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CHARLOTTE ELIZABETH TONNA AND THE MOBILIZATION OF TORY WOMEN IN EARLY VICTORIAN ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT. *This article addresses the historiographical neglect of tory women in the early Victorian period. The existence of a vibrant culture of female conservative letters, combined with the widespread participation of women in ultra-Protestant pressure-group politics, is suggestive of the neglected contribution women made to the revival of grass-roots toryism during these years. In particular, it is suggested that a consideration of the distinctive features of premillenarian Evangelicalism enables a more discriminating approach to the impact of Evangelicalism upon contemporary women. By focusing upon the career of the prominent premillenarian Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, and her editorship of the* Christian Lady's Magazine, *it is argued that contemporary attitudes towards 'female politicians' were far more flexible, variable, and contingent than is frequently assumed. The associational activities with which many premillenarians were involved, combined with their attention to Old Testament models of publicly active women and the sense of urgency that distinguished their theology, frequently led its adherents to problematize and critique existing formulations of women's roles.*

I

In recent years much scholarship has been devoted to the political activities of liberal and radical middle-class women (and their debt to religious nonconformity) in early Victorian Britain.[1] However, as Rohan McWilliam observed in 2002, women from the broad spectrum of conservative traditions have received surprisingly little attention.[2] For example, although women often predominated

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[1] Helen Rogers, *Women and the people: authority, authorship and the radical tradition in nineteenth-century England* (Aldershot, 2000), ch. 4; Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: socialism and feminism in the nineteenth century* (London, 1983); Alex Tyrell, '"Woman's mission" and pressure group politics in Britain (1825–1860)', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 63 (1980), pp. 194–230; and Kathryn Gleadle, *The early feminists: radical unitarians and the origins of the women's rights movement, c. 1831–1851* (Basingstoke, 1995).

[2] Rohan McWilliam, book review, *Gender and History*, 14 (2002), p. 160. Despite considerable interest in Hannah More (see for example the recent biography by Anne Stott, *Hannah More: the first Victorian* (Oxford, 2003)) there has been little attempt to understand her activities as part of a wider tableau of female conservatism. The exception is Linda Colley's powerful reconstruction of female Britons; however she focused largely on those of a lower social class: *Britons: forging the nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven and London, 1992), ch. 6.

in local Protestant organizations and there is evidence of women's conservative associations being established during this period,[3] their contribution to political Protestantism and to the 'tory revival' of the 1830s has been viewed largely through the lens of male activism.[4] This article suggests that this neglect is partly due to a historiographical tendency to analyse Victorian women with reference to a rather undifferentiated 'Evangelicalism'. By the accession of Victoria, women, it was once implied, were essentially depoliticized by the triumph of Evangelicalism.[5] This view has been restated by one historian who asserts that 'Evangelical sexual politics limited women to the patriarchal, domestic scene.'[6] More innovative research has delineated the ways in which the ambivalent and potentially empowering messages of Evangelicalism might sanction female public participation in a wealth of reformatory and missionary projects, including anti-slavery and anti-*sati* protests. This could involve engagement with parliamentary politics and facilitate a nascent concept of female citizenship.[7] Equally, many have noted the relationship between Evangelicalism and later Victorian feminism.[8] This article seeks to contribute further to the reassessment of the impact of Evangelicalism upon Victorian women through analysing how its different theologies had the potential to encourage female politicization in ways that have hitherto been little examined.

Evangelicalism, of course, had a complex and diverse relationship with contemporary politics and this article does not suppose that Evangelicalism necessarily led women to adopt particular political positions. Rather, by focusing on the career of a single woman, Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, who became a leading

[3] There are examples of female conservative associations being established in Scotland as well as in Canterbury and Middleton. *Times*, 16 Sept. 1841; Philip Salmon, *Electoral reform at work: local politics and national parties, 1832–1841* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 64, 240; James Vernon, *Politics and the people: a study in English political culture, c. 1815–1867* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 240–1.

[4] For the revival of grass-roots toryism see Salmon, *Electoral reform at work*; I. Newbould, 'Sir Robert Peel and the Conservative party, 1832–1841: a study in failure?', *English Historical Review*, 98 (1983), pp. 529–57; David Eastwood, 'Toryism, reform and political culture in Oxfordshire, 1826–1837', *Parliamentary History*, 7 (1988), pp. 98–121.

[5] Catherine Hall, 'The early formation of Victorian domestic ideology' (1979), republished in eadem, *White, male and middle class: explorations in feminism and history* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 75–93.

[6] D. G. Paz, *Popular anti-Catholicism in mid-Victorian England* (Stanford, 1992), p. 273. For another bleak assessment that views missionary enterprise as an exception to the 'silencing' of women within Evangelicalism consult Susan Thorne, *Congregational missions and the making of an imperial culture in nineteenth-century England* (Stanford, 1999), p. 100.

[7] Clare Midgley, *Women against slavery: the British campaigns, 1780–1870* (London, 1992); Clare Midgley, 'From supporting missions to petitioning parliament: British women and the Evangelical campaign against *sati* in India, 1813–1830', in Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson, eds., *Women in British politics, 1760–1860: the power of the petticoat* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 74–92 (see also Simon Morgan, 'Domestic economy and political agitation: women and the Anti-Corn Law League, 1839–1846', in the same volume, pp. 115–33); Alison Twells, '"Let us begin well at home": class, ethnicity and Christian motherhood in the writing of Hannah Kilham, 1774–1832', in Eileen Janes Yeo, ed., *Radical femininity: women's self-representation in the public sphere* (Manchester, 1998), pp. 25–51.

