The Role of the Clergymen in Creating a Model of Submissive Femininity in Philanthropic Work in Nineteenth-Century Britain

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Abstract

This study suggests that the clergymen in nineteenth-century Britain supported women's involvement in charitable work to cultivate a submissive, nurturing model of femininity that complemented patriarchal male norms. Although some historians have argued that Christianity played a crucial role in shaping women's social experience, this article puts forward some arguments to prove the opposite. Rooted in Christian doctrine, many clerics promoted the idea of women as naturally subordinate to men, both in the family and in society. The patriarchal interpretation of religious teachings reinforced the idea that women's primary virtues were piety, modesty, and submission, often influencing the expectations placed on women participating in philanthropic efforts. Further, they shaped a model of female philanthropy that emphasised submission and moral duty over independence and social change, keeping women within a framework that prevented them from challenging the broader patriarchal structures of the time. The analysis showed that the clergymen framed women's philanthropic work as virtuous, yet at the same time, they reinforced societal norms that limited their independence and enhanced their subordinate position.

Keywords

Clergymen;
Male norms;
Philanthropic work;
Submission;
Women.

دور رجال الدين في خلق نموذج للأنوثة الخاضعة في العمل الخيري في بريطانيا في القرن التاسع عشر

ملخص

تشير هذه الدراسة إلى أن رجال الدين في بريطانيا في القرن التاسع عشر دعموا مشاركة النساء في الأعمال الخيرية لتنمية نموذج خاضع وراعي للأنوثة يكمل المعايير الذكورية الأبوية. ورغم أن بعض المؤرخين زعموا أن المسيحية لعبت دوراً حاسماً في تشكيل التجربة الاجتماعية للنساء، فإن هذه المقالة تطرح بعض الحجج لإثبات العكس. من خلال التعمق في العقيدة المسيحية، روّج العديد من رجال الدين لفكرة مفادها أن النساء خاضعات بشكل طبيعي للرجال، سواء في الأسرة أو في المجتمع. وقد عزز هذا التفسير الأبوي للتعاليم الدينية فكرة أن الفضائل الأساسية للمرأة هي التقوى والتواضع والخضوع، والتي كانت غالبًا ما تنسج في التوقعات الموضوعة على النساء المشاركات في الجهود الخيرية. وعلاوة على ذلك، فقد صاغوا نموذجًا للعمل الخيري الأنثوي الذي أكد على الخضوع والواجب الأخلاقي على الاستقلال والتغيير الاجتماعي، مما أبقى النساء داخل إطار منعهن من تحدي الهياكل الأبوية الأوسع في ذلك الوقت. وأظهر التحليل أن رجال الدين اعتبروا العمل الخيري الذي تقوم به النساء عملاً فاضلاً، ولكنهم في الوقت نفسه عززوا المعايير المجتمعية التي تحد من استقلالهن وتعزز من وضعهن التابع.

الكلمات المفتاحية

رجال الدين؛
المعايير الذكورية؛
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I- Introduction :

Religion, Christianity in particular, played a crucial role in women's empowerment in nineteenth-century Britain. Despite ideological and cultural restrictions imposed upon women, they found ways to assert their agency within religious frameworks. Religious organisations, particularly those associated with the Anglican and Evangelical Church, established various charitable societies, often under the leadership of clergymen, where they assigned women roles that challenged the dominant patriarchal structure of gender roles. Middle-class women received encouragement to assist the poor, sick, and orphaned, in addition to their roles as mothers and housewives. Following this line of thought, scholar Maria Luddy (1996) argued that organized religious establishments, such as the Catholic and Anglican churches, played a central role in supporting women's independence by encouraging them to fully participate in charitable work (p. 350). Similarly, historian Williams Elliott proposed that clergymen tended to create opportunities for women to engage in charitable work to elevate their social position (2002).

