origin of life. We can chemically analyse protoplasm and recombine the elements, but the result is not life.\textsuperscript{303}

The draft letter raises the same point:

> how we know nothing yet of fundamental truths—where and what is life? for instance the life of a man or a plant. In protoplasm, which consists of this and that? Yes, but put this and that together in due proportions to make (life) protoplasm, and - life is not there. Not impossibly the next turn of the wheel.

\textsuperscript{301} Mason, *Draft Letter*, 2.
\textsuperscript{302} Mason, *Scale How Meditations*, no. 8, John 2:4.
will find us spending our strength in renewed search for that elixir—the hope of the past.\textsuperscript{304}

and again back to the meditations:

Here we have the secret disclosed which men in all ages have laboured to discover. At one time this dream was of an elixir which contained the subtle principle present in every leaf of every tree, in the giddy whirl of summer gnats, as truly as in man, present everywhere, but for ever eluding scrutiny and test. To-day we think we have advanced because we no longer speak of the vital principle as an elixir but as protoplasm, the chemical contents of which we know all about, but yet are we no nearer the divine secret.\textsuperscript{305}

These quotations clearly show how Mason presents the main argument with the same terms ‘protoplasm’ and the ‘elixir of life’ concerning our ignorance of the ‘mystery of life’. But the most remarkable cross reference between these two documents is a direct reference in the meditations to the same novel \textit{Robert Elsmere} responding to the objection that ‘Miracles do not happen’ with the same notion that doubts are the result of the limitations of human knowledge and that the advance in scientific knowledge will lead scientist to lower the strength of their objections:

Perhaps, for example a completer knowledge of what we call the laws of nature would silence once and for all the objections of those who believe that, in the words of Robert Elsmere,—'miracles do not happen.' But the temper of students, both of natural science and of historical criticism, is becoming daily more candid and gentle; they are less and less disposed, to believe that the last word has been spoken, are more open to the conviction that fuller light might resolve their doubts.\textsuperscript{306}

\textsuperscript{304} Mason, \textit{Draft Letter}, 13.
\textsuperscript{305} Mason, \textit{Scale How Meditations}, no. 17, John 5:26.
\textsuperscript{306} Mason, \textit{Scale How Meditations}, no. 30, John 7:42. Compare with the draft letter: “Robert Elsmere, for instance, loses his head entirely on the assumption that ‘miracles do not happen.” now it really should not be hard to fortify my children against such an attack as this. They must learn physical science, not only for the joy of reading the open secrets of nature, but that they may know and go safely in the knowledge,—how extremely little is open as yet to the most patient investigation; how soon we come to a blank wall in any field we follow; how we know nothing yet of fundamental truths—where and what is life? for instance the life of a man or a plant. In protoplasm, which consists of this and that? Yes, but put this
This remarkable coincidence of arguments, ideas and terms offers further confirmation of the original apologetic aim underlying Mason’s educational work at its inner levels, and also provides further confirmation that the draft proof was written by Mason, suggesting as we saw in the last chapter, the possibility that at some point in her life Mason may have written as a married woman and prospective mother.

Mason placed meditation at the heart of the educational process:

A third condition is necessary; men must not only attend and receive spiritual food, but they must assimilate it with some process answering to what we call digestion in the case of physical food; they must meditate upon what they have heard, ponder in their hearts, ‘keep’ it, live upon it.

Meditation is the key to spiritual growth and education. Education is not the mere presentation of ideas before the mind, it is not a passive process for the mind of children or adults but an active one. Mason’s emphasis on presenting ideas, and the tendency of ideas to grow on their own once received in the mind, does not imply a passive view of

and that together in due proportions to make (life) protoplasm, and — life is not there. Not impossibly the next turn of the wheel will find us spending our strength in renewed search for that elixir- the hope of the past. Then, for the miracle of resurrection, who shall say that it is impossible whilst science knows so little of the miracle of birth; Laws of nature? how few of them we know! and who is to determine therefore, what is, or is not a miracle? This ground at any rate, the most advanced (and skeptical) of our scientist have abandon reached: they decline to say that miracles do not happen: and affirm only that the Bible miracles have not been proved to their satisfaction: a quite different matter and by no means the last word on the subject- for those who have read much of the eclectic literature proper to the most advanced thinkers. Here are miracles of today which make the outsider (believer) smile remembering the old charge, that skepticism and superstition go hand in hand.” Mason, Draft Letter, 13-4.

307 There are other instances in which Mason stresses the relationship between education and meditation, see for example Meditation 19, commenting on John 6:2, where Mason identifies three characteristics of the learning process using the example of Jesus as a paradigm for all education.

education. Learning requires effort; ultimately all education is self-
education and requires meditation even in the life of young children.

**How Children Meditate**

The series of Scale How Meditations, with some additions, was
published in the *Parents’ Review* from 1906 to 1909 with a short
introductory note, making no reference to their original use and past
composition. In this introductory note, Mason recommends the
practice of meditation for small children following an article on
‘Teaching Children to Pray’, by the Rev. Prebendary J.S. Northcote.309
Again Mason stresses the importance of meditation for the growth of
the spiritual life, the need for parents and teachers to practise this in
their own life and the possibility of guiding even very small children to
practise meditation in the morning or evening devotions, detailing the
method to help them perform this task by the practice of silent
narration.310

As noted before, Mason also stresses that the chief thing in life
is to know God, and this can only be achieved through the process of
reflective contemplation. 311 Quoting the same anecdote as in the first
Meditation of 1898, concerning Darwin’s recommendation of

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310 It will probably come as a surprise to contemporary readers to learn that Mason first identified narration as a suitable means to help children in meditation. There is practically no reference made by Mason in *The Parent’s Review* to narration previous to this first instance in 1906 in reference to meditation and not in reference to school lessons. As we will show in the next chapter, the demands of school education, requiring methods suitable for bigger groups of children began to acquire a primary focus on Mason’s work around 1904 and after.

meditation as the best course in the pursuit of science, Mason highlights the importance of meditation for the Christian life because knowledge of Christ is the essence of Christianity. ‘Knowledge’ here implies more than intellectual information. It denotes a relation of intimacy with that which is known. This principle covers equally the spiritual life of adults as that of children. Therefore, she asks, how and how early may children meditate?

Parents and teachers should not allow their Bible lessons to be drowned in words of instruction. Children have an active principle in their minds that generates ideas. Too much talk in explanations and exhortations tends to numb this natural capacity in them. To avoid this, Mason’s advice is to keep things short and simple. The daily Bible reading should be clearly presented, with only enough information as to satisfy the children’s curiosity about any unknown reference in the text. This should be enough to provide material for children’s minds to be active in private meditation even at a young age, which is achieved by means of narration.

Children of any age are capable and enjoy ‘telling’ a story to themselves when they are alone. Parents should recommend their children to re-tell the story later to themselves. In such simple exercise the child will be meditating:

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312 “It is told that Mr Romanes once asked Darwin to advise him as to the best course to take in the pursuit of science. The answer of the elder scientist was ‘Meditate.’ If meditation be the secret of success in the scientific, much more must it be so in the spiritual, life: for, as has been well said by the late Dean Church, the spiritual life must be nourished upon ideas, and not merely emotionally stimulated. We are transformed by the renewing of our minds, and with the renewed vigour imparted by ‘new thoughts of God,’ we are again enable for the spiritual activities of prayer, praise, and godly endeavour.” Mason, The Parents’ Review 17, no. 9, (September 1906): 707.
here we have meditation, not in its initial stage, but in perfection; because this act of mental narration has the curious effect of bringing before the mind’s eye the persons and the action of the tale, somewhat as they would appear in a cinematography; and, with the progress of the story and the action of the figures, come into the mind the ideas proper to it—you meditate in the fullest sense of the word.\textsuperscript{313}

Mason makes no differentiation between adult and child meditation. Like adults, children meditate in the ‘fullest sense’ of the word. In concluding this introduction Mason remarks that the most important part of the preparation of a mother or a teacher of ‘Divine life’ to children is her own discipline of devout meditation.\textsuperscript{314} The rule of life for adults is essentially the same one as that for children. The only difference is the application of the principles according to levels of capacity, but the spiritual life is as much a reality in children as it is in adults. Adults should not underestimate the spiritual life of children, but should nourish it with ideas as well as they nourish their bodies. Today one of the most obvious marks of the practice of Mason’s method is the use of narration. Yet, since this emphasis on Meditation is not highlighted in the synopsis of 1904 and is only referenced lightly in the educational series, the connection between narration and meditation is easily missed. Narration can be interpreted as a group counterpart to the individual practice of silent narration by which the children may engage in meditation, regarded as a most important discipline for the spiritual life of both adults and children.

\textsuperscript{313} Mason, \textit{The Parents’ Review} 17, no. 9, (September 1906): 708.
\textsuperscript{314} Mason, \textit{The Parents’ Review} 17, no. 9, (September 1906): 708-9.
Sacramental View of Nature

Another foundational aspect of Mason’s theological view is clearly revealed in the *Scale How Meditations*, which has important repercussions in her educational theory in terms of the importance of the study of nature and her conception of life. The sacramental nature of reality is primarily disclosed by the interpretation of the meaning of the Gospel sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. On the fifth Meditation commenting on John 1:32 concerning the ‘Spirit descending as a Dove’ to reveal the Christ to John the Baptist, Mason asserts how many ordinary things have been hallowed by the gospel’s use of them to ‘convey deeper truths’. She then suggests that these objects are more than isolated instances, but rather:

> are but types of the rest chosen to point to us the fact that nature teems with teaching of the things of God, that every leaf on every tree is inscribed with the divine Name, that the myriad sounds of summer are articulate voices, that all nature is symbolic, or as has been better said, is sacramental. Realizing the close correspondence and inter-dependence between things natural and things spiritual, that God nowhere leaves Himself without a witness, and that every beauteous form and sweet sound is charged with teaching for us, had we eyes to see and ears to hear, we shall better understand any single emblem brought before us than if we suppose it to be chosen arbitrarily and taken away from its connection with the natural world.\(^{315}\)

Mason continues her reflection focusing on the dove as sign of the Holy Spirit in its multiple associations with redemptive history for the Church, indicating the joy and consolation derived from the idea that at the Baptismal font the Holy Spirit comes also as a dove upon the person so that Christ’s presence in the heart produces ‘quietness

\(^{315}\) Mason, *Scale How Meditations*, no. 5, John 1:32.
and confidence’ by the same Spirit. Later in the meditations, commenting on chapter 3, Nichodemus’ conversation with Jesus, Mason identifies baptism with regeneration saying that baptism had a divine and mysterious meaning. She describes it as a ‘sacramental Baptism with hidden meanings, out of which a man became a new creature, because the Spirit of God came upon his spirit,’ a view reflecting the sacramental teaching of the Anglican Church in its formularies and language of the Anglican Prayer Book.

In similar fashion the Meditations contain a detailed discussion of the sacramental meaning of the Holy Communion in relation to the discourse concerning the bread of life in Chapter six of the Gospel of John. In this context Mason affirms that the secret of Jesus’ kingdom is that only those who receive into their hearts communications from the Father come to Jesus and have eternal life. She affirms the uniqueness of Christ saying that ‘there is no vision of the Father for men only in Christ,’ and that faith in the word of Jesus grants eternal life already within this life, for him ‘that believeth hath already that fulfilment of desire which is eternal life, that satisfaction of his soul’s hunger which the ‘bread of life’ alone gives.’ She identifies the meaning of Jesus’ teaching concerning the bread of life as the most important teaching of the Gospel, that Jesus is the sustenance of the life of men, which finds sacramental realization in the Last Supper, in

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spite of the controversies of the interpretation of this sign which has divided Christianity.

‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’ Here we have an epitome of the controversy which has raged in the Church for many centuries, and is raging hotly as ever to-day. In this discourse of the bread of life our Lord sets forth the general principle that he is the sustenance of His people, that, whenever they manifest life, in whatever direction, that life, that power and joy, is immediately derived from Him. S. John does not tell us of the institution of that Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ whereto His people are required to come on set occasions, that they may be especially and peculiarly sustained; but the twelve who were present when—‘Jesus took bread and blessed and brake it; and he gave to the disciples and said, Take, eat, this is My body’—must have recognised in those words a summing up of the discourse which had in earlier days tested their faith. The teaching at the Last Supper, with its outward and visible signs, is the summing up and embodiment of this unfolding to men of the means whereby they live.319

Mason follows with a summary of the main contending views of interpretation concerning the question of ‘how’ this feeding happens and suggesting that the part of the believer is to partake of ‘the spiritual eating and spiritual drinking,’ and leave it to him to impart his flesh, which is meat indeed, and His blood, which is drink indeed, how He will.320 Mason’s solution is to stop asking the wrong question of ‘how’ and focus attention upon obeying the command to feed upon Christ, since every attempt to define beyond the word given by Christ leads to contention and schism, so that the best answer to the conflict is to:

make it our prayer that the eyes of all Christian people, whether clergy or laity, be turned away from the sore and burning question of how the spiritual life is imparted, and be turned

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320 The language of “spiritual drinking and eating” reflects the influence of the liturgy of the Anglican Prayer Book.
towards that most comforting assurance, that, if we will eat we shall be fed, and in feeding upon Christ shall have everlasting life.\textsuperscript{322}

In this discussion about the ‘living bread,’ identifying Christ as ‘the sustenance of life’ and his word as ‘the principle of life’ receiving its greatest expression in the sacrament of the Holy Communion, Mason derives a paradigm to interpret the whole of nature as being designed to reveal spiritual truth by means of material objects. Earlier in the meditations Mason had anticipated the scope of the implications of this sacramental understanding in relation to the Lord’s Supper, revealing that all ‘life is a manifestation of the very life of God’. The Bread and the wine are both products of living seed and living fruit, and these are tokens of the principle that our life is sustained by living food, revealing the same spiritual principle:

\begin{quote}
All the life that we have, of whatever sort, is the life of Christ, and in proportion as we realise that which is least, we shall perceive, however dimly, that which is greatest, and every eating of bread and drinking of wine will become to us, in a lesser degree,\textsuperscript{323} sacramental.\textsuperscript{324}
\end{quote}

The occasions in which people eat bread and drink wine outside of the Holy Eucharist become also sacramental but in a lesser degree, because these elements convey all the time the same principle of life which is the primary focus of the Holy Communion, i.e. the life of Christ, which is the common denominator of all life. This receives maximum expression when the elements are connected to his word as

\textsuperscript{322} Mason, “Twentieth Sunday after Trinity” Scale How Meditations, no. 24, S. John 6:53.
\textsuperscript{323} The ordinary eating and drinking of bread and wine becomes also sacramental in all circumstances, although in a lesser degree than that of the Holy Communion yet it is a means of grace to increase our knowledge of God.
\textsuperscript{324} Mason, “The Bread of Life” Scale How Meditations, no. 21, S. John 6:27.
an expression of faith in the administration of the Holy Communion in the context of the worship of the Church.