[8] See Jane Rendall, *Origins of modern feminism: women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780–1860* (Chicago, 1985), ch. 3.

publicist for premillenarian Evangelicalism, it is suggested that it is possible to highlight many neglected aspects of female publicity, not least women's contribution to conservative politics in the 1830s and 1840s.

Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna (1790–1846) was born in Norwich to a clerical family.[9] From 1819 to 1824 she lived in Ireland with her first husband, George Phelan, and began to write religious tracts for the Dublin Tract Society. After spending five years in Clifton (by which time she had adopted the pen name, 'Charlotte Elizabeth', to protect her literary earnings from her now estranged husband) she moved to Sandhurst and then to the outskirts of London. At this point she came into contact with the prominent preacher Hugh McNeile, who encouraged her transition to premillenarianism.[10] Premillenarians read contemporary political, social, and economic disruption as signs of profound dislocation in the divine order. The millennium would occur only after Christ's return and it was imperative that Christians prepare for his judgement. The 1830s and 1840s saw the emergence of a politically active ultra-Protestantism with which many premillenarians were involved.[11] This is not to say that premillenarians formed a homogeneous body. On a number of key issues, including the anti-slavery campaign, wider Evangelical co-operation, and the intricacies of Jewish conversionism, there could be sharp divergences in opinion.[12] Nonetheless, through

[9] The best source for Tonna's life is her *Personal recollections* (London, 1841). Tonna has received little sustained attention from historians. She merits less than half a page in Boyd Hilton, *The age of atonement: the influence of Evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1785–1865* (Oxford, 1988), although fares slightly better in Paz, *Popular anti-Catholicism*, pp. 56–7, 108, 271–3. John Wolffe notes Tonna's 'seminal significance' but does not provide any sustained coverage of her work: John Wolffe, *The Protestant crusade in Great Britain, 1829–1860* (Oxford, 1991), p. 119. She has been better served by literary critics. The best recent assessment is Ella Dzelzainis, 'Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, pre-millenarianism and the formation of gender ideology in the Ten Hours campaign', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31 (2003), pp. 181–91. Monica Correa Fryckstedt, 'Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna: a forgotten Evangelical writer', *Studia Neophilologica*, 52 (1980), pp. 79–102, is comprehensive. Also important are Ivanka Kovačević and S. Barbara Kanner, 'Blue book into novel: the forgotten industrial fiction of Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 25 (1970), pp. 152–73, and Joseph Kestner, 'Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's *The wrongs of woman*: female industrial protest', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 2 (1983), pp. 193–214. For considerations of Tonna's autobiography see n. 128 below, and for the relationship between Tonna and Jewish conversionism nn. 119–20 below.

[10] Premillenarianism should be contrasted with postmillenarianism (which assumed humanity's gradual progress towards divine bliss, with the second coming of Christ the climax of a thousand years of felicitous rule on earth). During its surge of popularity in the 1820s it was particularly (but not exclusively) associated with the Scottish minister, Edward Irving, although later premillenarians – Tonna included – were to distance themselves from Irving. By the 1830s premillenarianism was enjoying wide currency among the Evangelical community. Hilton, *Age of atonement*; W. H. Oliver, *Prophets and millennialists: the uses of biblical prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland, 1978); D. N. Hempton, 'Evangelicalism and eschatology', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 31 (1980), pp. 179–94.

[11] Wolffe, *The Protestant crusade*; Geoffrey Best, 'Popular Protestantism in Victorian Great Britain', in Robert Robson, ed., *Ideas and institutions of Victorian Britain: essays in honour of George Kitson Clark* (London, 1967), pp. 115–42.

[12] In the early 1830s Hugh McNeile, for example, criticized the anti-slavery campaign as a manifestation of liberalism: Hempton, 'Evangelicalism and eschatology', p. 183. See n. 20 below for the debate on pan-Evangelicalism. Differing views as to the particularities of Jewish conversionism are

publications such as *The Record*, high-profile public meetings at Exeter Hall and across the provinces, leading premillenarian campaigners including Robert M'Ghee and Hugh McNeile formulated a populist tory programme that revolved around an acerbic anti-Catholicism.[13] Whilst the movement's fortunes may have been uneven the activities of bodies such as the Protestant Association – and the publicity they created – were a significant factor in the revival of grass-roots toryism.[14]

The networks of premillenarian activism helped to facilitate women's commitment to a wide range of causes. Certainly McNeile's premillenarianism accorded well with Tonna's already vociferous anti-Catholicism and her staunch defence of English Protestantism.[15] As editor of the *Christian Lady's Magazine* from 1834 until her death, and as editor of the Protestant Association's *Protestant Magazine* between 1841 and 1844, Tonna became one of the leading propagandists for the ultra-Protestant cause.[16] She thus championed a particular brand of toryism, identifying herself with the staunch defence of the Church of England and the pre-1829 constitution and exhibiting a growing unease with the 'modern' innovations of 'conservative' politics she increasingly believed Peel's liberal toryism to represent.[17] Refusing to distinguish between religion and politics she was passionately committed to the cause of '*political* Protestantism', as she deliberately defined it,[18] and issued many (anonymous) pamphlets on religious and political themes.[19] However Tonna also reached a wide audience as an immensely popular fiction writer.

Tonna had a financial incentive for appealing to as diverse a constituency as possible. In addition, her encouragement of pan-Evangelical projects is indicative of an approach that was common to many (but not all) in premillenarian circles.

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discussed in William D. Rubinstein and Hilary L. Rubinstein, *Philosemitism: admiration and support in the English-speaking world for Jews, 1840–1939* (Basingstoke, 1999). Grayson Carter has also warned of the need to recognize the fluidity and compromise that could exist between post and pre-millenial positions: *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant secessions from the* Via Media, *c. 1800–1850* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 155–7.