Nevertheless, women's involvement in charitable work was circumscribed by the idea that they should remain in supportive, rather than leadership, positions, ensuring that they did not step beyond the boundaries of what was deemed "appropriate" female behavior. This article attempts to prove that the clergymen's vision of philanthropy not only reinforced the submissive role of women but also perpetuated the existing gender system. The clergymen praised women for their nurturing qualities and guided them to view their participation in charitable work not as a form of empowerment or leadership, but rather as an expression of passive obedience within a limited scope that did not challenge male authority. This moral framework created a version of womanhood that was both submissive and self-sacrificing, often silencing the potential for more autonomous or politically engaged forms of charity.

The study's perspective is historical, and the approach adopted to address the problem is descriptive and analytical. The descriptive aspect involves detailing the historical context, outlining how clergymen, often through religious doctrines, advocated for women's submissive roles in society. These descriptions emphasize the framing of women's charitable work participation as an extension of their domestic and moral responsibilities. The analytical one dives deeper into how and why clergymen promoted this submissive ideal. This could involve theological beliefs that underscored gender roles, the influence of patriarchal structures within the Church, and how these ideas reinforced broader social expectations. By combining both aspects, this approach provides both a detailed account of the historical phenomenon and a critical understanding of its underlying dynamics and impact on women's roles in society.

The article comprises three sections. The first brings to the fore the established literature about the role of religion in shaping the ideal of womanhood in nineteenth-century Britain. Then it moves on to explore women's involvement in charitable organisations as one of the main roles open to them during this period. It finally analyses how the clergymen used charitable work as a means of reinforcing women's subordinate status to the prevalent male system.

I.1. Religion and Gender in the 19th Century:

The debate over whether religion has historically been a source of women's empowerment or a force of oppression is complex and open to different interpretations. Thus, this section attempts to offer a nuanced understanding about the relationship between religion and gender in nineteenth-century Britain, with a focus on varying perspectives and arguments on the subject.

Historians of the post-1850s feminist movement have put forward several arguments that argued that religion was a source of women's empowerment. In particular, the idea of women and their moral duty in society flourished during the Evangelical revival. The clerics viewed women as the moral guardians of society, responsible for upholding Christian virtues like purity, piety, and humility. This moral duty was often used to argue that religion elevated women's social role, giving them a significant, albeit restricted, influence within the family and community (Groothuis, 1997).

The Victorian ideal of "true womanhood" was closely bound up with religious piety. Women who adhered to religious norms were considered respectable, which was essential for their social standing. In a patriarchal society, religion gave women a form of soft power through moral respectability, which could influence the behavior of men and the structure of the household. Historian Cynthia Scheinberg (2002) noted that the churchmen offered women religious role models such as the Virgin Mary and female saints, who embodied virtues of compassion, humility, and sacrifice (p.115). Churchmen upheld these figures as ideals for women to aspire to, providing religious justification for their roles in family and society.

To rid society of debauchery and other forms of sexual libertinage, religious doctrines have supported the notion of marriage as a sacred institution that could provide women with protection and upper status within the family. The religious model of the family emphasised the husband's duty to provide and protect, while the wife was seen as the nurturer and homemaker. Some argued that this model ensured women's welfare, shielding them from the harshness of the outside world. Following this line of thought, scholar Sider Ronald (1985) has argued that the evangelicals were

striving to protect women from the evils of Enlightenment and secularism by reconstructing the family life and sexual relations between men and women on the grounds of real Christianity (pp. 2-3). This statement suggests that Christianity has framed marriage as more than a social contract but also as an institution meant to maintain social order, strengthen moral values, and ensure family unity.

Some historians have argued that while religion often reinforced gender roles, it also presented a view of spiritual equality before God. In this sense, women were considered equally valuable in the eyes of God, which provided a theological basis for their dignity and moral worth. Some Christian reformers asserted that women's spiritual equality should translate into better treatment and more opportunities in society. Jolyn Schraedel (2023) reflected an idealised vision of gender relations grounded in religious virtues: a woman's faith in God makes her worthy of a man's respect, love and devotion. This aligns with traditional frameworks where women were seen as spiritual anchors, and men, in turn, were drawn to them for guidance and stability (p. 3). The idea of subtly places women's virtue as cornerstone for harmonious relationships.