This sacramental understanding of reality, revealing various degrees of the same principle of life, offers us a key to trace Mason’s ontology, epistemology and theory of education. The consecrated part stands as the leaven that leavens the whole. By means of the highest consecration, i.e. spiritual communion with Christ, the whole of life is also consecrated in relation to the living word. Mason assumed that the identity of Christ as the ‘living word’ reveals the true nature of all existing and living things, in particular, and their meaning in relation to Christ who is also the truth and the life. This connection gives nature a sacred character and provides a foundation for learning as an instrument for growth in spiritual life.

The conclusion of this meditation offers a key paradigm to illustrate Mason’s sacramental understanding of life through an analogy between the structure of the old covenant tabernacle and the hierarchy of living things presenting levels of this life common to all living things:

life, like the tabernacle in the wilderness, has its three courts. There is the outer court where living things blossom and bear fruit, eat and drink, and sleep and play; and this life is holy, and disease and fever do not extinguish, but liberate, the principle of life. There is the Holy place where not all living beings walk but only mankind, because men are able to think and love; this life also is sustained upon Christ, who is our life. Within, there is the Holy of Holies, where man communicates with God and consciously receives in Christ the life of his spirit.

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325 This idea, as will be shown in the next chapter, is a key to Mason’s book Ourselves.
Life is here presented in three courts which operate as concentric circles, first a wider court encompassing the biological life of all living organism, within this there is a smaller court presenting a higher level of life where there is a common spiritual life of feeling, knowledge and thought shared by all humankind as loving and thinking beings created in God’s image and sustained by Christ. But, within this court it is found the highest level of life, which is the life of union and Communion with Christ, in whom the person receives the life of his spirit. The common feature of these three levels is the principle of life which is the same running through all. But at the highest level, which is conveyed by the sacraments, there is the life of communion with the fountain of all life, in the Holy Communion and through meditation upon the words of Christ, one is invited to drink and commune with the source of the fountain of all life. This is the highest aim of existence in this world: Life eternal, the knowledge of God and the ultimate purpose of education.

This analogy of the tabernacle provides us with a theological paradigm in which to interpret Mason’s ontology and anthropology. It is a simple yet important paradigm to understand Mason’s views concerning the organization of the spiritual life as a key for the understanding of her educational movement. Mason highlights that our lives reflect the same structure of the tabernacle, of an outside, and outward court and an inner sanctum. These various levels of existence correspond with levels of existence in nature sacramentally interpreted, the outer court being the life of nature, the inner court
the life of the mind and the inner sanctum the life of the Spirit. In this light it becomes apparent that the value of education is that of preparation aiming at the cultivation of the highest level of spiritual life. All life is sacred, and all knowledge is sacred, but life and knowledge ought to grow into their full realization of a spiritual life of communion with God through Christ.

From Home to School

I would like to propose the use of this paradigm to interpret Mason’s educational movement itself, as reflecting this hierarchy of value. In the outer court, one may place the climate of opinion of English society, the inner court we can present the P.N.E.U. with its emphasis on educational theory and school training, culture and religious language; but at the inner sanctum we have Mason’s House in Ambleside the spiritual life of ‘The House of Education’- ‘The house of the Spirit’, with its explicit Anglican character. It is there where the true inner spirituality of the movement maybe revealed.

In practice this scheme produced a series of tensions, as the diverse emphasis of each of these levels took more or less prevalence relative to the rest in relation to circumstances and the attempt to make the movement successful. The polarity between the inner and the outer faces of the movement is exhibited in the ambiguity of religious versus Christian language employed in the foundation of the P.N.E.U. It is also revealed in the polarity within London and Ambleside, London establishing the credentials of respectability of the
movement as it recommended itself to English higher classes while Ambleside produced the army of faithful daughters who would then go to spread the ‘educational gospel’ in these circles working as governesses in homes and later as teachers in Parents’ Review Schools (PRS), which appeared by accident and not by design, when the demand for these governesses was more than their supply and some families gathered their children under the care of one governess.

This shift from the home to the school is also reflected in the shift on emphasis from the parent to the teacher, from the home-school room of the PRS to the growth of a school movement ‘liberal education for all’, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have presented the extent to which Mason’s educational philosophy is rooted within Anglicanism with a strong Christ centred spirituality whose emphasis on the ‘Words’ of the gospel provides the key to the deeper levels of spirituality animating Mason’s educational project in its inner core. In this paradigm of interpretation I suggest that in its original stages the *House of Education* reflected these prevalent spiritual elements of Mason’s movement, which become less visible over time with the growth of the schooling phase of the movement.

We have also traced the need for a principle allowing Mason to universalize the scope of the P.N.E.U. philosophy beyond the intimate limits of *Home Education*, pointing out how this is answered by the
‘great recognition’: the doctrine that the Holy Spirit as educator of mankind, which with the universal Fatherhood of God, sets the grounds for the universal Kingdom of the Son. This vision allows Mason to postulate a harmonic continuity of the particular personality of children with the demands of the Christian nation and the universal fraternity of man mediated by the institutions of the family and later the school.

As in the previous chapter we saw how lesser known writings of Mason exhibit key information lying in the background of Mason’s work, which reveal ideas essential to a more complete understanding of the religious foundation of Mason’s educational work. I have found also in this exploration, keys to Mason’s ontology and anthropology, revealing the importance for her philosophy of a sacramental understanding of the whole of reality, in various degrees. This conviction is a key to understand Mason’s ontology and epistemology and theory of education. The consecrated part stands as the leaven that leavens the whole. By means of the highest consecration the whole of life is also consecrated, providing the whole of education with a spiritual foundation and meaning, while recognizing levels of spirituality.

Once again the original apologetic aims of Mason’s work appear as a fundamental motive in her work promoting an understanding of the Christian faith, reflected in the emphasis on the personal foundation of faith as a personal knowledge of Christ, and highlighting
meditation as a primary means to grow in this knowledge by the nourishment of ideas through the discipline of meditation.

The importance of these revelations is that they allow us to highlight the spiritual roots of Mason’s thought exposing her educational work as something more than just a movement of English school reform with incidental religious overtones. Mason fully developed what can be characterized as the first Anglican educational philosophy geared toward personal discipleship, which helps to explain its current appeal for modern evangelicals in the Homeschool movement, looking for ways to disciple their children by means of education. Ironically, as Mason’s educational movement grew, developing many practical solutions and innovations in many fields, it also became more distant from an explicit declaration of its apologetic goals and home-schooling commitment.

The life, faith and practice of spirituality in the inner circle of ‘The House of Education’ and Mason’s early writings convey this same evangelical zeal characteristic of the ideal many homeschool families are striving to achieve. The emphasis on the vital importance of meditation as part of the training of governesses as well as part of Christian ordinary life based upon a sacramental understanding of reality, clearly shows why Mason’s philosophy, according to its own terms, would lose its vitality if conceived only as an effective method to warrant utilitarian results for teaching and learning. But, ironically this, without being acknowledged became one of the primary arguments in favour of its adoption, by showing the results proving
that it worked. The seeds of tension laid in this transitory stage matured into the conflicts characteristic of the P.N.E.U. movement in its attempt to influence the whole of national education as we shall see in the next chapter.

In the next chapter we will see a series of developments by which school life became more and more the centre of the philosophy while the spirituality of the centre, was unwittingly subordinated to the public promotion of the method. The tensions concealed at the deeper levels hide from view a conflict between Mason’s personal convictions and the public discourse of the P.N.E.U., which tended to attenuate for public consumption the spiritual overtones underlying Mason’s thought at its inner levels while promoting the ideals of citizenship and culture side by side to the religious elements of life in abstract terms.
Our exploration of the religious foundations of Mason’s educational philosophy has led us to highlight a series of underlying theologically inspired features not immediately apparent to modern readers, even though many of them are committed enthusiasts who have devoted a lot of time to study all they can concerning Mason’s philosophy and method. This ignorance raises a natural objection to my contention that Mason’s educational philosophy ought to be regarded as an Anglican philosophy of education. If the religious foundations were so important for Mason and her close followers how is it that this is not widely known?

This is a valid objection which is also analogous to another objection, if Mason’s philosophy is so important and valuable in the history of Christian education why has it not received a greater recognition? I believe that the clues to answer these questions can be found by tracing the later stages of Mason’s movement and are directly related to the institutionalization of Mason’s Philosophy.

In previous chapters I highlighted some of the inner tensions which began to be generated in Mason’s work since the foundation of the P.N.E.U. The need to find a ground to universalize Mason’s method was in tension with the original apologetic emphasis underlying the educational project. An abstractly defined religious
language was increasingly employed in order to secure the influence of the P.N.E.U. upon as wide an audience as possible.

I will argue that these tensions grew and led to an eventual attenuation of the religious emphasis at the outer fringes of the movement while it was retained in its inner circle of the House of Ambleside. This will highlight the difficulty that Mason was an active promoter of both spheres simultaneously as evidenced in her intimate friendship with Franklin, and how this relationship led Mason in the direction which has been described.

School Education

As mentioned before, the first decade of Mason’s work, from 1891 to 1900, was characterized by continual growth. New P.N.E.U. Branches were continually added. The Parents’ Review grew gaining wider circulation. A HOE graduate had a guaranteed place immediately upon graduation, there were waiting lists of positions to be filled. Eventually Parents Review School (PRS) families came together to use the services of the same governess giving birth to the first actual P.N.E.U. schools beyond the home-school room.

During these years Mason began a careful selection of books, tested and retested each term to see how suitable they were in conveying ‘living ideas’ to the children. The curriculum and examinations were centred in Ambleside. Parents enrolled in the school were required to sign an agreement not to share the curriculum with outsiders. Each term a new syllabus was sent and at the end
written examinations would be submitted to Ambleside for evaluation. These examinations eventually would acquire much importance as they presented concrete evidence of the effectiveness of Mason’s method in achieving comparatively extraordinary results. In this way a process began by which the validity of Mason’s philosophy came to be identified with the quality and the peculiarities of its developing method. Eventually more schools were added, but the control of the curriculum and examinations remained centralized in Ambleside. This seemingly harmless development began to generate an unacknowledged tension between Mason’s philosophy and her method. Within the sphere of *Home Education*, there was no need for examinations, and originally in the PRS it was just a simple matter of necessity to assess progress and to improve the curriculum. So at that stage it was easy to decry with Ruskin the vice of cramming for examinations. But as the school stage of Mason’s movement grew the pressure to show results increased. The validity of the P.N.E.U. philosophy became identified with the results of the method, and its main recommendation is extraordinary literary results. The visible began to take precedence over the invisible. The exhibition of the achievements of the students became a normal necessity, while in theory pressure over examinations was to be avoided.

An analogous process entered the life of the *House of Education*. Once the training of governesses and a practising school were in place regular examinations to assess the quality of the training became a recurrent means to guaranty the quality of the instruction, but also
became a means for advertisement. The promotion of the contradictory notion that the P.N.E.U. possessed a particular philosophy required that the achievement and promotion of results would become very important. The institutionalization of Mason’s ideas led to a natural emphasis on suitable methods able to warrant excellent visible results. Of course Mason’s experimentation in this area was led by the principles she had highlighted in *Home Education*, but this new stage had to solve the difficulty of developing the exigencies of a method increasingly applied to schools while keeping true to the ideals of a philosophy, which grew out of reflections upon home education.

Also, internal strife developed concerning the philosophical identity of the P.N.E.U. The first occurred early, during 1894 when a discussion erupted concerning the relationship of the P.N.E.U. to the principles of other educational philosophies. The central committee wanted to revise the constitution of the P.N.E.U. to identify it with the thought of Pestalozzi, Spencer, Froebel and other educational philosophers. Mason strongly opposed this decision, resulting in the resignation of Lady Margesson, and Henrietta Franklin became the honorary Secretary of the P.N.E.U. in London; a position from which she exercised considerable influence upon the development of the P.N.E.U.

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327 It was contradictory because of the earlier claims that there was nothing particularly new in their philosophy and Mason’s early opposition to efforts to identify the P.N.E.U. with any other educational reformer or school of thought.
The Synopsis of 1904

The correspondence from Mason to Mrs. Franklin 1897 – 1922, reflects some of the internal tensions leading Mason to articulate a definite summary of her Philosophy. It was Mason’s contention that the P.N.E.U. was not just a ‘women’s work association’ but that it possessed its own peculiar philosophy originally articulated in the lectures of Home Education, and that subsequent developments had only unpacked the principles already laid there. In this connection Mason describes her struggles in 1900:

Remembering that I have had to fight every inch of the way we have come and that... I sit like Botticelli’s Fortitude, sword in hand, dreading unspeakably a possible fray. Help me, dear, and pray for me: for you and for me and for all of us. The soil for P.N.E.U. is only more and more personal spirituality.\footnote{Mason, Charlotte Mason’s letters to Mrs. Franklin 1897 – 1922, House of Education, March 1900, Box 44, Charlotte Mason Archive.}

Although Mason claimed there was a direct and natural relationship between Home Education and the philosophy of the P.N.E.U., and that all was ‘in the nature of line upon line, precept upon precept, every bit, I think, in Home Education but unfolded and unfolded until the last pamphlet\footnote{Mason, Charlotte Mason’s letters to Mrs. Franklin 1897 – 1922, House of Education, 12/2/1904, Box 44, Charlotte Mason Archive.}; in fact the constitution of the P.N.E.U. says nothing about the lectures of Home Education and at the time of its insertion the language was deliberately chosen to be as religiously and educationally broad as possible. This continuity of development was in Mason’s original intention but the members of the society cannot be blamed for not being aware of that which Mason did not care to make explicit at the time. Home Education was not
originally perceived as a unique contribution to the history of educational philosophy, but rather as a collection of sensible advice by an experienced educator. Mason herself in the preface to the earlier publications limited her subject as referring to: ‘the mother’s duties to her children in the three stages of life during which they fall under her personal training—childhood, school-life and young maidenhood;’

Contemporary reviews, endorsed the work of the P.N.E.U. as a society of Parents willing to listen ‘to lectures on the subject of bringing up their children, and to appropriate the hints of Miss Charlotte Mason, the enthusiastic educationalist,’ but not much more.

After years of work and development Mason was compelled by Franklin to assert the work of the P.N.E.U. as the result of her intellectual property giving it a definite articulation. This took the form of the synopsis of 1904, which can be seen as a watershed: the moment in which Mason’s educational work formally moved from the sphere of the home to the sphere of the school as its primary locus. In a letter intended for a wider audience, after reviewing the causes for the secession of 1894 Mason declares:

It is quite true that at the date of the rupture, I protested against the use of names and definitions. I have tried for years to hide behind the phrase P.N.E.U. thought, but we make little headway as an educational power in the country and we lay

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332 “This is what your letter has produced. Now you will have a foundation for any talking or writing you may have to do.” Mason, Charlotte Mason’s Letters to Mrs. Franklin 1897 – 1922, House of Education, 8/2/1904, Box 44, Charlotte Mason Archive.
ourselves open to the charge brought against us by the malcontents of '94 that absolutely vagueness is to prevail about the best principles and methods of education as understood by the Union.