[13] D. N. Hempton, 'Bickersteth, bishop of Ripon: the episcopate of a mid-Victorian Evangelical', *Northern History*, 17 (1981), pp. 183–202; Frank H. Wallis, *Popular anti-Catholicism in mid-Victorian Britain* (Lampeter, 1993).

[14] Gilbert A. Cahill, 'Irish Catholicism and English toryism', *Review of Politics*, 19 (1957), pp. 62–76; Wolffe, *The Protestant crusade*. For the tory revival see n. 4 above.

[15] Appalled by the violence of Rockite gangs in Ireland, Tonna's publications for the Dublin Tract Society had expressed her anti-Catholicism. Before her conversion to premillenarianism she had also issued a number of significant pamphlets including *A respectful appeal to the primates and prelates or the church, on the present crisis* (London, 1830) and *An address to the Christian friends and supporters of the British and Foreign Society on the connexion between Socinians and Arians and that institution* (London, 1831).

[16] During Tonna's editorship of the *Protestant Magazine* she was responsible for all the articles that appeared until the title 'The Watchman': L. H. J. Tonna, 'Concluding remarks', *Personal recollections* (3rd edn, London, 1847), pp. 392–3.

[17] For Tonna's employment of the labels 'tory' and 'conservative' see *Christian Lady's Magazine* (hereafter *CLM*), 1 (1834), p. 535; 3 (1835), pp. 175–6; 19 (1843), p. 191; 21 (1844), p. 380; and 23 (1845), p. 472.

[18] *CLM*, 5 (1836), p. 571.

[19] In addition to the works cited in n. 15 above see also *The system: a tale of the West Indies* (London, 1832) and *Principalities and powers in heavenly places* (London, 1842).

Despite her strident attachment to this particular wing of Evangelicalism Tonna was prepared to support such ventures as the London City Mission and the Evangelical Alliance, and championed figures from the wider Evangelical community, notably Hannah More.[20] Tonna's primary objective was to convince the reading public of the urgency of the political, religious, and social crises facing Britain and she was prepared to use all manner of strategies to achieve this. Furthermore, although the extreme anti-Catholicism of the ultra-Protestants could hinder their reception amongst a broader audience, the political activities Tonna claimed for women were not always specific to the premillenarians and could often appeal to wider conservative readerships. A major significance of the premillenarian case was rather, as we shall see, that it provided pressing justifications for women's active involvement in contemporary affairs.

Much research has focused upon the ways in which middle-class women drew upon a peculiarly feminine identity in their political activities. Historians have noted how ideas of 'woman's mission', maternal activism, and domestic responsibilities were central to female political subjectivity.[21] It is argued here that important though such discourses were they formed but one aspect of a more heterogeneous imagining of the female politician. Tonna's oeuvre indicates that status, wealth, or religious identity were often privileged over gendered characteristics in the contemporary conceptualization of female publicity. Equally those discourses that did draw upon specifically female modes of activity could be extremely diverse and dynamic. Particularly important was the premillenarian preoccupation with the Old Testament scriptures which furnished Tonna with striking images of female leadership. Indeed, contextualizing Tonna's varied representations of politically active women reveals a much broader spectrum of contemporary ideas as to the public role of women than is often acknowledged. A study of Tonna's work has the potential therefore to enrich our appreciation of the complex gendered dynamics of contemporary political culture, whilst closer attention to the careers of Tonna and other female propagandists helps further to illuminate the importance of female writers in the dissemination, modification, and reception of conservative traditions.

II

In his expositions of early Victorian paternalism, David Roberts has granted considerable significance to a lengthy work published in 1843, *Perils of the nation*.

[20] Whilst Edward Bickersteth shared Tonna's approach others, including Hugh Stowell and Hugh McNeile, were opposed to such interdenominational cooperation: Donald M. Lewis, *Lighten their darkness: the Evangelical mission to working-class London, 1828–1860* (Westport, 1986).

[21] Midgley, *Women against slavery*; Midgley, 'From supporting missions', pp. 77–80.; Tyrell, 'Woman's mission'; Morgan, 'Domestic economy'; Kathryn Gleadle, '"Our several spheres": middle-class women and the feminisms of early Victorian radical politics', in Gleadle and Richardson, eds., *Women in British politics*, pp. 134–52.

This searing indictment of the capitalist economy utilized a mass of information drawn from parliamentary debates and commissions to insist upon the need for 'Parliamentary interference' to cure the ills of industrial cities and workplaces.[22] It was, Roberts claimed, a 'classic work on paternalism'.[23] Roberts attributes this work to its publisher, Robert Benton Seeley. However, as Tonna's husband Lewis Hippolytus Tonna revealed after his wife's death, *Perils of the nation* was written by Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna at the request of the Christian Influence Society. This was a premillenarian organization headed by Lord Ashley, the prominent Evangelical divine Rev. Edward Bickersteth, and R. B. Seeley.[24] As her husband proudly claimed of the work, 'It was quoted on platforms and discussed in private circles', and was apparently the catalyst for the foundation of further projects to ameliorate the condition of the labouring classes.[25]