The clergymen in Britain not only upheld female virtues in family life but also championed women's rights, especially their right to education, often framing it within their roles as mothers, wives, and caregivers. Schools run by religious organisations, such as Sunday schools, taught women literacy and moral education. The Church of England further endorsed women's education via the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, established in 1811 (Burgess, 1950). In spite of the fact that it initially focused on boys, this establishment opened its doors to girls, especially in rural areas. Nevertheless, the curriculum for girls was typically more limited, with an emphasis on domestic skills, religious instruction, and basic literacy.

In addition, the churchmen provided ways for women to engage in philanthropic activities, where they exercised a sense of agency within the confines of charitable work, such as caring for the poor, orphans, and the sick. Victorians often saw women as morally suited for charitable work because of their perceived innate qualities of compassion and selflessness. Religious organisations, particularly within the Church of England and non-conformist circles, provided women with the structure and legitimacy to engage in social reform and welfare efforts (Zigan & Le Grys, 2018, p. 536). Many women led-initiatives, such as the establishment of orphanages, workhouses, and temperance movements, were inspired by a Christian sense of duty to alleviate suffering and uplift the poor.

Nevertheless, several arguments were advanced to demonstrate that religion was a source of women's oppression in nineteenth-century Britain. These arguments stemmed primarily from feminist and Freethinking circles, which critiqued gender norms embedded in religious teachings and practices.

Contemporary scholars like Barbara Taylor and Laura Schwartz often cited religious texts, especially interpretations of Scripture, to justify women's subordinate position in society. Passages that emphasised female submission to male authority, including the maleness of Jesus and the creation of Adam before Eve, tended to favour the male self-hood while disadvantaging females and placing them in a subordinate position. They were used to uphold patriarchal norms and presented women as obedient wives, caregivers, and mothers with little autonomy or authority in public life (Schwartz, 2013, p. 131). It must be said that the Christianised versions of gender roles in Scriptural teachings, which argued that women's empowerment relied so heavily on men's fuller understanding of God and religion, provided the justification or the foundation for much of the pervasive persecution and subjection of women in family enterprises.

With the rise of evangelicals within the Church of England, ideas of domestic femininity - with women as the moral guide of the home - became ever more persuasive. The concept of the 'Angel in the House' was first introduced by the evangelicals, and it aimed to define the home as woman's proper and safe sphere. But the avowed object of it was to excluded women from positions of power. Leading Quaker feminist Sara Stickney Ellis (1843) was interested in the duties and roles of women in the Victorian family, assuming that clergymen played a crucial role in reinforcing women's subordinate position in society at large. The duty of a wife, she argued, was to observe the things which habitually would strike the attention of her husband, so as to convey to him immediate impressions of pleasures or of pain; the senses of the men must ever be consulted by the wife who would adapt herself to her husband's mood and character (p. 22).

Some feminist scholars have claimed that the Bible was the main source for canonizing an unequal marriage system. They powerfully believed that religious doctrines emphasised conventional gender roles, often presenting women as naturally submissive, virtuous, and destined for domestic responsibilities. However, this religious framework served as a justification for the limitations placed on married women in private life (Thormahlen, 1999, p. 37). Interestingly, these far more repressive views gave way to an ever-increasing recognition that women were treated somewhat as slaves and they had few rights in comparison to their male counterparts.

Although some Christian writers were agreed that the evangelicals attempted to reconstruct the family life and sexual relations between the sexes on the grounds of real Christianity, some recent studies pointed out that the Priesthood marriages were incompatible with the feminist perceptions. Biblical passages, such as the idea of Eve's sin and women being the weaker vessel, were often interpreted to support the view that women should remain in the home, focusing on

child-rearing and serving their husbands (Lamonaca, 2002, p. 249). The dominant gender system resulted in effects like the discrimination of the weaker sex and lack of social authority that made it difficult for women to wield effective political power.