As people grow in earnest about education, they will either neglect us as amateurs, or require to know what our platform is. So it seems to me well to draw even an inadequate statement of what we teach and also it seems necessary that this teaching must be protected by the name of the originator, or everyone who speaks for P.N.E.U. has a right to say, 'I think' and call it, 'P.N.E.U. Teaching' and this must result in the 'absolute vagueness' we deprecate.333

This letter is very significant for it places Mason’s sentiments in taking this new step. She expressed her desire that the movement would make headway as an educational power in the country. But that lack of definition was a hindrance to that goal. She asserts that people’s interest in education was growing and that there was danger of them being ‘neglected as amateurs’ for lack of a definite statement. It was Mason’s intention for her philosophy finally to come out of the closet and be named after her.

This is the climate which produced the articulation of the Synopsis in 1904 and leads to the publication of the ‘Home Education Series’, by which Mason’s method is known today.334 Interestingly enough this new reduction of the philosophical scope of the P.N.E.U. to subscribe to the boundaries of Mason’s new philosophical definition, ‘carried through by Mrs Franklin’s leadership’,335 provoked the opposition and subsequent resignation from one of its most distinguished members A. T. Schofield, Esq., M.D. who had been

334 Contemporary Reviews of the Series pointed out that its title was inappropriate, for its main subject is not Home Education. See R. B. lattimer, School: A Monthly Record of Educational Thought and Progress (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1906), 113.
335 Cholmondeley, Story of Charlotte Mason, 109.
chairman of the Executive Committee of the P.N.E.U. for many years. In 1898 Schofield had gone as far as stating that he counted Mason side by side with Herbert Spencer, Herbart, Pestalozzi, Froebel, among the most advanced educationalists. But, Schofield, like Lady Margesson before him, had not been drawn to the P.N.E.U. by Mason’s ideas alone, but rather by the notion of being part of a society promoting progressive interaction with the latest advances in the science of pedagogy for the benefit of parents.

The original tension underlying the foundation of the P.N.E.U. concerning the ambiguous leadership of Mason was finally resolved, with a strong statement of Mason’s thought. But in the process the association completely changed its character, while in principle it was still committed to the training of parents, in practice it devoted most of its energy to become a power to promote Mason’s project to influence the education of the nation.

**Religious Principles in the Synopsis**

In spite of Mason’s claims that the synopsis was only an articulation of the same principles enunciated in *Home Education* and developed over the years in the life of the P.N.E.U., there are important omissions in this re-definition of Mason’s educational thought.

Mason sets as the first principle of her synopsis ‘children are persons’ but makes no effort to underline the spiritual presuppositions upon which that postulate rested, as she had done in

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Parents and Children. The eighth principle ‘Education is a life’, is explained as implying the ‘need of intellectual and moral as well as of physical sustenance’ without reference to the Holy Spirit as ‘Lord and giver of life’. The ‘mind feeds on ideas’ makes no reference to meditation, or the life of the spirit. The explanation of the principle only reiterates its practical application that education must provide for a generous curriculum. Mason goes on to present her notions concerning the will, and reason, and the definition of education as the science of relations, in such a way that anyone reading it for the first time would actually receive very few hints of any particularly Christian foundations guiding and informing the whole.

The only explicitly religious affirmation comes at the end of the synopsis when in the 18th postulate Mason finally asserts:

We should allow no separation to grow up between the intellectual and ‘spiritual’ life of children; but should teach that the Divine Spirit has constant access to their spirits, and is their continual helper in all the interests, duties and joys of life.

This is the only explicitly religious statement entering within Mason’s schooling synopsis of 1904. In moving from the requirements

337 Articles 6, 7 and 8 of the Synopsis build upon the P.N.E.U. motto, “Education is an Atmosphere, a Discipline and a Life,” This motto was attributed on and off to Matthew Arnold. It first appeared in print in the Parents’ Review 1. no 3, (April 1890) but, it could be an actual quotation from an article published in February 1890, where the anonymous author writes about the importance of the university for popular education inviting to conceive Oxford as the: “Alma Mater gathering her children round her, and instructing them on the nature and scope of the mission for which she had trained them. Might not her parable run somewhat as follows? “I send you, my sons, to those who have not had the same advantages as you have, and who have not the dimmest idea what true culture means. They think that education can be bought at so much a head; attempt to instill into their minds with all gentleness by our own example and attitude, that education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life.” “Oxford, Democratic and Popular,” Macmillan Magazine 61, (November 1889 to April 1890): 283-284.

of home to the requirements of school education Mason’s philosophy underwent an unacknowledged significant restructuration. The outer sphere of the British Empire became its primary target, while its inner core became subordinated and hard to find except for the initiated.

‘School Education’ a ‘Stimulating’ and ‘Irritating’ Book

It is not a coincidence that after *Parents and Children* the next book, third volume of the Series, was called *School Education*. It produced a mixed reaction from outsiders of the movement as expressed by a Reviewer in *The Journal of Education* characterizing the book as both stimulating and irritating. The stimulating part refers to Mason’s ‘great freshness and originality,’ and strong character defining a helpful system of education. Yet, the book was puzzling:

The irritating part is a certain confusion that reigns throughout. Nothing sufficiently clear is told to the uninitiated about the Parents’ Educational Union or the school, or schools, in which the ideas in this book are brought to the test of practice, and there is a complete haziness that is really comical as to whether Miss Mason is addressing us — the ignorant, outside general readers— or her own enlightened colleagues of the Union.

The essays at one moment appear to be addresses delivered to the members of the Union, but at the next, we — the general reader — find ourselves receiving explanations as to the successful work the Union has done, and other information that cannot be got to fit in with the first theory on any terms. Then we are told the leading points in Miss Mason’s theory of education over and over again; yet, in the end, we are left on many points in a state of confusion.

Only by dint of exhaustive research do we at last grasp what she means by educating children on books. What else, we helplessly ask, have they been ever educated upon — at least, since books existed? At length we discover that the system is to supply the child with a large number of books to read himself, or, if he has not yet learnt the art, to have read to him. Then, again, Miss
Mason calls her book ‘School Education’; but it is mostly about home training; and she completes our bewilderment by warning us not to mind the title, ‘Home Education Series,’ because it is only appropriate to Vol. I. of the series.339

The confusion highlighted by the reviewer can be read throughout the Series. It is the fruit of Mason’s attempt to move without moving from the focus of Home to School Education. The idea that all her philosophy was all there originally from the beginning contributed to produce an amalgamation of ideas which muddled the clear scope of her thought. Good results, not clear philosophical definition became the primary recommendation of her method. Mason’s work was still ‘stimulating and informing,’ but this could be attributed rather to Mason’s personality:

No doubt, it is Miss Mason’s own personality that makes her system succeed; this, unhappily, is usually the case with educational successes. Nevertheless, other teachers will derive much help from the views and suggestions her book contains.340

This last point begins to show what would become a serious obstacle for the future of Mason’s philosophy. The philosophy became tied to a unique experience and personality, and for that very reason incommunicable beyond the span of that particular life. But, I argue that this was due to the ambiguity of presentation produced by the change of target in the later stage of the educational movement, rather than in lack of consistency within the principles of the philosophy. Of course Mason did not renounce her religious foundation. Everything written and done before committing to definite religious views

remained there, but her new articulation changed before the general public its previous religious emphasis. It became displaced giving to the general contemporary audience the false impression that this philosophy did not possess substantial roots within a particular religious point of view, while only the inner circle of the initiated were able to perceive it.

At this stage little appears publicly of the original apologetic aim of the philosophy, the previous emphasis upon the Kingship of Christ, or the Gospel boundaries on education, the Holy Spirit as educator of Mankind, the universal fatherhood of God, the sacred duty of parents; all these ideas and other explicitly religious commitments find in the synopsis no representation. The process of the attenuation of Mason’s original religious commitments, which began at the foundation of the P.N.E.U., reached its climax in this synopsis and the Series it produced. Marking the beginnings of what can be identified a new and final stage in the development of Mason’s work in which her religious commitments were displaced, although not abandoned in order to realize the institutionalization of Mason’s method.

**The School over the Home**

School education eventually became the overriding interest of Mason’s work until her death. The fourth edition of *Home Education* underwent a series of important modifications to adapt its content to the new series. The final lecture on the education of ‘Young Maidenhood’ was moved to the fifth book of the Series, *The Formation*
of Character which was printed during 1906. The fourth edition of Home Education now included instead several enlarged sections covering various new school subjects in detail like: the kindergarten, first reading lesson, handwriting, transcription, Bible lessons, preparation for arithmetic, science observation, history books, grammar, French, handicrafts, etc. For the first time, narration was introduced as a technique useful to develop attentive reading. All the religious foundation remained there but the character of the series changed its original focus from home to school education, creating the need for specialized re-statements of the spiritual side of the philosophy characteristic of its original focus.

Mason did not change her religious perspective, but rather she changed her primary target and her tactics. Instead of primarily aiming at strengthening parents to convey the best education for their children in families, now she was primarily targeting the teachers of the nation, with the hope that they would adopt her, now fully developed, curriculum and method produced and centrally managed from Ambleside. This way she hoped to achieve an educational revolution in the nation. But unwittingly, this move introduced into her work the seed of separation between religious and secular which she so much dreaded. The change in focus necessarily implied in practice the eventual compartmentalisation of religious instruction as compulsory popular education stands one step removed from the kind of religious instruction which parent and family life is able to impart,

341 Mason, Home Education. 4th edition, 277.
led by voluntary personal conviction rather than imposed as an institutional requirement, which had been a primary emphasis of the previous stage. But, because of the success of the curriculum and Mason’s presuppositions concerning England as a Christian nation with an established Church, this incongruence was easily dismissed, without renouncing her previous religious commitments.

That Mason did not renounce any of her religious convictions is clear since she did not remove or alter any of the previous statements from *Home Education*. But, her new focus required a recasting of the religious teaching now in the form of special subjects. For example, nothing was given in the first lectures concerning the technique of giving Bible lessons, instead mothers were given suggestions on how to give to their children the religious knowledge that had become vital in their own lives. But now, *Home Education* added definite guides on how to give an actual lesson. Now teaching the Bible could be counted as one subject among the others, and the holistic emphasis of the spiritual foundation of Mason’s philosophy in its inner core, became attenuated.

In the same way this new focus produced new important writings dealing thoroughly with religious themes, which served not only for individual direction but could be used for group lessons. In particular the books *Ourselves* and the poetry volumes to be discussed in the next sections.
Ourselves, Our Souls and Bodies

The Fourth volume of the Series: Ourselves, our Souls and Bodies corresponds with the original ideal of the 1886 lectures concerning the provision of a method and principles conducive to the development of Christian character. For that reason, in light of the original aims of Mason, this book ought to be considered among the most important and revealing of all her writings.

The book Ourselves carries in its title another sign of the underlying Anglicanism of Mason’s philosophy, bypassed by modern readers. In the modern ‘Home Schooling Series’ republication of 1989, the full title is omitted and only reads ‘Ourselves’ making it practically impossible for the modern audience to recognize that the title is taken from the Prayer of Oblation, which follows the reception of the sacrament in the traditional Holy Communion service of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, stating: ‘and here we offer and present unto thee ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice on to thee’.

The full title gives this book further importance in light of the emphasis Mason gave to the meaning of the sacraments in terms of the sanctification of the whole of existence, as we saw in our previous chapter in the discussion of the meditations on John Gospel.

Mason also declared that ‘Ourselves’ was designed to achieve the main goal of her original lectures to Ladies of 1886. The main goal of Mason’s educational project was to develop character upon the basis of Christian principles in relation to the attainment of the chief
end of Man. In this book Mason develops a floor plan of her understanding of the spiritual life of the inner being developing at length a fundamental analogy comparing the inner world with the structure of a kingdom, the kingdom of ‘man-soul’, which corresponds with the original idea of the kingship of Christ over all, beginning in the heart of a child. In light of the goals highlighted in our previous discussion the importance of this book becomes evident. In this book Mason distils all the wisdom gathered through her own spiritual experience with the aim of providing a definite plan by which young persons (she originally had in mind young maidens) could receive a plan to provide the principles and methods of self-culture, in the service of God, which was the main purpose for her original lectures.

Ourselves is a book for the spiritual direction of the young and growth in Christian discipleship. The content of the whole two books which combine to produce the fourth volume of the Series is too extensive to be presented here in detail. But, as an example of how the religious presuppositions of Mason help to understand her educational philosophy, let us briefly consider the second principle of the synopsis which reads, ‘Children are not born either good or bad, but with possibilities for good and evil’. Some have interpreted this principle as a negation of the doctrine of original sin which postulates

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342 Mason, Preface to Ourselves, Home Education Series 4.
343 Mason “Young Maidenhood—The Formation of Character and Opinions” Formation of Character, 241.
the corruption of human nature.\textsuperscript{345} With this presupposition they go on to read the passages in which Mason speaks about the exaltation of childhood in the Gospel to conclude that Mason has indeed denied orthodox belief.

The book \textit{Ourselves} as a whole puts to rest this misreading. There is only need for a book like this, addressed as it is to Christians, because of the corruption of human nature. Part III, ‘Of the Soul’ in the second book deals with the disabilities of the soul, beginning with the statement: ‘The Soul, like the Mind and Heart has its chronic disabilities, its deep-seated diseases’\textsuperscript{346} There are other instances in Mason’s writings in which the teaching of the 39 articles concerning original sin is affirmed.\textsuperscript{347} The safest route to avoid misreading Mason is to pay close attention to her religious presuppositions, which become explicit in her religious writings. As Mason acknowledges in the preface to \textit{Ourselves}:

\begin{quote}
The more or less casual ordering of young people which falls to their elders might become more purposeful if it were laid down upon some such carefully considered ground-plan of human nature as this book attempts to offer. The scheme of thought rests upon intuitive morality, as sanctioned by the authority of Revelation.\textsuperscript{348}
\end{quote}

Mason was still operating within the boundaries of the doctrinal commitment of orthodox and conventional Anglicanism of her time, giving particular attention to the limits and terms of Scripture revelation, specially the teaching of the Gospel.

\textsuperscript{345} For a more detailed presentation of Mason’s views concerning the condition of the child as neither good or evil, but with potentiality for both, which eventually finds expression in this principle see Mason, “What is Truth,” \textit{The Parents’ Review} 6, no. 2 (March 1895): 132-4.