The emphasis the *Perils of the nation* placed upon 'parliamentary interference' contrasted with the Christian political economy of more moderate Evangelicals, and owed much to the influence of Michael Thomas Sadler, whose activities Tonna was keen to publicize.[26] Tonna's frequent employment of parliamentary debates and committee reports in the *Perils of the nation*, as well as in fictional work such as *Helen Fleetwood* and the *Wrongs of Woman* (1843–4), formed part of a trend for female authors to construct themselves as interpreters of parliamentary information to their readerships.[27] Indeed, Tonna was one of a number of women whose publications concerning the living and working conditions of industrial labourers made a significant contribution to the revival of paternalist ideas that reached their apogee in the 1840s. Caroline Bowles (later Southey) a frequent contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine*, explicitly positioned her 1833 poem *Tale of the factories* as a political intervention. Dedicated to Sadler, it included a lengthy and detailed appendix drawing on evidence and debates presented to the House of Commons.[28] Frances Trollope was also concerned to ground her novel *Michael*

[22] [C. E. Tonna], *The perils of the nation: an appeal to the legislature, the clergy and the higher and middle classes* (London, 1843). 'Parliamentary interference' was the title of ch. 13.

[23] F. David Roberts, *The social conscience of the early Victorians* (Stanford, 2002), p. 417; David Roberts, *Paternalism in early Victorian England* (New Brunswick, 1979), ch. 1.

[24] Lewis Hippolytus Tonna, also a fervent millenarian, was Tonna's second husband. They married in 1841. Her authorship was revealed in Tonna, 'Concluding remarks', pp. 408–9. Its sequel, *Remedies suggested for some of the evils which constitute the 'Perils of the nation'* (London, 1844), was correctly ascribed to Seeley. For the Christian Influence Society see J. Douglas Holladay, 'Nineteenth-century Evangelical activism: from private charity to state intervention, 1830–1850', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 51 (1982), pp. 53–79.

[25] Tonna, 'Concluding remarks', pp. 409–10.

[26] *CLM*, 10 (1838), pp. 49–50. Kim Lawes, *Paternalism and politics: the revival of paternalism in early nineteenth-century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2000), chs. 1–2. Hilton, *Age of atonement*, chs. 3 and 6, traces the implications of different Evangelical positions for attitudes towards poverty.

[27] Kovačević and Kanner, 'Blue book', p. 164. My interpretation differs from that of Kovačević and Kanner, however, in that they stress the uniqueness of Tonna's approach. See also Kestner, 'Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna', pp. 208–9.

[28] Robert Southey to Caroline Bowles, 11 Mar. 1833, in Edward Dowden, ed., *The correspondence of Robert Southey with Caroline Bowles* (London, 1881), p. 270; Virginia Blain, *Caroline Bowles Southey, 1786–1854: the making of a woman writer* (Aldershot, 1998), p. 103.

Armstrong (1839–40) in detailed parliamentary research, in which she was assisted by Lord Ashley.[29]

Other genres were used too. The West Country poet, Sibella Miles, chose the opportunity of the 1844 parliamentary vote on the Ten Hours Bill[30] to issue an extended manifesto to the 'Ladies of England'. Writing of the 'shame of a Christian, a British legislative assembly', she implored women to rally and 'remove the stain which has been cast upon our national name'.[31] Sibella Miles explained that the 'Ladies of England', to whom she addressed her text, were possessed of 'social influence' and were 'well acquainted with the value of *money*'.[32] The emphasis here was as much upon the privileges that equipped 'ladies' to intervene in political issues, as it was upon particular gendered characteristics. Similarly Tonna's *Perils of the nation* contained a chapter on 'Female influence' which urged the 'Ladies of England' to exert their influence primarily as consumers and employers to ensure more equitable practices in the labour market.

Women from across the political landscape contributed to the public consideration of industrial legislation, but the various arguments they employed are testament to the deeply held political sensibilities which could inspire them.[33] For example, tory women's support for the working-class labourer often involved questioning the liberals' supposed preoccupation with the plight of black slaves. Sibella Miles wrote of a 'degree of toil, nearly as exhausting to body, and certainly as debasing to mind, as that which ground the African to the dust'.[34] Similarly, Tonna (despite her support for the anti-slavery campaign) argued that the plight of African slaves was 'nothing in comparison' to the sufferings of English labourers which were characterized as an affront to the 'boasted bulwark of English laws'.[35] Promoting the cause of the English labourer was constructed as part of a discourse of patriotism which necessitated upholding what Sibella Miles termed the 'honour of *Christian* England', through securing the passage of legislation.[36]

Tory female paternalism presumed the existence of an energetic, politicized constituency of women who might lobby parliament for legislative change. As this suggests, women might not have necessarily assumed that philanthropy was the

[29] Holladay, 'Nineteenth-century Evangelical activism', pp. 74–5.

[30] See Robert Stewart, 'The Ten Hours and sugar crises of 1844: government and the House of Commons in the age of reform', *Historical Journal*, 12 (1969), pp. 35–57.

[31] [Sibella Miles], *An essay on the factory question, occasioned by the recent votes in the House of Commons* (London, 1844), pp. 7, 5. Miles (née Hatfield) enjoyed some success as a poet. Originally from Cornwall she married naval commander, Alfred Miles: *Oxford new dictionary of national biography* (http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18702, accessed 25 Jan. 2005).

[32] Miles, *An essay*, pp. 6–7.

[33] This included Caroline Norton, *A voice from the factories* (1836) and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The cry of the children* (1843). J. T. Ward, *The factory movement, 1830–1855* (London, 1962), p. 271. Note also the variety of material produced by radical women: Gleadle, *Early feminists*, pp. 90–2.

[34] Miles, *An essay*, p. 9.

[35] *CLM*, 10 (1838), p. 187; *CLM*, 1 (1834), p. 157.