In addition, the education of girls in Britain was powerfully attached to religious morality. As a matter of fact, the clergymen emphasised an education that reinforced gender roles. Girls were taught domestic skills and moral virtues to prepare them for marriage and motherhood, with limited access to broader academic subjects that would encourage independent thought or career aspirations (Burgan, 1986, p. 51). This is clear evidence that the education provided to women was often limited to subjects deemed appropriate for their social roles, such as moral and religious instruction, basic literacy, and domestic skills. Higher education or critical thinking, which could lead women to question authority or pursue independence, were discouraged, as they were viewed as a threat to the established social order.

Religious leaders often opposed early feminist efforts to secure rights for women, such as property rights and suffrage, claiming these demands were unnatural and against divine will. The emergence of 'separate spheres' as a social reality in the lives of the middle classes tended to limit women's sphere of interest within a private or domestic sphere, separate from the public sphere occupied by their husbands and fathers. Following this line of thought, women were incapable of supporting their feminist cause and recreate their collective identities because of the complexity of this domestic ideology. In a comprehensive study, Sarah Pink (2004) was of the opinion that religion has historically been the primary barrier to women's rights, as many religious doctrines and institutions reinforced patriarchal norms that limited women's autonomy. They defined socially legitimate household responsibilities for women and made their subordination a side effect of class exploitation (p. 85). In many cases, laws and customs rooted in religious values upheld rigid gender roles, framing women's primary role as caretakers and homemakers, which hindered their ability to access equal opportunities. Consequently, Christianity not only shaped societal attitudes toward gender but also served as a powerful tool to resist legal reforms promoting equality.

In summing up the previous arguments, religion in this period acted as a dual force: it both repressed and empowered women, depending on the context, interpretations, and movements within which they engaged. On one hand, religious frameworks, particularly within Christian denominations, often reinforced traditional gender roles, promoting women's subservience and limiting their public participation to charitable or domestic spheres. Clergymen frequently upheld ideals of submission and piety and confined women to roles aligned with patriarchal interpretations of religious doctrines. On the other hand, religious movements were fertile ground for women to challenge these limitations. Through involvement in charitable work and reform movements, many of which were driven by religious motivations, women found opportunities to exercise leadership, pursue education, and advocate for social justice. In these contexts, religion offered a moral justification for women's activism and provided an avenue for expanding their influence in public life.

I. 2. Women's Involvement in Charitable Work:

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the clergymen played a key role in shaping societal norms, particularly in relation to women's roles. One of the few socially acceptable roles for women to engage in public life was through philanthropic work, which was often legitimized by the Church. The notion of female virtue and moral duty, deeply embedded in Christian ideology, framed philanthropy as an extension of women's natural nurturing and caring qualities. Religious institutions endorsed this work and presented it as a moral obligation, while also reinforcing traditional gender roles that confined them to charitable and domestic spheres. Thus, philanthropy became a channel through which women could participate in social reform, albeit within the boundaries set by the prevailing religious and patriarchal structures in Victorian society.

A set of factors are put forward to justify women's involvement in charitable work. These included ideological, social, and cultural considerations, often framed within the broader context of gender norms and social expectations. One significant justification is that women were subject to significant social and legal constraints, with limited rights and agency. However, clergymen sought to frame their philanthropic involvement as a reflection of divine will, portraying them as moral agents uniquely suited to addressing social wrongs. While middle and upper-class women were often encouraged to take on charitable roles as an extension of their domestic duties, seen as a way to cultivate moral virtues and express their femininity, their participation also allowed them to step into public life in ways that were otherwise restricted (Grimshaw, 1992, p. 225). In addition, philanthropy offered a socially acceptable avenue for women to exercise agency and address issues related to poverty, education, and healthcare. Last but not least, many women used their direct involvement in charitable work to push for broader social change, from improving living conditions for the poor to advocating for women's rights and education. These factors collectively highlight how philanthropy was both a product of, and a response to, the socio-cultural context of the time, offering women a complex space to navigate the constraints and opportunities presented by their gendered roles.