\textsuperscript{346} Mason, \textit{Ourselves}, Book 2, 177.

\textsuperscript{347} Mason, “Simplicity a Bible Study”. \textit{The Parents’ Review} 9, no. 1, (January 1898): 49.

\textsuperscript{348} Mason, Preface to \textit{Ourselves}.
Concerning Children as Persons

It will be remembered from the discussion of Mason’s original lectures on home education how she saw the teaching of Christ as providing an educational code setting the boundaries of education in relation to the realization of the dignity of children, their priority in the kingdom and adult responsibility of avoiding offences against them. In 1911 Mason took this seminal notion and developed it in a pamphlet titled: Concerning Children as Persons; Liberty versus various forms of tyranny,\(^{349}\) where she developed the implications of what she defined in the synopsis as the fundamental principle of her educational creed.

The realization that children are persons and that what this means is ultimately a mystery to us is according to Mason a concept carrying with it revolutionary consequences for education. She envisioned a revolutionary reversal of attitude happening within one or two decades of progress in the direction she proposed once the science of education embraced the implications of the teaching of the gospel, for:

> We remember the divine warning, ‘See that ye despise not one of these little ones’; but the words convey little definite meaning to us. What we call ‘science’ is too much with us. We must either reverence or despise children; and while we regard them as incomplete and undeveloped beings, who will one day arrive at the completeness of man, rather than as weak and ignorant persons, whose ignorance we must inform and whose weakness we must support, but whose potentialities are as great as our own, we cannot do otherwise than despise children, however kindly or even tenderly we commit the offence.\(^{350}\)

\(^{349}\) Mason, Concerning Children as Persons, (London: Parents’ National Educational Union, 1911).

\(^{350}\) Mason, Concerning Children as Persons, 5.
The complete change of attitude towards children which Mason worked and hoped for did not realise, as the next decades of the early twentieth century pedagogy mainly followed the scientific point of view of behaviourism, where children were not conceived as sacred, mysterious spiritual entities whose freedom must be defended from all forms of tyranny, but rather the complete opposite, where all spiritual aspects of soul, mind and feeling are reduced in principle to observable, measurable and manipulable behaviour.

In this regard it can be argued that Mason’s educational philosophy provides an unmet challenge to contemporary educators, especially those who find themselves in the Christian tradition, to re-examine the anthropological presuppositions of their educational approach and its practical implications, providing also an alternative view in which spirituality is not a department but the foundation and ultimate goal for the whole of education. This conviction led Mason to develop various writings providing for the spiritual nurture of teachers and children, among which stand the lesser known of Mason’s writings, a poetical commentary on the gospel story.

**The Saviour of the World**

The six volume poetry project 'The Saviour of the World' was after the Series the next most important publication project to which Mason devoted all her efforts. The six volumes were published from 1908 – 1914. The series was designed to be of eight volumes, covering the whole story of the Gospel, but the combination of the war and the
exigencies of the ‘Liberal Education for all Movement’ conspired to leave this, the most important of all Mason’s projects, unfinished.

These are the only books of Mason which did not undergo several editions. Although Mason did everything in her power to commend them to her religious audience and in spite of positive reviews in the press, they do not appear to have drawn much attention beyond the inner circle of the P.N.E.U. movement.

Mason wrote a letter to the Bishop of Liverpool,\(^{351}\) who had expressed his intention of reading the first volume of the series, to ask the Bishop to write the preface for the second volume which was in the press for that same year. In this letter Mason makes explicit her allegiance to the Anglican Church:

I have tried not to work from any personal standpoint Anglican or other but it gratifies me to see how in the close phrase by phrase examination of our Lord’s teaching which the plan of my work requires, the doctrine and government of our Church are justified as well as its intellectual appeal.\(^{352}\)

Mason saw in her careful reading of the Gospel, both the justification of the doctrine and government of the Anglican Church and also its ‘intellectual appeal’. It is helpful to emphasize the point she raised here. Mason avoided in her public writings as much as possible writing overtly from her ‘personal standpoint’ as an Anglican Church-Woman. This is the main reason why a superficial reading of her work could convey the wrong impression that her Anglicanism had

\(^{351}\) Only a draft manuscript of the letter survives, without date or any further information. In 1908 The Bishop of Liverpool was Francis James Chavasse, who followed the distinguished evangelical Bishop JC Ryle, from 1900 until 1923. Chavasse had been Principal of Wycliffe Hall Oxford from 1889 to 1900, providing training in the Evangelical tradition.

\(^{352}\) Mason, *Manuscript Letter to the Bishop of Liverpool*, 1908, Box 44, Charlotte Mason Archive.
little to no bearing upon her educational work and that both may
stand separate one from the other. I have shown through this
exploration how misleading such a presupposition is and how
important it is to factor Mason’s religious foundations back into the
reading and interpretation of her thought and work in order to assess
her educational philosophy.

The purpose of the letter was to ask the Bishop if he would be
willing to write a preface for the second volume recommending the
book as a useful source for meditation and instruction.

I have ventured to write so fully to prepare the way for a request
that your lordship would give the work a sort of imprimatur by
writing for it a few words of preface and I could only hope for
this if you were convinced that such a work (it is I think unique)
should be of some service in the Church at a critical moment
when people discuss and reject our Lord’s teaching with very
little knowledge of what that teaching is.

There is no record of further communication between them, but the
Bishop did not write a preface. In the introductions to these volumes
Mason develops her ideal promoting a verse rendering of the gospel as
a way to rekindle a passionate devotional reading of the story so that
it could become alive and influence the life of the church. Mason
considered her work as a unique contribution to devotional literature.
No one before her had taken such a difficult task. She felt compelled
to present the reasons for this monumental effort. It was not because
she loved verse, or because she thought that she was exceptionally
good at writing poetry, but rather because she was looking for means
to provide for a great need of the church, the need to encourage and
help devotional meditation upon the words of Christ, which she
thought was the essential task necessary for the defence of the faith in her time.

We are at present in a phase of religious thought, Christian or pseudo-Christian, when a synthetic study of the life and teaching of Christ may well be of use. We have analysed until the mind turns in weariness from the broken fragments; we have criticised until there remains no new standpoint for the critic; but if we could only get a whole conception of Christ’s life among men, and of the philosophic method of His teaching, His own word should be fulfilled, and the Son of Man, lifted up, would draw all men unto himself.\textsuperscript{353}

The poetry volumes represent Mason’s final and more thorough attempt to answer the apologetic need lying at the heart of the beginnings of her educational efforts. She perceived an overriding need to save from the danger of unbelief and criticism the foundations of a living faith as an inheritance for future generations. The primary condition to achieve this goal was to develop a vibrant Christ-centred spirituality. The faith Mason was promoting and defending was not an abstract body of belief or an original thought, but found adequate and sufficient expression, as with F. D. Maurice, in the life and teaching, sacraments and formularies of the Church of England. In connection with her defence of her project, in passing, Mason highlights that the intended primary audience of her poetry, were devout Anglican readers when she asserts:

Day by day we are taught to pray, by way of summing up all our requirements in this life, for ‘knowledge of Thy truth’ the prayer in the Liturgy which seems to summarise most fully our Lord’s teaching. But our practice hardly keeps pace with our prayer; we are apt to put two or three legitimate desires before what should be our primary aspiration; to have good the cult of prosperity is the prayer and effort of the natural man; to be good

\textsuperscript{353} Mason, “Introductory” \textit{The Saviour of the World} 1, xi.
the cult of sanctity is the desire of the spiritually-minded; to do good the cult of philanthropy sums up the ‘religion of humanity’: these things we should have, be and do, but we are becoming aware that there is a further duty which we may not leave undone.\textsuperscript{354}

The reference here is to ‘A Prayer of St. Chrysostom’ the concluding prayer for Morning and Evening Prayer of the Book of Common Prayer. It concludes with the petition: ‘granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting’. Mason saw in this prayer the best summary of Christ’s teaching, which identifies personal knowledge of God with eternal life.\textsuperscript{355} Mason held this connection between knowledge and eternal life as the best foundation for moral instruction.

As part of a series of collected answers by various educational authorities under the title ‘Moral Instruction and Training in Schools’ after warning about the danger of excessive influence of the teacher repressing the individuality of the student, Mason stated her conviction that:

On the other hand, as for definite religious teaching, I think its aim should be that indicated in St. John 17:3. Ethical teaching flows naturally from the study of the Gospels, as also from that of the Old Testament and of the Epistles. I have not tried the effect of a graded course of moral instruction on non-theological lines. Such a course seems to me unphilosophical and likely to result in the production of persons whose virtues are more tiresome than their failings.\textsuperscript{356}

The purpose of the poetry volumes is to encourage a devout readership to strive to achieve the highest purpose of learning,

\textsuperscript{354} Mason, Preface to “The Great Controversy” The Saviour of the World 5, v-vi.
\textsuperscript{355} “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” John 17:3.
\textsuperscript{356} Michael Sadler, Moral Instruction and Training in Schools: Report of an International Inquiry (United Kingdom: Longmans, Green, 1908), 229.
knowledge and education which according to Mason sums up the higher purpose of this life: personal knowledge and communion with God, which is also the only proper basis for ethical teaching.

In the preface to the fifth volume Mason presents explicitly the presuppositions guiding her Bible reading upon the foundation laid by the dogmatic teaching of the Church of England:

I think we must bear three things in mind in study of this nature: that we build upon the foundation which is laid—the teaching of the Church—The Church, i.e. 'The blessed company of all faithful people.'—for no Scripture is of private interpretation; that we have no special thesis to advance, but are open to 'receive with meekness the engrafted word'; and that our reading be not casual,—as though one were to dip here and there into a book of mathematics,—but continuous, following the chronological order of our Lord's life rather than the sequence of events as given in any one Gospel: only so shall we be in a position to realize the progressive and cumulative character of the Christian philosophy proposed to us.

This reflects the overall conservatism informing Mason’s reading of Scripture which also regulated her interpretation of life and the world. She worked within the boundaries of the dogmatic definitions of the Anglican Church and found within such, ample room for growth and knowledge, resisting the temptation to follow the sceptics when human reason runs into trouble and finding comfort in trusting Christ as the answer to the mysteries surrounding human existence at each limit of our understanding. Mason’s poetry was an aid to meditation in order to know more closely the character and teaching of Christ.

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357 This is a quotation from the final prayer of the Holy Communion Service of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer.
358 James 1:21.
which answered the need for a deeper understanding of the truth of
the Gospel afflicting ‘modern life’.

These volumes quickly became a primary text for religious
instruction in the P.N.E.U. schools and the *House of Education*. But,
the late-Victorian devotional mood upon which Mason relied to gain a
receptive audience for her work was passing. The poetry never
received wider distribution than within the inner circle of the P.N.E.U.
and has not been recognized as a unique contribution to the history of
Christian devotional literature. The war years put an end to the
possibility of finishing this project, when the ‘liberal education for all’
claimed all the attention of her later work.

This is perhaps the most clear indication of how the schooling
stage of Mason’s educational work finally betrayed her original
purposes. Mason was not able to complete the one project she thought
was the most important one, because of the demands of a movement
which of its own nature, as we will see later in this chapter, could not
fulfil the foundational religious ideals of her philosophy.

The poetry volumes do not touch any of the reflections Mason
had concerning the culmination of the gospel story in the passion,
resurrection and ascension. These would have been the themes
covered in the last two projected volumes. In Mason’s final will of
1919, she makes provision for funds ‘towards the expense of
publishing the Seventh and Eighth volumes of *The Saviour of the

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World’ in the event of Canon Rawnsley or other fit person undertaking to finish that work during my lifetime.’  

Unfortunately, Rawnsley died in 1920, and Mason followed not long after, and, there not being ‘any other fit person’ able to complete such project it remained unfinished.

It fell upon the Rev. Wm. H. Draper, Rector of Adel, who had written an introductory note to volume IV (1910) in which he identifies Mason as a writer for whom the gospel story is ‘the Truth of all truths and the Life of all lives’, to highlight in his tribute to Mason’s memory the paramount importance of Mason’s poetry among all her other writings:

I had good ground for knowing also that to her, more than literature, more even than poetry was Religion itself. This was proved in that work to which she gave much time and effort the verse paraphrase and comment of much of the Gospel record, and to which she gave the title, ‘The Saviour of the World.’ Others will write upon and commemorate her system of education. To me let it fall to mention the work dearer to her heart, perhaps, than all the rest.

In light of the religious and apologetic foundation of Mason’s philosophy of education this assessment by Draper appears to be essentially correct, as his description, in this same instance, of Mason as someone ‘who triumphed over difficulties’ and who ‘reigned from her couch’ is also a correct and significant characterization.

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361 Mason, Charlotte Mason’s Will, April 10, 1919, Box CM1, Charlotte Mason Archive.
‘A ‘Snowball’ effort to Promulgate the Movement’\textsuperscript{364}

The struggles to expand the sphere of influence of Mason’s thought began in earnest after 1904 and were manifested in a series of efforts to recruit England’s headmasters to adopt the P.N.E.U. curriculum. At the time that Mason was working on her poetry volumes she also engaged various efforts to expand the influence of her educational movement promoting her method, now understood as beyond its experimental stage, over the whole system of education in England. From December of 1905 Mason began to hold a series of conferences in Ambleside promoting her ‘education by books and things’\textsuperscript{365} summoning all School Headmasters and Inspectors to consider the adoption of Parents’ Union School curriculum,\textsuperscript{366} as providing a uniform curriculum which could be adopted by all secondary schools of the country beginning with the region of Westmorland.\textsuperscript{367} Demonstrative presentations of the work performed by the children with opportunity for oral and written examination were also held in London,\textsuperscript{368} with the goal of exhibiting the extraordinary success of the Parents’ Review School curriculum. In presenting her work to Headmasters summoned to The House of Education in Ambleside at Whitsunday during the Summer of 1906 to discuss this

\textsuperscript{364} Mason, “Conference at the House of Education,” The Parents’ Review 17, no. 7 (July 1906): 551.
\textsuperscript{365} Mason, “Conference at the House of Education,” The Parents’ Review 17, no. 7 (July 1906): 531.
\textsuperscript{366} This new name for The Parents’ Review School marks its evolution beyond the family school Room into a network of schools and home school rooms using the P.N.E.U. curriculum.
\textsuperscript{368} For example see: “Jottings,” Journal of Education (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907), 529.
question, Mason defined the new scope and urgency of her efforts as follows:

But we are living in a time of great changes, and perhaps we hardly realise that the regulations which include Secondary Schools in the scheme of State Education, is revolutionary in character. Responsibility is thrust upon us, and the lonely furrow is not for us any more; we must think imperially, and we must think and act for all.369

A heated discussion followed Mason’s bold proposal, which generated mixed reactions. As a result of the conference a list of those supporting the effort was circulated in educational journals describing Mason’s work and expressing their support for such proposal.370 The letter describes how an educational experiment had been carried out for the last fifteen years showing evidence of definite results of a high standard of education reached in over 500 family school-rooms under the direction of Mason’s trained governesses, but now also available for use in a school setting under certain conditions. The signers of the letter wanted to express their ‘sense of the value of her experiment as regards the literary side of child’s education.’ The letter describes Mason’s method as follows:

The curriculum of the Parent’s[sic] Union School is very wide, and includes all the subjects ordinarily taught in schools, besides hand-work, physical exercises, etc. The originality lies in the methods of work prescribed by Miss Mason with regard to ‘English subjects.’ Miss Mason bases all humanistic work on a study of history, and form the earliest age devotes much time to it, demanding from the first independent study on the part of the child. The books he is to use are selected with the greatest care; mere text-books and readers are discarded and those of living interest chosen. Miss Mason allots a certain portion for

the study of each class each term: the child reads part of this
daily in lesson hours, and the teacher’s function is confined to
directing the work, inspiring interest and setting some test that
demands reflection. e.g., calling on the child from time to time
to narrate something of what he has read.\footnote{The Parents’ Review 17, no. 7 (July 1906): 590.}

It was Mason’s hope that this endorsement widely circulated
would produce a snowball effect leading to the wide adoption of her
curriculum.\footnote{The Parents’ Review 17, no. 7 (July 1906): 551.} But it did not happen. An interesting detailed account
of the debate held at the conference reported in the Parents’ Review
helps to understand why.\footnote{See “Conference at the House of Education. June 1906” The Parents’ Review 17, no. 7 and
no. 8, (July and August 1906): 481-640.} Of interest to our exploration are some of
the main objections raised against the universal adoption of Mason’s
program.