[36] Miles, *An essay*, p. 8.

most effective mode for assisting those in need.[37] Tonna herself carried out extensive social work amongst the Irish migrants of St Giles in London (for whom she opened an Irish Episcopal Church in 1831) yet she criticized many charitable societies for their judgemental attitude towards those in distress.[38] Premillenarian Evangelicalism could foster a confidence in its adherents that they might act additionally as political agents to persuade the state of its wider responsibilities. As Ella Dzelzainis explains, 'Their social paternalism was galvanized by terror of God's judgement.'[39]

One of the strategies employed by Tonna to bring this imperative message home to her readership was to use the genre of the novel. *Helen Fleetwood* (1841) focused upon the deleterious effect of factory labour upon working-class families, leading Dzelzainis to argue that Tonna utilized domestic ideology to rally support across denominational divides.[40] This insightful suggestion hints at Tonna's strategic employment of specific genres and tropes to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. By focusing in greater depth upon the *Christian Lady's Magazine* – the magazine in which *Helen Fleetwood* was first serialized – this article will consider how, in other aspects of her oeuvre (particularly in her more polemical magazine articles and editorials), Tonna encouraged far more forthright and strident models of female publicity than emerge in her fiction.

The conflicting messages the *Christian Lady's Magazine* broadcast as to the nature of female political engagement revealed not only a desire to remain sensitive to the social conservatism of its potential readership; it also highlighted the multifariousness of contemporary discourses concerning the female politician. Of course, in part, such discursive instability is a product of the nature of magazine publication in itself. As Margaret Beetham observes it is a genre 'marked by a radical heterogeneity. It refused, and still refuses a single authorial voice.'[41] This diversity appears to have been particularly apparent when magazines sought to address the issue of women and politics. Yet, far from encouraging a feminine detachment from the rigours of parliamentary politics, a study of the *Christian Lady's Magazine* indicates that women's close absorption in parliamentary politics could actually be insisted upon in some Evangelical quarters.[42]

III

Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna commenced her editorship of the *Christian Lady's Magazine* in 1834 and by the end of the following year was conducting the

[37] F. K. Prochaska, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1980), provides a clear overview of the characteristics of female philanthropy. See also Sean Gill, *Women and the Church of England: from the eighteenth century to the present* (London, 1994).

[38] *CLM*, 5 (1836), pp. 429–33; 7 (1837), p. 463; 13 (1840), pp. 232–7, 349–53; and 21 (1844), pp. 87–92. [39] Dzelzainis, 'Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna', p. 183. [40] Ibid., p. 182.

[41] Margaret Beetham, *A magazine of her own? Domesticity and desire in the woman's magazine, 1800–1914* (London, 1996), p. 12. [42] Ibid., pp. 36–7.

magazine largely single-handed.[43] It is hard to gauge the extent of its circulation. Tonna herself was extremely pleased with the way in which it flourished, and it was quickly reprinted in the United States of America. It was clearly well known amongst the reading public. References to its more controversial editorials were made in a range of contemporary publications.[44] Many of the works first serialized in it, including Tonna's *Helen Fleetwood*, the *Wrongs of Woman*, *Chapters on Flowers*, and *Judah's Lion*, were reissued to enjoy huge commercial success. The magazine also included poems, essays, and letters on a wide variety of contemporary questions. Many of these were concerned with aspects of Tonna's Evangelicalism, not least opposition to Roman Catholicism and Tractarianism. The publication articulated a comprehensive view of politics, sanctioning female participation in animal welfare legislation and educational policy as well as electoral, municipal, and parliamentary politics, the conduct of imperial and foreign policy, and court behaviour. In addition, the magazine was concerned to counter what it insisted were the dire consequences of fashionable political economy so successfully popularized by Tonna's bête noire, Harriet Martineau.[45]

The climax of each issue of the magazine was a lengthy section devoted to political discussion. In the first two years of the magazine it was entitled the 'Political department'. This consisted of a fictional dialogue between the female conductor of the section and her 'Uncle', an emotional ultra-Protestant, vociferously opposed to Roman Catholicism and liberalism. These dialogues provided Tonna with the opportunity to problematize conventional attitudes towards female political activity. For example, the 'Uncle' warned darkly against the monstrous spectacle of female 'agitation' in the cause of factory legislation. However, approving references to the vitality of the women's anti-slavery campaign undercut this rhetoric,[46] and meticulous itemization of the accidents and injuries suffered by juvenile labourers were published in the hope of prompting a swift response from the readership.[47]

Central to the magazine's political agenda was a conviction that the Roman Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 had betrayed both the British people and

[43] Tonna appears to have been assisted by Caroline Fry, another popular Evangelical writer (for whom see Peter Toon, *Evangelical theology, 1833–1856: a response to Tractarianism* (London, 1979), p. 45.) In addition, those from Tonna's private circle, such as the educationist Mary Ann Stodart and Tonna's second husband, contributed material. For a fuller discussion of the magazine see Monica Correa Fryckstedt, 'Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna and the *Christian Lady's Magazine*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 14 (1981), pp. 43–50.

[44] For Tonna's response to such criticisms consult *CLM*, 4 (1835), pp. 383, 569–71; 13 (1840), pp. 56–63; and 18 (1842), pp. 178–92.

[45] See for example *CLM*, 3 (1835), pp. 88–92, 375–80. For a recent assessment of the centrality of economic discourse to other aspects of Victorian conservatism: Anna Gambles, *Protection and politics: conservative economic discourse, 1815–1852* (Woodbridge, 1999). Tonna and Martineau also engaged in pamphlet controversy over the issue of mesmerism: Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: powers of mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago and London, 1998), p. 262.