Arguably, philanthropy became a platform for women to influence public discourse and policy under the guise of moral responsibility and duty. The very emotional nature of women made them suitable for this role as natural guardians

of virtue and morality. This association positioned women as key figures in charitable endeavors, particularly those aimed at alleviating poverty, educating the poor, and reforming the 'fallen' sisters of prostitutes (Severson, 2014, p. 226).

The Evangelical sect provided a formal structure for women to participate in charitable work. It established several philanthropic institutions with the purpose of encouraging and guiding women's benevolence. These institutions focused on the traditional gender roles of women as caregivers and nurturers, connected to the Victorian ideals of femininity and domesticity. They believed that through charitable work, women could fulfill their spiritual and moral duties while maintaining their prescribed roles within society. Philanthropic organisations, including mothers' societies, visiting societies, and church-based charitable associations, provided a way for women, particularly middle- and upper-class women, to engage in social welfare while remaining under the supervision and direction of the clergymen (Jacob, 2021, p. 196). They saw this as a way to promote Christian virtues and humility, submission, and service among women. This form of controlled benevolence allowed women to participate in public life through charitable acts but often limited their autonomy by framing their work within a religious and patriarchal context.

In the earliest history of the women's movement, middle-class women were involved in charitable work, housing management, domestic visiting, and official workplace inspection. They proved to be active feminist citizens by expanding the sphere of their actions despite their seemingly circumscribed existence during the nineteenth century. Among them was the founder of the Charity Organisation Society set up in 1869 in London, Octavia Hill, who advocated for housing reform for the poor and was regarded as one of the founders of modern social work (Smith, 2008). Angela Burdett-Coutts, who helped to establish both the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), used her vast wealth to support various charitable causes, including education, housing, and healthcare for the disadvantaged (Stephens, 2023). Josephine Butler led campaigns against the exploitation of women and advocated for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, which targeted the poor fallen women. In addition, Florence Nightingale revolutionized nursing and healthcare through her work during the Crimean War and subsequent reforms (Fee & Garofalo, 2010). These women, among others, transformed the landscape of philanthropy in Britain and worked within societal constraints while advocating for rights and welfare of the marginalised groups.

Scholars have called attention to the fact that women benefited from charitable work in a manner that they were capable to recreate the collective lives of women. Ray Strachey (1978) has examined middle-class women's experience within philanthropic institutions and argued that it played a central role in the formation of women's collective and political identities (p. 30). It could be inferred that charitable 'networks' were crucial sites for social action that connected women with each other.

Philanthropy in the nineteenth century served as a subtle yet powerful form of activism for women, allowing them to challenge social norms, advocate for reform, and exercise influence in public life under the guise of benevolence. For example, a charity bazaar was a marketplace where women of all social classes could meet, talk, and sell items they had made by themselves. Women organised bazaars, sewing circles, and other activities to raise money, reinforcing the idea that their work was selfless and non-profitable (Prochaska, 1988, p. 73). Interestingly, upper- and middle-class women worked alongside working-class women in charitable projects, and they facilitated the development of class alliances that were crucial to the women's rights movements.

Through charitable networks, women gradually developed their political identities by gaining organisational skills, building networks, and engaging with issues of social justice, which fostered a sense of agency and paved a way for their involvement in broader political movements such as suffrage and social reform. By managing fundraising campaigns, institutions, or working as inspectors of proof-houses, women gained public visibility and credibility in ways previously unavailable to them. Direct work with marginalised groups, particularly poor women and children, made philanthropic women more aware of structural inequalities, including gender discrimination (Hall, 1992, p. 64). In addition, women learned how to advocate for their causes, often addressing local councils or parliamentary inquiries on social issues, experiences that later empowered them in political activism. Philanthropy, thus, served as a bridge between the private and public spheres for women. It allowed them to develop their political identities, ultimately equipping them with the skills, networks, and confidence needed to engage in more overtly political movements such as the fight for women's suffrage.