In the letter of endorsement no mention is raised about the
religious foundation and scope of Mason’s philosophy, or its relation
to its methods. The originality of Mason’s work was perceived to lie in
Mason’s methods of work in regard to English subjects and the key
question was the suitability of adopting these methods and its
curriculum as a uniform standard for literary education throughout
England. An ambitious project, which nevertheless presented grave
obstacles to some of the headmasters present, which may be
summarized in the position of one:

Mr. Smith said he would like to explain his own feeling with
regard to the curriculum. He was unwilling to enter upon
anything like criticism, but he was frankly afraid of any
organisation however competent. He should greatly welcome an
amendment. He was gravely doubtful whether any organisation
could relieve a schoolmaster from choosing the books in use in
his school, and wondered whether we should not, in suggesting
this, be going against education in the best sense. Education was a personal matter, and it would be difficult for an organisation to do anything for schools as a whole, though help that did not pledge them to anything would be welcomed by many schools. He was afraid of regimentation however beneficent, for however competent it might be to begin with, it might come to lay a dead hand upon what was really living. All organisations began by being beneficent, but it ended in cramping individuality.  

It is quite remarkable, that the objection here raised is built upon the conviction that education is ‘a personal matter’. Here the tension between Mason’s principles and the new emphasis aiming at the adoption of her method at a national level is made manifest. Can education be both personal and under centralized control? The major objections leading the headmasters to reject the adoption of Mason’s method, were not lack of respect for the quality of the work or lack of evidence of good results, but rather the requirements laid down by Mason for its adoption. Mason required from each school to comply with certain conditions. These conditions were designed to promote the adoption of the method as a whole and not in part. It had to be all or nothing. Headmasters would commit to use her curriculum and submit term examinations to Ambleside. But, many Headmasters expressed their unwillingness to renounce their independent ability to monitor their own programs, and expressed the view that they should be allowed to receive the P.N.E.U. material and take or leave as much of it as they thought would profit their work. Such modification of the proposal would have gathered much more support than the restrictive and exclusive one demanded by Mason.

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374 The Parents’ Review 17, no. 7 (July 1906): 539.
Mason strongly opposed the possibility of this kind of adaptation of her method as it is expressed in a letter following the Whitsun Tide conference at the *House of Education* in June 1906:

> Those who do not regard education as a vital whole but as a sort of conglomerate of good ideas, good plans, traditions and experiences, do well to adopt and adapt any good idea we come across. But our conception of education is of a vital whole, harmonious, living and effective. You will see, therefore, that every little plan we recommend rises out of a principle and that each such principle is a part of a living educational philosophy (if I may call it so), and does not very well bear to be broken off and used by itself.\(^{375}\)

Paradoxically, according to Mason, the organic unity of her method based upon a ‘living educational philosophy’ admitted of no external adaptation, and required central administration and supervision. Ironically, the fact that she could provide these services to all willing subscribers led her to dream of the possibility of seeing an adaptation of her method adopted under her supervision in every secondary school of England. Unfortunately for her, Mason’s proposal to ‘think and act imperially’ for all providing a specialized curriculum with central examination under her able direction from Ambleside, even in a minimal form, appeared to headmasters as entailing the possibility of ‘cramping individuality’. It is greatly ironic that a method based upon a philosophy defining ‘children are persons’ as one of its foundational postulates would be rejected on the grounds that ‘education was a personal matter’.

Here we have the paradox generated by Mason’s attempt to think and act imperially upon the basis of a philosophy grounded

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upon personal individuality. The Anglicanism which gave Mason her personal reading of the gospel and her ideas of the best education a mother may convey to her children, also provided the grounds for her to think and act imperially, imposing a uniform curriculum, selected by experts and in light of tested results, without anticipating the natural reaction of headmasters who saw in such conditions a trampling upon their independence to choose the books and methods that they preferred.

Some important features call attention at this point in the development of Mason’s project. At this stage of Mason’s narrative a complete identification of her philosophy and the method was asserted. A change or adaptation of the method implied a rejection of the organic unity of the philosophy. The schooled realization of Mason’s method had swallowed the whole. To her mind, by this time the P.N.E.U. school’s success was such, that her ideas could not be fully explored apart from it. In other words the philosophy and the realization of its method became completely identified by Mason and by the P.N.E.U. This translated into efforts to promote the adoption of Mason’s method as a whole, which naturally created resistance upon Headmasters valuing their independence and their ability to choose among educational approaches. But the most important aspect I want to call attention to is the implication this development carried concerning the religious foundations and scope of Mason’s education.

The personal origins of Mason’s educational vision were characterized by freedom of enquiry and un-centralized development.
She began by freely collecting ‘good ideas, good plans, traditions and experiences’. If we take the draft letter as Mason’s writing, we find there, for example, a mother thinking her own thoughts concerning the best education. The principles guiding her choices remained open to examination. Mason enjoyed a freedom and independence of thought, which she had to down play during the conference in order to persuade the headmasters to submit to her judgment and curriculum upon the basis of the quality of the results.

Mason did not perceive the contradiction between the demand for a closed curriculum centrally managed, and the sacred freedom of personal education probably because the curriculum was the result of her own work, and many had profited by submitting to her commanding authority. But her success with a few became the obstacle for the many, when she closed the door for innovation and adaptation of her ideas outside the institutional structure she built in order to administer the method she had devised. I believe that this identification of Mason’s institutionalized method with her philosophy is a primary cause why her philosophy as such has yet to receive a thorough examination in its theoretical and theological merits. Mason had the creative impulse to develop her ‘living philosophy’ freely taking or rejecting from as many sources as she saw fit, what she approved or not. But when the time came for her body of work to be assessed by others, Mason did not provide the same openness to them which she gave herself. Everyone of the P.N.E.U. supporters must become a true

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376 This expression characterized the approach Mason was now rejecting in her letter explaining the reasons why her method must be adopted as a whole.
believer; it had to be all or nothing. And this is, I believe one of the tragic flaws which hampered Mason’s thought from entering the market of ideas at the level of philosophical discussion, and helps to explain why Mason’s movement was unable to retain its influence after the death of its founder.

The most important other negative consequence of this thorough identification of Mason’s philosophy with the institutional manifestation of the P.N.E.U. method is that it condemned the religious foundation of Mason’s philosophy to fall to the background and lay hidden from view except for those intimately associated with its inner circle. If it was hard to convince headmasters to adopt a literary curriculum of the best English literature, even in light of the positive verifiable results of its effect upon the students, much more difficult, actually impossible, would have been to promote the religious ideals originally informing Mason’s philosophy. That is why this aspect of her philosophy was down played for general consumption.

In other words, the Anglican apologetic foundation inspiring Mason’s philosophy and work had to be removed from primary sight. As a result of these choices Mason’s philosophy from then on was not considered any further as a set of guiding principles which could offer valuable insights to a particular theory of Christian education geared to promote Christian discipleship. The future of Mason’s thought was tied to the future of the institution and the method adopted for its promotion.
‘The Liberal Education for All’

The efforts to expand the influence of the P.N.E.U. over the system of education in England were not checked by the partial results of a direct appeal to headmasters. In 1912 Mason wrote a series of letters in *The Times* which were eventually published in the pamphlet ‘The Basis of National Strength’ and later incorporated to Mason’s last book. These letters reflected the shift of emphasis from the home to the nation, and the primary concern driving Mason’s mind of how to provide a nation-wide school method of instruction which could provide the knowledge necessary for ‘national strength’.

The P.N.E.U. had continued to grow reaching the limits of its administrative reach as an organization. Mason was looking for ways to launch her curriculum as an independent source available for the whole nation, but without losing its integrity. An unplanned new door was opened by the initiative of an old friend, collaborator and co-founder of the P.N.E.U., Mrs. Steinthal, who through the years had kept alive the original interest of the P.N.E.U. to aid the education of the lower classes. It should be remember that this was a primary preoccupation set at the beginning of the life of the organization, but which had not received any concrete application besides some pious exhortations in the *Parents’ Review* and individual collaboration with other organizations like *The Mothers Union*.

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In April of 1914, Miss Ambler, a friend of Steinthal, for the first time adapted Mason’s method to bigger classes, of about 45 students, in an elementary school at Drighlington, where she acted as principal over 200 girls of the working class. Miss Ambler, the head of the school began to experiment with narration. She explored Mason’s books in conversation with trained teachers of the House of Education. For the first time in the history of the P.N.E.U., an elementary school teacher and her staff experimented searching for ways to adapt Mason’s principles to large classes of children of the working class within the state system and were able to accomplish remarkably positive results.

Mason seized this opportunity as the door she had been longing for. She began in earnest to use all P.N.E.U. resources in an effort to introduce her methods into primary schools across England, under the banner of ‘A Liberal Education for All’. The coincidence of this development with the beginning of the war created emergency conditions which facilitated Mason’s entrance into state schools. The demand for teachers able to handle big groups radically increased as children were moved north to safer areas, and a mood of adaptation and improvisation facilitated cross-pollination between House of Education graduates and state school teachers. The results of the experiment were described as a miracle; the poor children were both learning and happy, they appeared to be awakening to knowledge just as the children of the higher classes did. Mason’s method had

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challenged the presupposition that intelligence and knowledge
necessarily ran within the boundaries of biological inheritance and
economic class.

A P.N.E.U. pamphlet ‘A Liberal Education for All’ was circulated
during 1919 to all the educational committees of the country. It was
mostly ignored, except by Mr. Household, the Gloucestershire
secretary for Education. 379 He became a strong supporter of Mason
and her method identifying Mason as a ‘prophet in our midst’, 380
Under his direction the PUS syllabus was introduced by degrees into
most of the schools under his jurisdiction. The results again claimed
year after year extraordinary results.

The remarkable results of this experiment were interpreted as a
practical confirmation of the truth of Mason’s principles and the value
of her method as children of the lower class began to exhibit the same
ability to interact with the best of English literature as the children of
the higher classes had been doing for years. This combination of
factors helped to give ‘narration’, a technique which only began to
receive primary attention because of the requirements of bigger school
groups, even further status as the primary hallmark of Mason’s
method. 381

379 Henrietta Franklin, Parent’s Union School Diamond Jubilee 1891-1951 (Westmorland:
Holywell Press. 1951), 8.
380 H. W. Household, Teaching Methods of Miss Charlotte Mason (London: P.N.E.U. Pamphlet,
1920), 1.
381 There is no definite statement of the time when Mason “discovered” narration, only a
passing reference in a letter to Mr Household where Mason notes: “I began to find out by
telling myself a chapter of “Emma” to put myself to sleep. The result was as if the proper light
had been thrown upon a picture.” Mason, Letters to Mr Household, 1917, Box 44, Charlotte
Mason Archive.
Mason finally saw the beginning of the fulfilment of her dreams, nation wide application of her method with extraordinary results. In a letter to Steinhthal, Mason connects this achievement with the message of the Great Recognition:

I have thought and dreamed wonderful things since your letter came. . . I can hardly tell you how deeply impressed I am by your great work. Yes, dear, the whole of this wonderful movement is your 'Fault'! From the first notion of it to the last meeting you had done it all. But I am not offering you any words of praise or of thanks because it seems to both of us, does it not? - that all this comes from a higher source, In one or other of those volumes there is a chapter on The Great Recognition. If you look at it you will know what I think you are doing.\textsuperscript{382}

The success of this initiative served to make the transition from Home to School education complete. The final realization of Mason’s method became the codification of the principles of the philosophy. From then on the only thing that mattered was how to persuade more people to adopt the method. But, the price for this success was a significant adaptation of the original scope, not only in terms of the practical solutions to the new situation, but in terms of an attenuation of the religious foundation of the philosophy. The disconnection between the inner and the outer circle became complete, but this was not a source of concern for Mason, for she could only see the beginning of the realization of her dream, and she supposed that one thing would necessarily lead to the other, in spite of the opposition which after the war the adoption of her method produced in those to whom it appeared to be offensive.

\textsuperscript{382} Mason, \textit{Letters to Mrs. Steinhthal 1914-1918}, 12/5/1914, Box 44, Charlotte Mason Archive.
The possibility of providing a liberal culture to the lower class could carry controversial repercussions. Among some, there were strongly held opinions that class differences were ultimately caused by differences between the natural hereditary conditions of the races which constituted those classes. One of the consequences of this doctrine of heredity was a normal expectation for the perpetuation of the moral traits characteristic of each class, which tended to legitimize the social hierarchy in terms of ‘nature’ rather than ‘nurture’.\textsuperscript{383}

The idea that a discovery had been made in such a fundamental area could carry offensive consequences. For some the claim had to be a fake or carried the implication that teachers had been doing a poor job.\textsuperscript{384} And moreover, Mason’s philosophy promoted a displacement of the teacher and made the child a self-learner. Such independence of judgment, especially in lower classes, could have represented a threat to some in positions of power. Anyway Mason’s efforts to promote her educational philosophy continued to the end exhorting the P.N.E.U. to develop a clear understanding of the philosophical ground upon which the movement was built.