[46] *CLM*, 1 (1834), p. 160. From 1836 the section was retitled 'The Protestant'.

[47] *CLM*, 1 (1834), pp. 155–7. She also urged her readers to buy published versions of Lord Ashley's speeches: *CLM*, 18 (1842), p. 59.

their constitution. 'From that hour', fumed Tonna, 'all has been changed. British legislation has lost its stability. England has lost alike her pre-eminence abroad, and her confidence at home. Every great institution of the State has tottered.'[48] The consequent 'madness of innovation' that followed had resulted in the 1832 Reform Act – a devastating piece of legislation for which the country had since been punished with the outbreak of cholera.[49] Such anti-Catholicism informed the intellectual culture of substantial constituencies within the reading public. Novelists such as Anna Eliza Bray, Charlotte Anley, Grace Kennedy, and Catherine Sinclair played a significant role in the continuing circulation of anti-Catholic prejudice.[50] Other genres could also be exploited. Mary Ann Kelty's *Times of trial*, purportedly aimed at young readers, provided a detailed catalogue of the 'various abuses and usurpations of the papacy'.[51] However, the *Christian Lady's Magazine* reveals that the anti-Catholic cause could also draw women into the intricacies of parliamentary politics.[52] A searing criticism of whig government policy towards Ireland frequently formed the mainstay of the publication's political comment. In the spring of 1835 it spoke of the despair that the Irish Tithe Bill evoked and accused the government of being 'virtually … popish'.[53] In September 1838 the publication launched a comprehensive attack on the government's legislative programme, citing the Irish Poor Law and the Irish Tithe Act as examples of the government's disastrous course of action. The Irish Municipal Corporations Act, which sought to increase the political representation of Roman Catholics in local government, incited the publication's rage yet further. Tonna denounced the legislation as an assault upon the political establishment.[54] The government's apparent reliance on Irish nationalist MPs at Westminster was also bitterly decried by Tonna.[55] The advent of a Peelite government in 1841 did little to allay her criticisms. Ultra-tories found it hard to forgive Peel for his role in the granting of Roman Catholic rights in 1829 and Tonna bitterly attacked his continuance of whig poor law policies, referring to 'that national Monster, the Poor-law Commission, with its harpy brood, its Board of Guardians'.[56] In the following months the disgusted 'Uncle' reported that he wished to repudiate his identification with conservatism. The term 'Conservative' it was declared was now 'synonymous with "Destructive"'.[57]

[48] *CLM*, 8 (1837), p. 93.

[49] *CLM*, 11 (1839), pp. 89–90.

[50] Miriam Elizabeth Burstein, 'Protestants against the Jewish and Catholic family, c. 1829 to 1860', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31 (2003), pp. 333–57.

[51] Mary Ann Kelty, *Times of trial: being a brief narrative of the progress of the Reformation, and of the sufferings of some of the reformers* (London, 1830), p. 1. Women could use history to articulate other aspects of the tory tradition: Rosemary Mitchell, *Picturing the past: English history in text and image, 1830–1870* (Oxford, 2000), ch. 6.

[52] For recent discussions of the centrality of religious debate to parliamentary politics in these years see Stewart J. Brown, *The national churches of England, Ireland and Scotland, 1801–1846* (Oxford, 2001), chs. 3–5; J. P. Ellens, *Religious routes to Gladstonian Liberalism: the church rate conflict in England and Wales, 1832–1868* (Pennsylvania, 1994).

[53] *CLM*, 3 (1835), p. 467.

[54] *CLM*, 11 (1839), p. 375.

[55] *CLM*, 4 (1835), p. 379.

[56] *CLM*, 21 (1844), pp. 286–7.

[57] *CLM*, 23 (1845), p. 472.

Whilst Tonna was uncompromising in her desire to provide women with an understanding of party politics, the ways in which she encouraged them to become actively involved were more complex. In an ideology that placed such an emphasis upon obedience and traditional social relations, the conceptualization of the conservative female politician was destined to be problematic. In 1836 the magazine hosted a lively series of debates considering the issue of female inferiority,[58] and Tonna frequently sought to appease potential critics by situating her comments within a conventional discourse that questioned female participation in the political sphere.[59] A disquisition on the merits of poor law legislation, for example, begins by explaining the necessity of considering these issues to those readers who may be 'alarmed' by what they 'consider the too frequent introduction of political subjects into these pages'.[60]

In this delicate process of negotiation the use of religious imagery and reference proved a particularly effective means of suggesting potential avenues for female action. '[I]t is our province, by secret prayer, and by every scriptural mode of encouragement', she piously declared, 'to strengthen [men's] hands, and gird them for the battle from which we must stand aloof'.[61] Prayer was not perceived to be a uniquely female mode of political intervention.[62] Ardent Evangelicals had recently been successful in persuading the government to call, exceptionally, for a general fast day dedicated to religious devotion on 21 March 1832, following rural unrest and outbreaks of cholera.[63] However it was, as Tonna astutely realized, a means by which countless women could feel comfortable in expressing political convictions. When composing their autobiographies, both Lydia Cameron and Jane Pennington, for example, published the private prayers they had offered during moments of political crisis.[64] Similarly Esther Copley, another popular polemicist, urged her audience of the importance of prayer in meeting the challenge of radical reformers.[65] For dedicated Protestants prayer could be conceived as a far more profound and efficacious strategy than any temporal activity. Yet Tonna's own career indicated that female prayer could also function as a context for political opposition. During the debates on the Catholic Emancipation Bill in 1829, Tonna organized women's prayer meetings in her neighbourhood as a

[58] *CLM*, 5 (1836), pp. 168–75; *CLM*, 6 (1836), pp. 34–6, 113–20, 237–9. Tonna's attempt to carve an independent career following the breakdown of her first marriage is indicative of her personal desire to establish clear parameters to the extent to which women should remain subordinate to their husbands.