It is important to stress upon the fact that women in charitable work not only provided the aid to the poor but also craved out new spaces for female agency within a male-dominated sphere. However, these efforts were often framed within ideals of Christian duty and submission. The clergymen emphasised women's nurturing and moral superiority while limiting their authority to the domestic and charitable spheres. Although some women used these roles to challenge social inequalities, their initiatives remained largely tethered to religious expectations of piety and self-sacrifice. The tension between empowerment and constraint defined women's contributions to Christian philanthropy, leaving a complex legacy that reflected both the opportunities and limitations of their engagement in public life.

I. 3. Clerical Influence and the Cultivation of Submissive Femininity through Charitable Work:

The idea of a woman being central to the running of the churches and the participation in charitable work could also be viewed as empowering, but a number of research studies in the past few years found strong evidence that traditional frameworks of Charity played a key role in giving strength to arguments for women's subordinate nature. In effect, women were less educated, had no political rights, and so they used philanthropy as a cover to enter into the public sphere. It must be noted that the Christian influence over women's lives could come in the form of education or philanthropic work. A report commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1919 on The Ministry of Women, indicated that charitable work in the last two-thirds of the 19th century became the sphere of interest to a great number of middle-class women, who had embarked on a variety of Christian endeavors, such as Sunday school teaching, district visiting, missionary societies, study circles, parochial work, and rescue work among fallen women. However, women's charitable activities under the banner of Christianity provided them with a degree of influence in the parish community only. That means the Established Church stressed the subordinate nature of women's voluntary work, by ensuring that women were always answerable to and superintended by the parish priest. Although female Church workers extended their influence outside the home for the social and moral improvement of society, the expectations upon them - enforced by wider evangelical sects - made them vulnerable to criticism and chastisement in the event they stepped outside of these expectations (Schwartz, 2013, pp. 19-20).

In a clear context, participation in charity taught women discipline, humility, and self-denial, preparing them for submission within the family. This was consistent with societal norms that emphasised piety, service, and the moral responsibility of women, particularly in middle-class and aristocratic circles. Charitable activities allowed women to engage in public life while adhering to expectations of modesty and altruism. These roles were considered a form of moral training that mirrored the discipline required for domestic duties. Through charity work, women were expected to cultivate virtues of obedience and restraint, thus aligning with ideals of female submissiveness within family structures and reinforcing gender hierarchies ("Philanthropy in 19th Century Britain – Humble Beginnings," n.d.). Moreover, the professionalization of philanthropy later in the century offered new opportunities, but the moralistic undertones of the efforts continued to emphasise women's duty to self-sacrifice and nurture others. This engagement also maintained a balance between limited public involvement and traditional private roles, further reinforcing expectations of submission within marriage and family life. These trends highlight how Victorians charity functioned not only as a means of social engagement but also as a tool for reinforcing the social order and gender norms of the period.

There were cases in which clergymen acted as patrons or supervisors of philanthropic efforts, ensuring women remained in subordinate roles. Charity boards were often male-dominated, with women occupying auxiliary position, thus reinforcing male leadership. While women were seen as morally superior and natural caregivers, men were perceived as more rational and capable of leadership. This dichotomy influenced the division of labor within charities, confining women to non-decision-making roles. As a matter of fact, many charity boards created women's sub-committees or auxiliary bodies, such as "Ladies Committees," organising charity bazaars, or distributing aid. However, these groups were answerable to the main (male) board. In the Charity Organisation Society (COS), for example, women were assigned roles related to visitation or casework with poor families, but the main decision-making remained firmly under male control (Hansan, 2013). This statement reflects that although women were actively involved in charitable work, their roles were largely limited to tasks like home visits and casework, where they assessed the needs of poor families and moral guidance. Strategic planning, funding, and policy-making were controlled by men. This contributed to reinforcing traditional patriarchal structures that confined women to subordinate roles, even within philanthropy.