**Rudolf Eucken: ‘Only One Education for All’**

On March of 1914, Mason surprised her P.N.E.U. audience\textsuperscript{385} declaring her joy in finding one philosopher whose thought was in all

\textsuperscript{383} For example see a letter in response to an article on heredity: Nausica, “By the Way,” *The Parents’ Review* 1, no 12 (January 1891): 954.

\textsuperscript{384} Mason, *Letters to Mr Housebold*, 1920, Box 44, Charlotte Mason Archive.

essential aspects identical to her own. The philosophy she had been
developing alone over the years finally found a philosophical
framework and support. The name of this philosopher was Rudolf
Eucken, a German philosopher whose work came to Mason’s attention
by a notice on the *Spectator* highlighting a book about Eucken by Dr.
Meyrick Booth. Eucken had received the Nobel Prize for literature in
1908, after which he gained for a short while international popularity.

Eucken’s philosophy was a fruit of German idealism although it
did not attempt to build a metaphysical system. Rather he elaborated
a series of principles by which to interpret human existence
emphasizing the spiritual nature of man against naturalism. Although
Eucken did not profess to be a Christian, his philosophy, according to
Mason, followed the principles of the Gospels. Mason was not alone in
this appreciation. Eucken’s philosophy had been described as ‘a
philosophical restatement of the teaching of Jesus’. The coincidence
of philosophical point of view was so remarkable that Mason
enthusiastically highlighted two primary features identical in their
thoughts as the basis for an exhortation to the P.N.E.U. to live up to
the principles of their philosophy and to regard the importance of their
contribution to the nation.

The primary common feature with Eucken’s philosophy is ‘his
recognition of man as a spiritual being, having a sensible investment
which adapts itself and as it were grows to his spiritual

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The second was Eucken’s key principle of ‘Activism’, which Mason characterized as:

the principle of struggle, striving against opposition, with which the Gospels have made us familiar and which belongs to intellectual and moral, as truly as to religious life. Out of this struggle, this Activism, proceeds something new, a quickened life of thought or aspirations.

Mason identified these two principles as correlating with her own emphasis on education as a spiritual task and the method of narration which provides for the spirit the kind of struggle which Eucken required for its spiritual elevation from the conditions of natural life.

Eucken strongly rejected pragmatism and materialism as erroneous philosophies conducive to the degradation of man in so far as they conveyed a distortion of the concept of truth which hindered man from its spiritual realization. In a passage quoted by Mason, he affirms:

The essence of the conception of truth, and the life and soul of our search after truth, is to be found in the idea that in truth man attains to something superior to all his own opinions and inclinations, something that possesses a validity completely independent of any human consent; the hope of an essentially new life is thus held out to man, a vision of a wider and richer being, all inner communion with reality, a liberation from all that is merely human.

On the other hand, pragmatism destroys the unity of truth into many truths, which may be inconsistent one to the other, and in case of conflict no further arbitration is possible. An utilitarian or pragmatic

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388 Mason, “Trop De Zèle” The Parents’ Review 25, no. 6 (June 1914): 404.
389 Mason, “Trop De Zèle” The Parents’ Review 25, no. 6 (June 1914): 410.
reduction of truth to its transitory uses carries with it the trivialization of human existence, and the loss of any reason to strive for a higher aim, which destroys the inner spiritual life. Truth cannot be just a means. ‘Truth can only exist as an end in itself. ‘Instrumental’ truth is no truth at all.391

The metaphysical reflections of Eucken strongly resonated with Mason. Although Eucken did not write much about education she saw an immediate application of his principles to her own work. Mason had been striving to promote an education which stressed the elevation of the spirit, the role of mind over matter, and which would not be subordinated to mere temporal uses. The philosophical ground offered by Eucken helped Mason to urge the P.N.E.U. to understand the spiritual foundations of its method, and avoid the tendency to follow the trends of educational innovation, grabbing any new idea without understanding or assessing the consistency of its philosophical roots.

Mason evaluated the contemporary educational trends of her time:

Now, the world was never more alive to the importance of education than it is today, and the air is full of notions that masquerade as new. Conscientious mothers feel it is a duty to know and to try the last new thing; but let me entreat you and them to try the spirits whose they be; every new and promising theory that I have come across is of the flesh and not of the spirit; (in using the word spirit I am not just now referring to religion at all, but to that immaterial part of us which knows and thinks and feels).392

391 Eucken, Main Currents of Modern Thought, 77.
Mason conceived her education as a unique contribution to educational theory because of its spiritual foundation. All the others worked upon the principles of matter and utility, training and efficiency, while her goal was spiritual nourishment and growth of the whole spiritual person, and education appropriate for the development of the spiritual life. Mason saw in the possession of the P.N.E.U. the possibility of triggering a momentous educational revolution based upon the two principles of the recognition of the spiritual character of education and the practical realization of the principle of Activism as it was already in place within her method.

Mason’s article caught the attention of a distinguished pupil of Eucken, Professor Bryce Gibson, of Melbourne, who prepared an address called ‘Education and Personality’ and presented it to the P.N.E.U. Victorian Branch in Australia and was published in the Parents’ Review. Mason identified this article as one of the most valuable ever published in the Magazine. In this article Gibson elaborates on the metaphysical principles of Eucken as applied to education, highlighting one of the few essays which Eucken devoted to the theme, entitled ‘Thoughts upon the Education of the People’. In this important essay, Eucken considers the essential requirement for a popular education

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394 In an editorial note after correcting the name of the author Mason commends his article with the following remark: “we are exceedingly glad to have this correction, for we have seldom had a more valuable paper to publish in the “The Parents’ Review”. Mason, The Parents’ Review 26, no. 6 (June 1915): 476.
By ‘education of the people’ it must not for a moment be supposed that we mean a special kind of education. We do not refer to a condensed preparation of our spiritual and intellectual possessions, suitable for the needs and interests of the great masses: we are not thinking of a diluted concoction of the real draught of education which we are so kind and condescending as to dispense to the majority. No: a thousand times, no! Just as there is only one truth common to us all, so there is only one education common to us all. In the case of the education of the people the only question is: How is this common education to be developed under the special circumstances of simple conditions of life and large masses of people?  

Mason was convinced that she had a positive answer to this question. She agreed with the principle that ‘one truth for all’ implies ‘one education for all’. Moreover she argued that she had developed a philosophy and method answering to the spiritual life of Man based upon the one truth common to all, which could be applied to the large mass of people as well as to any individual class.

**Religion and Civilization**

Mason’s contention of having found a practical solution to Eucken’s demand for a popular education enters in conflict with other aspects of his philosophical interpretation of the reality of the human condition. One of the attractive features of Eucken’s thought which Mason embraced with enthusiasm is his emphasis on the primary role of religion and spiritual reality as part of a necessary framework for all meaningful life and knowledge. At a time when religion and metaphysics had lost intellectual status and popular support, Eucken was willing to oppose the trend of non-metaphysical humanism and

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claim a role for religion based upon its transcendental claim to truth rather than upon its favourable uses for society. But Eucken also defined a dialectical opposition between civilization and religion.

For Eucken, while civilization and religion both procure the elevation of man they must always remain independently based as a condition for their respective prosperity. The prevalence of one over the other denies the dynamic demand of each one. Religion over culture denies independence of inquiry while civilization over religion curtails its transcendental meaning. A civilisation which remains faithful to its higher aims must remain open to religion, and religion must always hold to the primacy of grace as the foundation of faith without submitting to rational demands of civilization. The preponderance of the values of one over the values of the other robs each of these principles from their proper creative force necessary for the spiritual elevation of man.

Mason would agree with Eucken’s assessment of the importance of religion for civilisation especially at such times when civilisation is laboriously looking for new pathways in the midst of doubt and confusion. Eucken affirms that faith has the ability to renew mankind inwardly and sustain it through difficult times. This is exactly the role of religion that Mason thought was essential to promote through education in the midst of the climate of spiritual doubt of the late-Victorian Era. Mason generally presupposed congruence between the demands of personal freedom and the duties towards the state. From the realm of personal freedom of enquiry to the realm of dutiful
citizenship little fundamental conflict of interest was highlighted by Mason between the demands of religion and civilization.

Therefore, Mason saw herself at the brink of achieving a momentous revolution providing, by a simple application of the principle of activism to school discipline by means of narration, a means to realize an education of the spirit producing extraordinary results among all people.

Indeed, from those two principles, which coincide curiously with those of Eucken, we hope to bring about a momentous revolution: — I mean the recognition of the spiritual character of education; and, the application of the principle of Activism.397

Eucken’s insights exhibit remarkable congruence with Mason’s views. Although she never before had advocated such an understanding, the spiritual nature of education, activism, the ideals of freedom of personality, the contradictory impulses in the nature of children fit neatly within Eucken’s presentation of the nature of spiritual reality in which religion and civilisation exists. But, Mason’s philosophy and method are rooted upon the religious side of the equation, as defined by Eucken. Mason believed in freedom of inquiry and would advocate the independence of civilisation, in Eucken’s terms, but for her this freedom was grounded and limited by the certainties of revealed religion as found in the formularies of orthodox Christianity. Where Eucken speaks of ‘religion’ in general, Mason speaks of Christ centred Christianity requiring the commitment of personal discipleship. Mason rested the principles concerning the spiritual nature of

397 Mason, “Trop De Zèle” The Parents’ Review 25, no. 6 (June 1914): 410.
children in essentially theological terms i.e. ‘person’ without the need to ground them upon philosophical speculation. In other words the foundations of Mason’s method are intrinsically religious, while she was attempting to expand the application of her method through the national school to encompass the whole of civilization.

But, Eucken perceived a dialectic relationship of thesis and antithesis between religion and civilisation which points to a transcendental framework which enables a process of spiritual progress to take place preserving the ability of a person to move freely within that framework even in opposing directions. Religion and civilisation at the same time repel and attract one another. As he says;

Life is able to form independent points of departure within its own sphere, and to embrace within itself different and even opposed movements, the conflict of which advances life, preserves its freshness, and reveals to it a depth within itself.398

This dichotomy defined by Eucken, which Mason never explored, would have important consequences if applied to Mason’s goal of providing a spiritually based education to the whole Kingdom of England. Mason never seriously contemplated the possibility of a fundamental contradiction between religion and civilization. Her presupposition was mainly one of perfect congruence from the kingdom of the heart to the kingdom of England.

398 Eucken, Collected Essays of Rudolf Eucken, 9.
The War

Eucken’s status as the philosopher for the P.N.E.U. did not last long. The war broke a month after the publication of Mason’s paper endorsing Eucken’s philosophy, and it was not long before Eucken wrote in defence of Germany. By December of 1914 we find Mason declaring:

Perhaps we are all a good deal disappointed that Eucken, the exponent of this spiritual philosophy, has not been able to maintain a philosophic outlook in the present distressing crisis, but has ranked himself frankly amongst the Anglophobes; but we never had philosophers of our own in the past who have not even been able to keep clean hands, and it may be necessary to admit that a sound philosopher is not necessarily a well-poised human being. We, at any rate, in our small way are philosophic enough not to reject sound thinking on the score of alien sympathies.399

Yet, in spite of this ‘philosophical’ disposition little mention was made later of Eucken and the consequences of his thought in relation to the task of the P.N.E.U. except for a quotation in Mason’s final book which we shall consider in the next section. Mason never explored the metaphysical implications of Eucken’s interpretation of existence or applied it to understand the resistance against her efforts in trying to encompass both civilization and religion within the scope of her method.

Mason wrote giving advice about the war as ‘the doyen amongst acting teachers’ explaining how to answer children’s searching questions and how to look at the war as a ‘revealer of spiritual values’.

She saw the war as an occasion to examine the quality of the

education of the nation with the questions: ‘Is what we are giving good enough?’ and ‘What can be done to meet the demands of this great occasion?’ She identified the ideological causes of Germany’s claim to aggression and concluded:

Perhaps the tremendous object lesson of a nation gone astray may help us to see that the end of education is the power to form a right judgment in all things.

Mason identified as a root cause of the war the utilitarian education of Germany, which allowed for a specious but convincing argument to carry away a whole nation in an immoral direction. She also deplored the utilitarian model of education which was becoming prevalent in England leading her to raise the following objection against militarism:

The moment has come for us in England to decide whether we are to educate children on the principle of Militarism, solely for the uses of the State or whether we shall recognise that the State itself is the servant of the individual.

This records one of the few instances in which Mason recognized some conflict between the interest of the state and the interest of the person. The demands of a spiritual education implied a humanistic rather than a utilitarian and militaristic aim for popular education. Ironically, the war brought for Mason the opportunity for the expansion of the ‘Liberal for All Movement’ providing a wider entrance for her teachers and method into state schools.

The war brought with it unforeseen challenges and new opportunities. But it also brought another important sign of the

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400 Mason, “The War and the Teacher. Miss Mason’s Advice to the Editor of The Times” *The Times*, February 2, 1915.
402 Mason writing an editorial comment following Gibson’s article “Education and Personality” *The Parents’ Review* 26, no. 3 (March, 1915): 192.
evolution of Mason’s project, *The Mothers Education Course*, which had appeared announced as early as December of 1891 in the *Parents’ Review*, came to an end with the war in 1915,\(^{403}\) when cost and time, and other priorities made its continuation a practical impossibility. It was not reopened after the war.

This was the last direct link connecting Mason’s work with the original goal of the training of mothers. This is another sign of the transformation Mason’s project underwent as its primary focus shifted from the home to the nation. The war would affect Mason’s movement in other ways also. An untold number of boys educated in the first generation of P.N.E.U. Parents’ Review School did not see much of adult life in England.\(^{404}\) Also, Mason’s movement was further hampered in its efforts of expansion by a growing tendency towards inbreeding. This occurred in part for Mason’s need to exercise control over the development of her method, and also because of its marginal origins. Mason did not encourage *House of Education* graduates or staff to pursue degrees of higher learning to continue to develop an analogous creative process to the one she had started by assimilating new insights from science into her educational project. The aftermath of the war produced a very high number of respectable young women who then had even lower possibilities of marriage life. This increased the chances for the P.N.E.U. to continue to enrol from its own ranks a steady supply of young Christian women willing to devote their lives

\(^{403}\) Cholmondeley, *The Story of Charlotte Mason*, 45.

with missionary zeal to the reforming cause of education for the salvation of the nation, which became from then on a primary focus. As Mason wrote in 1922:

June 8th, 1922

My dear Miss King

Thank you for your letter. I am sure you have enlisted in our Crusade for the real bettering of England. You and the ‘seven’ to whom I would like to send my love.

I shall look forward to seeing 'Florence'. I think she will be happy with us, and you will fell that you are helping the world through her as well as in many other ways.

With kindest regard
truly yours

CM Mason

The war influenced the course of Mason’s final stage of work, giving her a sense of urgency while providing both an opportunity to answer the spiritual need of the nation and a door to enter into the school system. Mason’s crusade was coming to the last efforts to promote her educational reform by means of her last publication.