[59] In 1834 the Uncle warned of the iniquity of female demagogues and the dangers of women overstepping their boundaries, *CLM*, 1 (1834), p. 160. Two years later Tonna (disingenuously) declared, 'It is not the province of females to interfere in public measures, or to obtrude our opinions on public men'. *CLM*, 5 (1836), p. 570. See also *CLM*, 1 (1834), pp. 73–80; 2 (1834), p. 519; 3 (1835), pp. 492–502; and 10 (1838), p. 472.

[60] *CLM*, 5 (1836), p. 244.

[61] *CLM*, 5 (1836), p. 570.

[62] *CLM*, 16 (1841), pp. 260–70.

[63] Richard J. Janet, 'Providence, prayer and cholera: the English general fast of 1832', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 51 (1982), pp. 297–317.

[64] Jane Pennington, *Memoir of Jane Pennington* (London, 1856), pp. 50–2; C. Cameron, ed., *Life of Mrs. Cameron: partly an autobiography, and from her private journals* (London, 1862), p. 305.

[65] [Esther Copley], *Radical reformists: a narrative, adapted to the present times* (London, n.d.), p. 10.

means of galvanizing local opposition to the measure[66] (a practice viewed as inappropriate by some Evangelicals).[67]

Tonna's exploitation of the multi-faceted implications of religious observance emerges most clearly in her treatment of women's electoral role. It was during general elections, the *Christian Lady's Magazine* suggested, that female religiosity was most needful. The magazine urged women to pray with a 'meek and quiet spirit' that the electors might return 'really Christian men' to the legislature.[68] If this language appears tentative, Tonna's insistence that women must exert their influence during elections needs to be understood with reference to contemporary debate on female electoral intervention. Whereas historians have often assumed that the Reform Act crystallized women's exclusion from electoral politics,[69] it is clear that women could feel closely implicated in the process of politicization associated with the reform agitation itself.[70] Moreover, it has been recognized that the widening of the franchise increased the opportunities for middle-class women to involve themselves in the electoral process, a phenomenon frequently commented upon in the provincial press.[71] When Bradford tories issued an election poster 'To the women of Great Britain' in 1837, imploring those who had 'influence' over their male family members to ensure they did not vote for the whigs, they were doing nothing exceptional.[72] As one contemporary put it, 'The question is not shall they exercise political influence … for every member of Parliament appeals to them, but shall they employ their power wisely and for the good of the country?'[73] Contemporary novels written by women with inside political experience, such as *Canvassing* (1835) by Harriet Martin (the daughter of Richard Martin, MP)[74] and *A year at Hartlebury; or the election* (1834) jointly authored by Sarah and Benjamin Disraeli,[75] further aired the nature and implications of female electoral influence. Tonna herself gave a warm review of George Brittaine's novel *The election* noting its attention to women's electoral significance.[76]

[66] Charlotte Elizabeth, *Personal recollections*, pp. 276–9.

[67] Cameron, *Life of Mrs Cameron*, p. 222.

[68] *CLM*, 3 (1835), pp. 86.

[69] Vernon, *Politics and the people*, especially p. 39; Catherine Hall, 'Private persons versus public someones: class, gender and politics in England, 1780–1850', in eadem, *White, male and middle class*, p. 152.

[70] Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian nation: class, race, gender and the Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 29–30.

[71] Dorothy Thompson, 'Women, work and politics in nineteenth-century England: the problem of authority', in Jane Rendall, ed., *Equal or different: women's politics, 1800–1914* (Oxford, 1987), p. 76; Simon Morgan, 'Middle-class women, civic virtue and identity: Leeds and the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1830–1860' (Ph.D. thesis, York, 2000), ch. 6.

[72] Sarah Richardson, 'The role of women in electoral politics in the eighteen-thirties', *Northern History*, 32 (1996), p. 135.

[73] Benjamin Parsons, *The mental and moral dignity of woman* (London, 1842), p. 344.

[74] Harriet Martin's novel *Canvassing* was published together with *The mayor of Wind-Gap* by Michael Banim under a collective pseudonym: O'Hara Family, *The mayor of Wind-Gap and canvassing* (London, 1835).

[75] Benjamin and Sarah Disraeli, *A year at Hartlebury; or the election* (1834), eds. Ellen Henderson and John P. Matthews (Toronto and Buffalo, 1983).

[76] *CLM*, 14 (1840), p. 77; [George Brittaine] *The election* (Dublin, 1840).

Furthermore, local examples of elite women exercising electoral dominance are manifold, and could incite fierce disputes amongst constituents,[77] whilst investigations into controverted elections revealed that women of all social classes were routinely involved in political canvassing and other forms of electoral influence.[78]

Therefore Tonna's words furnished women with a religious imperative to concern themselves in the parliamentary process at a time when such activity was the source of considerable discussion. Yet, if encouraging female prayer at elections seems to imply that women were not 'to interfere very actively',[79] Tonna made clear that the recourse to prayer did not preclude more dynamic modes of engagement; in 1837 the publication courted controversy in its treatment of Irish elections.[80] The magazine also hinted at the need for its readership to take an active role in elections. In 1845 it declared that even the unenfranchised should exert themselves to action during the general election.[81] Later, the magazine urged 'Protestant agitation' in the coming election to dissuade Lord John Russell from implementing a reported proposal to endow Irish Catholic priests.[82]