Elizabeth Fry, a Quaker activist, became a model of female charity but operated under the watchful support of male religious leaders. Quakerism, though relatively progressive in its acknowledgment of women's spiritual authority, still maintained a degree of male oversight. Fry's charity work, despite being pioneering, had to align with the broader Quaker ideals. The Religious Society of Friends approved her public activities, but male elders were involved in guiding the theological underpinnings and public framing of her efforts. They ensured that her charitable work was portrayed as an extension of women's domestic duties rather than an attempt to subvert gender roles (Brown, 1960).

Clergymen actively shaped the sphere of women's philanthropic work to align with the gender norms of Victorian society, using religious doctrines to support submissive ideals. Frank Prochaska, the author of a number of critically acclaimed books, has emerged as the most influential figure in the history of female philanthropy, and his book on *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* contributed to the understanding of the role of religious philanthropic institutions in reinforcing the subordinate nature of women. Prochaska (1981) assumed that the intellectual and spiritual atmosphere offered by Christian 'evangelicalism' encouraged large numbers of women to become involved in philanthropy, thereby escaping their traditional roles as wives and mothers. Nevertheless, these philanthropic institutions had emphasised the family-centered values which powerfully drew on marital permanence and a shared commitment to sacrificing for one's spouse and family. The author asserted that clergymen were often responsible for organising educational programs for women in philanthropic and public institutions, such as schools, orphanages, or workhouses. However, the education provided was limited to subjects and skills deemed appropriate for women's roles within the domestic sphere -like sewing, childcare, or household management (p. 79). It must be said that clergymen used their

influence within charitable and public institutions to provide women with a constrained education that promoted their future roles as obedient wives, reinforcing patriarchal norms of the time.

In fact, we might view women's experiences within church-based philanthropic organisations as enhancing the ideal of womanhood within a supposedly Christian civilising mission. As historian David Hampton (1996) pointed out, "the Christian evangelicals have opened up new opportunities for women, particularly through charitable work, yet at the same time constructed ideologies to keep women in their places" (p. 197). Indeed, women charitable workers came to view Christianity as a powerful source of gender equality, based on the premise that it involved them in this civilising mission. But these philanthropic institutions aimed, in the end, to create male clerical control over women's work and female autonomy.

As the previous arguments clearly demonstrate, while some women used charity as a stepping stone to public activism, the framework laid by clergymen ensured that their work remained within the boundaries of traditional femininity. The involvement of women in charity under clerical influence demonstrated how philanthropy was both an empowering and constraining factor in shaping women's social experience.

II- Conclusion:

The clerical support for women's participation in charitable activities was not just a validation of selflessness but a deliberate strengthening of the existing gender expectations. By urging women to engage in charitable endeavors, clergymen directed women's energy towards roles that reflected Victorian gender ideals of piety, care, and self-sacrifice. These initiatives did not focus on empowering women in the public or political realm, but on promoting a docile, caring type of femininity that aligned with patriarchal norms.

Philanthropy became a space where women could exercise influence, but within tightly controlled boundaries that did not pose a serious threat to male authority. The moral framing of charity allowed women to feel they were contributing to society while reinforcing their dependency on male guidance, often in collaboration with the clergy. Through these roles, women were socialized into seeing their worth in terms of service and compliance, reaffirming their subordinate position within the gender system.

The clerical role in promoting women's charitable work reflects how religious authority was employed to maintain social hierarchies. While women's involvement in charitable work gave them a certain degree of visibility, it simultaneously functioned as a mechanism to curtail their aspirations beyond the domestic and moral realms, ensuring that their growing public presence did not distrust the patriarchal order. This co-option of women's philanthropic efforts illustrates the subtle but effective ways in which power dynamics were perpetuated through ostensibly benevolent initiatives.

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