**Towards a Philosophy of Education**

The evolution of Mason’s philosophy from *Home Education* into the crystallization of an exceptional method of schooling was complete at its later stage. It was very frustrating for Mason, in spite of all the respect she had gained and the considerable number of children being taught under her method,⁴⁰⁶ to witness the sharp division between

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⁴⁰⁵ Mason, *Letter to Miss King*, 1922, Box CM1, Charlotte Mason Archive.

⁴⁰⁶ Mason claims in 1919 that “10,000 children in council schools are doing incredible things
sympathisers and opponents of her method. In a last attempt to make
the mature expression of her thought appealing to the English nation
Mason put together in a final volume the results of her long career
emphasizing its latest triumph and its implications. In this volume
Mason improved upon one liability which had been pointed out
against the *Home Education Series*. It was correctly pointed out that,
although suggestive and helpful, it lacked methodical presentation
hampering the appreciation of its ‘philosophic theory’. Mason’s last
book is the most methodical and philosophically consistent of all her
books.

The exposition of this book follows the main emphasis of the
synopsis adding the writings of the ‘liberal education for all’ and the
‘Basis of the National Strength’. The main focus on the book was to
produce ‘a volume which is chiefly concerned with education in the
sense of schooling’. Yet, in this book Mason does not fail to restate
and apply at the core of her method all the main religious convictions
she had previously held throughout her work.

The Liberal Education for all Movement gave Mason a basis
upon which to launch a last appeal to the educational leaders of the
English nation. She had evidence to back the claim that a spiritual
revolution could be accomplished through education. Children of the
lower class had experienced an intellectual awakening when exposed

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with freedom and joy. They have taken in hand their own education and are greedy of
knowledge for its own sake” Mason, “The Liberal Education Movement” *The Parents’ Review*
30, no. 2 (February 1919): 97.

407 “Educational Topics” *The Educational Times and Journal of the College of Preceptors* 59

to certain principles, under certain methods of a certain curriculum. No system but a method was provided built upon the premise of education as a spiritual endeavour because children are persons. A new hope for the world had been found. A new renaissance was within reach. The awakening of the soul of the people was possible by means of an intellectual and liberal education. The awakened souls manifested themselves in state schools where avidity for knowledge had become the primary motivation of children who had ‘taken in hand their own education’ seeking ‘knowledge for its own sake’ instead of being driven by marks and recompenses.

Although the administration of her curriculum remained centralized, Mason claimed that her method was now applicable to any school. She wrote the book to urge all concerned with education to become familiar with the series of principles, generally unknown or disregarded, she had discovered and tested through practical investigation for fifty years developing methods which made these extraordinary educational results not only possible but entirely effectual. Modifications and adaptations had been worked out to allow for a more universal application of the method with the hope of promoting an educational school awakening throughout the nation. Mason was able to claim that every statement of her philosophy had been proven in practice a thousand times and could be seen at work

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409 In 1920 Mason writes to Household after a visit to Gloucester. “What a week that was at Gloucester... I don't think such a breaking out with knowledge has been known any where since the Renaissance.” Mason, Letters to Mr Household, 1920, Box 44, Charlotte Mason Archive.


in all kinds of schools. Therefore, she felt justified in her claims of having developed a method that worked and which could potentially serve for the educational renewal of the English nation.

Mason believed that the P.N.E.U. was beginning to fulfil one of its original purposes to benefit parents and teachers of all classes. She saw in the ‘Liberal education for all movement’ the occasion to reveal a great discovery given at the appropriate time to her. This idea was simple and old but yet was the correction of a long held conviction which presumed that the best education could only be the property of the elite. ‘Not all is for all’, expresses the limited view which makes teachers essential as mediators of knowledge to instruct others about what they could not get by themselves. But the discovery made by Mason overturned this conception upon the premise that education is a matter of the spirit and therefore is accessible to all, transforming the relation between teachers and learners and beginning to fulfil the great hope of Comenius to give ‘all knowledge for all men’ by means of the best literature. The key idea is that children develop best as self-learners upon the principle that ‘All education is self-education’ and that ideas appeal to the spirit. This is enforced through the use of ‘telling again’ i.e. narration, a suitable means by which ideas are incorporated. Throughout this book great emphasis is given to the uses of narration, which had become a key feature for the application of Mason’s principles for lessons in the context of large groups in state schools.
At the last P.N.E.U. conference held in Ambleside during Whitsuntide in 1922, Mason gave her last series of addresses, where she summarized the main ideas which are developed in her last publication, and in passing highlights the spirituality of the children in relation to the knowledge of God. She states:

For the knowledge of God, the chief knowledge, we use the Bible, Prayer Book, and certain devout and up to date commentaries. We avoid what school-boys used to call 'pi-jaw.' We do not exhort much, nor appeal to feeling, nor shew pictures, nor introduce models or handicrafts; but the sincere piety of P.U.S. children is remarkable, and is perhaps partly due to the fact that they are never bored but always interested. From the age of twelve or so, they read a Life of Christ in verse; they seem to recognise that the poetic point of view helps them to realise the Divine life, in itself the epic of the ages.\(^{412}\)

This brings to the forefront the observation, often ignored, that the spirituality fostered by Mason had a definite Anglican foundation while it aimed at a universal scope. In this last publication Mason did not add any novel religious idea but rather recapitulated those which had been already established in her previous work with small variations of emphasis. For example instead of talking about the ‘Great Recognition’ that the ‘Holy Spirit is the educator of mankind,’ the discussion about the Fresco highlighted by Ruskin appears in a discussion about the meaning of knowledge old and new.\(^{413}\) The original principles of Home education are presupposed without need of re-statement. The role of mothers is highlighted briefly by pointing out again that they are the best religious instructors of their young children. The practice of meditation does not receive direct expression,


\(^{413}\) Mason, \textit{Essay Towards a Philosophy of Education}, 321.
as it is practically substituted by the notion of narration, except when presenting a discussion about the profound meaning of the identification of Christ as the word.

The knowledge of God falls under the discussion of curriculum. Through this discussion many of the ideas highlighted in the Books _Ourselves_ and the _Saviour of the World_ are explained as part of their use for religious instruction in school lessons. A section devoted to religious instruction presents various examples of work produced by children and then concludes with a revealing summary:

The Catechism, Prayer-book, and Church History are treated with suitable text-books much in the same manner and give opportunities for such summing-up of Christian teaching as is included in the so-called dogmas of the Church. We find that Sundays together with the time given to preparation for Confirmation afford sufficient opportunities for this teaching.\(^{414}\)

Once more it becomes evident that the presupposition about who were the children who would be receiving this religious instruction is that they would be members of the Church of England, who would be instructed upon the basis of the dogmas of the Church and would partake of confirmation. In her discussion about habits, Mason includes a reflection about religious habits in children which includes a detailed quote of the experience of Thomas De Quincey who in his autobiography describes his intense experience of a Sunday Service on 'a church on the ancient model of England'\(^{415}\) which concludes stating:

\(^{414}\) Mason, _Essay Towards a Philosphy of Education_, 103.

\(^{415}\) Thomas De Quincey, _The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey_ (London: A. & C. Black, 1896), 46.
God speaks to children also in dreams and by the oracles that lurk in darkness; but in solitude, above all things when made vocal to the meditative heart by the truths and services of a national church, God holds with children ‘communion undisturbed.’

Upon the basis of this testimony and by recollection of their common experience as children brought up familiar with the liturgical services of the national church of England Mason affirms that:

we may take courage to believe that what we rightly call Divine Service is particularly appropriate to children; and will become more so as the habit of reading beautifully written books quickens their sense of style and their unconscious appreciation of the surpassingly beautiful diction of our liturgy.

While discussing the second principle of the synopsis, Mason refers to the same paradigm she presents in the meditations of 1898 comparing the inner life of the spirit with the basic structure of the temple with its three dimensions from the outer courts: ‘mind and body’, to the holy places: ‘the affections and the will’, to the inner core of the Holy of Holies: ‘where man performs his priestly functions’ to explore the question: What may education do for the soul of a child? Mason answers by quoting her book *Ourselves*, that children as persons have the same spiritual needs as adults:

How is the soul of a man to be satisfied? Crowned kings have thrown up dominion because they want that which is greater than kingdoms; profound scholars fret under limitations which keep them playing upon the margin of the unsounded ocean of knowledge; no great love can satisfy itself with loving; there is no satisfaction save one for the soul of a man, because the things about him are finite, measurable, incomplete and his reach is beyond his grasp. He has an urgent, incessant, irrepressible need of the infinite. ‘I want, am made for, and must have a God;’—not a mere serviceable religion,—because we have

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416 De Quincey, De Quincey, The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey, 48.
in us an infinite capacity for love, loyalty and service which we cannot expend upon any other.\footnote{Mason, \textit{Essay Towards a Philosphy of Education}, 64.}

The great need of the soul of man is God. And this great yearning of the soul is the same for adults and children. The best way to satisfy this hunger is by the nourishment of the words of Scripture, as a treasury of ‘divine words’ which children reproduce with delight in their lessons as long as they are not hindered by too much instruction, or by opinions instead of direct encounter with ideas. Mason distinguishes opinions from ideas in terms of their lack of power to generate and sustain interest. That is why the best literature appeals to the soul, because it provides nourishment of ideas instead of loose disconnected and boring notions. Through constant exposure to Scripture and profound devotional literature children:

\begin{quote}
get that knowledge of God which is the object of the final daily prayer in our beautiful liturgy—the prayer of St Chrysostom—‘Grant us in this world knowledge of Thy truth,’ and all other knowledge which they obtain gathers round and illuminates this.\footnote{Mason, \textit{Essay Towards a Philosphy of Education}, 64.}
\end{quote}

As highlighted before, the emphasis on the knowledge of God as the most important foundation of education which illuminates all the rest, opposes the notion of an education limited to temporal uses. Mason reaffirms her rejection of a utilitarian definition of education, by which the main interest of school be either to serve the temporal advantage of the individual or the interest of the state:

\begin{quote}
Germany has pursued a different ideal. Her efforts, too, have been great, unified by the idea of utility; and, if we will only remember the lesson, the war has shown us how futile is an education which affords no moral or intellectual uplift, no
motive higher than the learner's peculiar advantage and that of the State. Germany became morally bankrupt (for a season only, let us hope) not solely because of the war but as the result of an education which ignored the things of the spirit or gave these a nominal place and a poor rendering in a utilitarian syllabus.\textsuperscript{421}

Education must not ignore or subordinate the spiritual nature of persons. As mentioned in our previous sections, Eucken had raised this principle as implying a demand for 'only one education common to us all' raising the question:

How is this common education to be developed under the circumstances of simple conditions of life and large masses of people? That this should be accomplished is the decisive mark of all real education.

To which Mason responds:

The writer (Eucken) offers no solution of this problem: and it remains with the reader to determine each with himself whether that solution which I here propose is or is not worth a trial.\textsuperscript{422}

This is the challenge placed by Mason upon each individual reader of her last essay. She and the P.N.E.U. had great expectations about the possibilities raised by this proven philosophy and procured for it a number of respectable endorsements. But Mason died early in 1923, while the book was still at the printers, so that when a few months later the book finally came out it took more the sense of a memorial tribute to honour the memory of her work than a challenge to be seriously grappled with. Once Mason's personal influence was gone, it was easy to see her work as representing a past era in educational theory rather than a challenge towards the education of

\textsuperscript{421} Mason, \textit{Essay Towards a Philosophy of Education}, 123.
\textsuperscript{422} Mason, \textit{Essay Towards a Philosophy of Education}, 249.
the future, which steadily continue to move upon the utilitarian and psychological principles which Mason so much deplored.

Mason’s radical claims and challenging proposal for her discovery and the evaluation of the claims of her work as a truly new educational philosophy able to respond to the needs of the English nation were basically ignored. The philosophical claims and the evidence to validate them which were the fruit of her life work were not debated, they were neither accepted nor rejected. The implications of her work have yet to be assessed either by secular or religious authorities; Her work has yet to be acknowledged as a substantial and original contribution to the theory of Christian education thoroughly developed upon an Anglican perspective.

After such a life of achievement the death of Mason marked the beginning of the end of an era for the P.N.E.U. Immediately upon her death the movement entered into conservation mode, and in spite of all their efforts to make the work carry on they experienced a slow process of diminishing influence. Mason’s thought just passed slowly out of the main focus of attention into the margins, where it remained, until sixty years later it was rediscovered by contemporary Christian mothers recovering its lost vitality and showing strong signs of a resurrection apart from the institutional garb of the P.N.E.U.

**A Hope of Resurrection**

It is suitable to end this chapter making reference to Mason’s last published Meditation, from 1921, published in 1925 reflecting the
deep yearning of the P.N.E.U. that the legacy of Mason’s thought would endure. The meditation is a reflection upon the message of Easter beginning with some remarks about the collect for Easter Sunday. Mason summarizes it in two of its key phrases: that God has ‘opened the gate of everlasting life’ through Jesus and the simple petition appropriate for any time ‘Put into our minds good desires’ which she identifies as the desires of the elevated life of the Spirit. She goes on to explore the mystery of the meaning of the resurrection of the dead.

The resurrection is more than an event, it is a principle of life for the present, based upon the conviction that the ‘there is no death’. Only the flesh can die, not the spirit. Mason expresses her faith in life after death and applies it to her hope about her work:

some of us believe that we may be allowed to go on with the work we have done. Perhaps it is not only the successors who carry on the work, but the spiritual thought of those who began the work. It is so good to think that any good work we carry on will be carried on.

Mason believed that the works begun upon earth would be a growing seed for eternity, implying a personal life where each personality is preserved living an infinitely rich enjoyment of that which is eternal, which each person already has in this life, is able to begin to cultivate and will never lose. Mason saw the great goal of education to be the

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424 The collect for Easter reads as follows: Almighty God, who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life: We humbly beseech thee, that, as by thy special grace preventing us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.
nourishment of that which is eternal in each person. She emphasised the material temporal body as the seed of the life of the resurrection so that that which is temporal is the precondition for that which is eternal, while the temporal is left behind and transformed. Mason expressed this hope:

The resurrection must be so much more full. If we love on earth, enjoy beauty, glory in sweet sounds, heroic deeds, we shall glory, enjoy and love, much more in the life to come.

The resurrection and the life are principles that we can understand. It is the principle of the overcoming of evil which we trust will happen even if ‘We may not live to see it, but the peace of God will come.’ This meditation concludes quoting Mason’s series of poems about the raising of Lazarus:

As fluttering birds just ’scaped the nest,
Half blinded, baffled, by wide air,
Make tiny flight, then sink to rest
Fall’n in some ditch which chances there;-
E’en so our timid fancies fare
In that vast ocean of deep thought
Thou launches us upon; -scarce dare
We seize a hope we ne’er had sought,
Or hold secure the bliss that Word to men hath brought!

I am the light,’ we think we see;
‘I am the door,’ we peer within;
I am the life.’ —Lord, ever be
Our life to save from death of sin!
‘I am the resurrection,’ win
We, for all our thinking, scarce,
A hint of all enclosed within
The casket of that word; nay, worse,
Vain words of would-be faith, like Martha, we rehearse.

And every day, behold, we fall;
But, lo, that germ of life we hold
May not be weighted by the pall
Of custom or of death as cold;
We rise, in our Redeemer bold;
Where there is life needs it must rise;
No cerement shall the soul enfold;
The strong truth lifts us to the skies;
Lo, resurrection is- our life in amolest guise.\textsuperscript{425}

In this chapter I have examined the final stage of development of Mason’s project showing the paradoxical nature of its success. The education for the kingdom required adaptations which entailed a subtle displacement of the inner religious core of the philosophy. The method became identified with the philosophy, and proven and tested by its results, the very pragmatic criteria which Mason had tried to resist in promoting a spiritual education for all. After Mason’s death the P.N.E.U. movement did everything possible to extend the life and influence of Mason’s philosophy resisting any change or innovation of its ‘realized’ pedagogy.\textsuperscript{426} Yet, in spite of this the philosophy slowly decayed out of sight until its recent resurrection in the Homeschool movement. In the following conclusion I will draw together the fruit of this exploration suggesting a point of view from which to explain both the death and the resurrection of Mason’s philosophy, its renewed attraction for some contemporary homeschooling Christian parents and teachers and its importance for the theory and practice of Christian education from an Anglican perspective.

\textsuperscript{425} Mason “Lift us up for ever” in \textit{The Saviour of the World} 5, 188-189.
\textsuperscript{426} See Jack E. Beckman, "Lessons to Learn - Charlotte Mason’s House of Education and Resistance to Taxonomic Drift (1892-1960)".
Chapter VI Conclusion

The exploration of the religious foundation of Mason’s educational thought has exposed the grounds upon which it can be claimed that Charlotte Mason developed a coherent body of educational thought based upon the religious presuppositions of Anglicanism. This gives her work a unique, although until now unacknowledged, place among the philosophers contributing to the theory of education in the history of Christian educational thought. At the beginning of this exploration I pointed out the need for a better framework from which to assess the meaning and importance of Mason’s work in the history of Christian education. As a fruit of this exploration I have uncovered a series of ‘new’ sources which I believe help to assess this whole subject from an alternative perspective, opening at the same time various fronts for further investigation.

In this research I have challenged the received opinion that there is a seamless continuity and non-confictive progression from beginning to end in the body of Mason’s thought and work. Rather I have followed a process of development revealing a series of underlying tensions leading to various adaptations and changes of emphasis in an attempt to ignore or reconcile incompatible, problematic or inconsistent claims and features of Mason’s work.

In the final chapters I have examined the final stage of development of Mason’s project showing the paradoxical nature of its
success. The ideal of one education for the whole kingdom required adaptations which entailed a subtle displacement of the inner religious core of the philosophy.

This paradoxical tension at the core of Mason’s movement, coupled with particular circumstances, serves to explain why in spite of all the efforts to succeed, in expanding the influence of the movement, and all the claims for verifiable results were not enough to commend it to the general adoption of the English public, at the beginning of the twentieth century, and why ultimately Mason and her devout followers failed in this attempt.

I have traced the evolution of Mason’s ambitious project for parent’s education suggesting that some of its inner tensions may have resulted from unknown factors hidden within the details of Mason’s personal story now shrouded in mystery. An examination of some of the documents peculiar to the early stages of her work revealed the thoughts of a woman freely engaged in the task of searching for new ways to strengthen the education of Christian children in order to preserve them from the dangers of unbelief. We saw how this apologetic impulse led to the creation of a multifaceted effort to strengthen the ability of Christian parents to provide a spiritual education for their children at home, but at the same time we saw how the original scope began to evolve in a process which led Mason to shift the focus of attention from the mother at home to the teacher at school and eventually to the realization of an educational reform movement for the nation. Paradoxically, the price of this shift
of focus was the attenuation of the Anglican spirituality which inspired the inner core of Mason’s philosophy and movement.

To begin to understand this paradoxical result, I propose to focus attention upon the insights provided by the only philosopher Mason ever hailed as the one in essential agreement with her views concerning a spiritual education. Eucken offered metaphysical categories which serve to identify the roots of Mason’s paradox which may be perceived as embedded within Anglicanism as articulated in the theology of F.D. Maurice’s identification of the Kingdom of God with the institutional manifestation of the Church of England as an established Church within the British Empire.

If Eucken’s assessment of the dialectic tension between religion and civilization is correct, a universal education based upon the convictions of personal faith by grace, entails an irresolvable paradox; becoming simultaneously a necessity and a practical impossibility. The demands of religion and civilization cannot be universally supplied at the same time, without sacrificing one or the other. Only one common education for all human persons necessary entails a contradiction.

It is this fact which defines, according to Eucken, the framework upon which personal freedom can be exercised, which is necessary for the activism which leads to human creativity and spiritual elevation. This freedom opens the possibility of contradictory developments both at the heart of religion and civilization. An education based upon the spirit, a personal and spiritual education entails, as recognized by
Mason herself, freedom from every form of tyranny, unbounded personal freedom in the pursuit of knowledge, contradicting the idea of a universal common education, which in practice must become tied to particular institutional forms and authority.

This paradox does not render Mason’s achievement worthless. But it highlights the necessary limitations of its intended religious personal and universal scope. It also serves to explain the resurrection of Mason’s thought apart from any particular institutional manifestation of its method. Thanks to the ultimate failure of the P.N.E.U., history has allowed a possibility which was not presented to Mason’s audience during her lifetime: the separation of her philosophy from the institutional manifestation of its method, and the unbounded creative application of its principles again guided by the voluntary interest and free initiative of mothers acting upon the basis of faith and personal conviction, which appears to have characterized Mason’s own process of self-education. This new initiative has revitalized Mason’s philosophy in new and diverse contexts.

In the trajectory from home to school education, Mason chose a society for the instruction of parents as the means by which to develop and promote her thought. The exigencies of moral probity, traditional gender roles and class boundaries imposed formidable barriers for gaining respectability during the late-Victorian era which curtailed Mason’s ability to be transparent concerning whatever were her personal and spiritual facts of her early life. This need for secrecy carried down the line an eventual attenuation of the personal
dimensions of the foundations of Mason’s thought with its overt Christian spiritual and apologetic convictions. In an attempt to universalise her appeal this ambiguous start eventually led to a complete identification between Mason’s personal philosophy and the institutional realization of her method within the confines of the success of the P.N.E.U. schools. A shift of focus began to move attention away from the mother and the home, to the teacher and the school as a means to serve the nation, until by the end, mothers practically fell out of the picture.

I believe that the internal tension and compromise, between Mason’s personal convictions and the needs of the P.N.E.U., eventually weakened Mason’s potential to act as a prophetic voice from within Anglicanism concerning education. Her message was particular and meaningful relative to the adoption of certain religious convictions, which she attenuated in order to succeed. Everything she said makes perfect sense to committed parents in the Christian tradition. But, Mason cloaked these in order to gain acceptance. The society she founded required only an abstract commitment with moral and religious concerns. The end result of this process was that Mason’s work eventually was deprived from receiving the more definitive place it could receive as an original contribution to the theory and practice of education viewed from a Christian perspective, had Mason being more transparent about her actual religious commitments, as she was within the inner core of her movement.
The truth about how she was able to negotiate the obstacles presented by the exigencies of late-Victorian social and religious life remained hidden. There were certain lines which Mason was never willing to cross officially, due to her conservative Anglicanism setting for her the boundaries of traditional gender roles. This explains for example, why there were never male teachers instructed in her House. It is hard to speculate about ‘what if’ in history, but a look into the annals of British educational history shows that men whose career and achievements have been relatively modest in comparison to Mason’s, have nevertheless received much more credit and attention than Mason has. Yet, none of these educational reformers of the nineteenth century are being actively sought after with passion today, as Mason is. Just this simple fact is indicative of the importance of her work for the theory of Christian education.

The implications of Mason’s work are in fact potentially revolutionary. Mason should be recognized as a unique educational philosopher, the framer of what could be regarded as the only fully articulated gospel centred philosophy of education and discipleship based upon the doctrinal foundation of Anglicanism, a unique contribution to the theory and practice of Christian education. Yet, as presented in this study, the historical, national, English form of Anglicanism which gave Mason the foundations upon which to build, also provided the constraints which would generate paradoxical tensions and obstacles for its growth.
For example, here is the paradox Mason had to address: a well educated person, freely following independent personal convictions will tend to think for herself and may challenge hierarchical systems of control which rely upon authority rather than evidence or truth. Mason’s idea of the sacredness of the person and the recognition of children as persons, made every willing person an authorized self-educator, it redefined the role of teachers as helpers, potentially challenging the established order of class, based upon money or race.

As pointed out in chapter five, Mason’s realization of the potential implications of the teaching of Christ concerning the sacred mysterious nature of children and the sacredness of personality are yet to be realize by a majority of Christian educators, raising a challenge to contemporary educators to evaluate the educational points of view and methods which by definition do not acknowledge the spiritual as a valid category at the level of educational theory.

This I would argue is one of the most important and challenging features of Mason’s educational philosophy, with relevant implications for today. Mason articulated a radical opposition to utilitarian indoctrination, management, engineering or manipulation of people, by means of ‘education’ based upon a religious recognition of the infinite value of the person over its natural and societal relations within the family, church and the nation. But, Mason took for granted the religious ethos of the British Empire, and never seriously contemplated a contradiction between these dimensions of human existence. Mason’s original intent of empowering the person to think
for herself, may clash against the interest of family, church and state. She never saw a contradiction between protecting the person from ‘every form of tyranny’ and choosing for the person a close curriculum of the ‘best literature’ selected by the experts like her.

Unfortunately, as time went on this original tension between individual freedom and society was resolved by conformity and subordination of the person to the institutions rather than in favour of the freedom of the person, a feature which became fixed through the administration of a closed P.N.E.U. curriculum.

Mason trusted in the truth of the Christian religion as taught by the Anglican Church. She felt there was nothing to fear from the Anglican position. Yet all throughout her career there was in her thought an incipient paternalism which tended to approach the lower classes from a patronizing point of view validated by the Anglican Church’s ethos. Children are Persons, but some persons (the poor) need to be guided like little children for their own good for life by religiously motivated, benevolent managers. The ruling class had the duty to manage the lower class. Carefully assessed, these presuppositions are incompatible with Mason’s revolutionary religious and educational principles. So, in practice, her philosophy tended to affirm rather than challenge the class consciousness of English society, always with an underlying bad conscience, for the inconsistency it purported between principle and practice.

The class system in British society was sanctioned by Anglicanism and was linked to the imperial paternalism which Mason
shared. Mason’s method proved to be appealing, satisfying the some of
the educational expectations of members of the elite and for parents
serving abroad the ‘benevolent civilizing’ project of the British Empire,
especially for the education of girls, in their need to provide an
education which would foster the British identity when they were not
able to be instructed in England.

The prospect of English respectability was an appealing feature
which the House of Education had to offer to prospective students
seeking the promise of employment as a governess for a well to do
families in England or abroad. The development of PUS schools was
an unforeseen by-product of the work of these governesses, as the
demand for their services to the children of the elite grew among
families with the reputation of the P.N.E.U. respectability. When the
war created an unforeseen demand for school teachers to take care of
displaced children, the doors were flung open for Mason’s graduates to
come and influence directly state schools.

Thus, the liberal education for all movement was born, but it
required certain fundamental adaptations which attenuated the
radical individualistic and religious principles underlying Mason’s
philosophy. By the end of her life the self-taught independently
minded Mason was trying to secure Board Administration
accreditation credentials for her House of Education certificate,
something which she had previously refused to pursue. The Mother
educational Course was dropped, and her poetry project left
unfinished. Mason was seized at last with the prospect of a real
opportunity, after her failed attempts, to recruit the whole nation into her educational vision, but this time not only by persuasion but by securing a place in the government compulsory system and its standardization, again without perceiving the contradictory entailed in such proposal.

Finally, the opportunity came for realizing her old vision of influencing directly the whole nation by guiding it to adopt her curriculum by state schools as happened in Gloucester. But this integration carried a price. This vision of missionary zeal for reforming the nation through the ‘educational gospel’ bypassed the objections to the system Mason had articulated earlier and sympathized with in the philosophy of Eucken. When the opportunity came, Mason tried to influence the growing modern system, to actually use it, without realizing the incompatibility of the modern system with the radical religious principles at the heart of her philosophy. The modern project of compulsory managed education based upon the theories of the experts, their examination and standardizations could not be squared with the ideal of defending persons from all forms of tyranny. State sponsored compulsory schooling could be interpreted as at least a potential threat which could compromise Mason’s scope of an education grounded upon spiritual principles.

The religious underpinnings of the philosophy became attenuated in order to adapt the method for public national compulsory consumption. As the modern state continued to move away from the tacit religious presuppositions of the Victorian era, so
Mason’s philosophy lost more and more its religious meaning, purpose, impulse and appeal, except for the groups which kept benefiting their children by the services of the highly valued governesses and the devotees of the inner circle. The vision of a religious revival of Christianity triggered by the liberal education of all persons would not be realized. It could not be imposed upon one, even less ‘all’, without contradiction.

Now that this link has been broken Mason’s thought has been freed from its institutional cocoon and paternalistic presuppositions. It has been creatively seized by a new group of parents and teachers in a new set of cultural circumstances, opening new opportunities for the realization of its radical implications. Many of these educators share an apologetic aim similar to the one Mason may have faced in her secret personal life. They found in Mason’s educational writings a fellow sympathetic writer from a hundred years before. I believe it is time for Mason’s philosophy to enter the realm of philosophical discussion, and her writings, like her pamphlet Concerning Children as Persons, to become the common property of all Christian educators and a required reading for any course of instruction on the subject of educational theory, since so many parents and teachers Have witnessed to the stimulating result of an encounter with Mason’s thought.

The challenge for these parents, teachers and educators is to learn from the historical example which the benefit of hindsight provides for those who examine this history critically; helping to
assess not only the threat of a secular society, but also the limitations of their own conceptions of Christianity which may hinder the practical implications of an honest recognition of the sanctity of children as persons.

A glance into the history of the Christian church is enough to realize that there is still much to learn concerning the implications of the ‘code of education’ identified by Mason in Jesus’ teaching concerning children and his kingdom. For this reason Mason’s work is sure to continue to spur interest for generations still to come. I hope that this exploration may help those who are seeking a more thorough understanding of her contribution and future researchers who will be able to see more perfectly the blind spots in my own investigation and learn from the achievements and limitations of this great Christian educator from the past.
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