In exhorting women to rally themselves at election times, Tonna alluded to the tradition of female biblical leadership to adumbrate a more potent vision of female intercession. Comparing women's role to that of Abigail assuaging the wrath of David; Esther shielding the nation from impending destruction; or Deborah leading her people to safety, Tonna urged women to return to their bibles during these moments of national crisis.[83] She thus rooted women's activism within an ancient tradition of female leadership.[84] These scriptural associations were further emphasized through employing the appellation of 'mother in Israel' to validate powerful images of female public authority. Tonna, for example, referred to Hannah More in this way.[85] Whilst scholars of the early modern period have explored the ways in which this image drew upon a compelling web of associations which included those of social and economic status,[86] considerations of the title in our period have been limited largely to its salience for plebeian preachers.[87] Its continuing potential for Victorian middle-class female identities consequently remains under-explored.

[77] Richardson, 'The role of women', pp. 133–5.

[78] Matthew Cragoe, '"Jenny rules the roost": women and electoral politics, 1832–1868', in Gleadle and Richardson, eds., *Women in British politics*, pp. 153–68.

[79] *CLM*, 3 (1835), pp. 85–6.

[80] *CLM*, 4 (1835), pp. 282–3; and 8 (1837), p. 471.

[81] *CLM*, 23 (1845), pp. 376–7.

[82] *CLM*, 26 (1846), pp. 282–8.

[83] *CLM*, 3 (1835), pp. 85–6.

[84] *CLM*, 12 (1839), pp. 512–18; and 6 (1836), p. 27.

[85] *CLM*, 2 (1834), p. 199.

[86] Phyllis Mack, *Visionary women: ecstatic prophecy in seventeenth-century England* (Berkeley, 1992), pp. 215–46. For brief mention of the salience of the title for eighteenth-century women see Helen M. Jones, 'Daughters of Eve but mothers in Israel: some aspects of the religious life of women in eighteenth-century England' (Ph.D. thesis, King's College, London, 2003), pp. 208–12.

[87] Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic sons and daughters: female preaching and popular religion in industrial England* (Princeton, 1985).

Tonna's appropriation of such language formed part of a broader debate as to the appropriateness of Old Testament models to contemporary women.[88] In *The women of scripture* (1847) the temperance lecturer Clara Lucas Balfour suggested, like Tonna (of whom she wrote a memoir),[89] that women should look to their bibles and study the examples of scriptural women. She argued they provided evidence not of the exceptionally gifted, but rather of the 'eminent public authority' women could achieve when given the opportunity.[90] By contrast Tonna's associate Mary Ann Stodart, who was hostile to women claiming a public role, insisted that women such as Deborah were exceptions to the more general principle of female domesticity.[91] Although Tonna made a similar point, maintaining that Deborah and Esther were extraordinary examples of women called by God to lead their communities,[92] she drew upon her premillenarianism to claim that society was in such a state of crisis that it was incumbent upon all women to act. These were unprecedented times, and she trusted that her countrywomen were not those who would 'sit at ease' in 'times of public trial'.[93] In 1845 she accused those women who wished not to intervene in public affairs of exhibiting an 'apathetic acquiescence that gives success to the foe'.[94] Many in the ultra-Protestant community clearly agreed and were ready to recognize Tonna in this capacity. As the Rev. E. Dalton declaimed at the annual meeting of the Protestant Association in 1844, 'God forbid that the thunders of Tractarian batteries, or the sneering arrows of an infidel press, should ever frighten so valiant a contender for the faith … or that all the waters of the Isis and the Tiber conjoined should ever quench the light of such a mother in Israel.'[95]

Explorations of the applicability of Old Testament role models are symptomatic of the intricate shifts that marked female aspirations to religious influence during these years. By the late 1850s premillenarianism was to form one strand of the brief florescence of female preaching that marked the Evangelical revival,[96] and later feminists such as Josephine Butler were to use their religious conviction to claim the right to speak.[97] However, in the early Victorian period there was

[88] For some contemporary critics this preoccupation with the Old Testament was indicative of the premillenarians' 'Judaizing' tendencies. See Arthur Burns, ed., 'W. J. Conybeare: "Church parties", in Stephen Taylor, ed., *From Cranmer to Davidson: a Church of England miscellany* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 280–1. The essay was first published in the *Edinburgh Review* (1853).

[89] Clara Lucas Balfour, *A sketch of Charlotte Elizabeth* (London, 1854).

[90] Clara Lucas Balfour, *The women of scripture* (London, 1847), see pp. iii, v, 68–9, 90–1, 97–8, 104. Parsons, *The mental and moral dignity*, ch. 3 is also instructive.

[91] M. A. Stodart, *Every day duties: in letters to a young lady* (London, 1840), pp. 17, 20–1.

[92] *CLM*, 12 (1839), pp. 512–16.

[93] *CLM*, 5 (1836), p. 89.

[94] *CLM*, 23 (1845), p. 156.

[95] *Protestant Magazine*, 6 (1844), p. 201.

[96] Olive Anderson, 'Women preachers in mid-Victorian Britain: some reflections on feminism, popular religion and social change', *Historical Journal*, 12 (1969), pp. 467–84.

[97] Joy Dixon, *Divine feminine: theosophy and feminism in England* (Baltimore and London, 2001); Jacqueline R. Devries, 'Transforming the pulpit: British suffragists', in Beverley Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker, eds., *Women preachers and prophets through two millennia of Christianity* (Berkeley, 1998), pp. 318–33; Susan Mumm, '"I love my sex": two late Victorian pulpit women', in Joan Bellamy, Anne Laurence, and Gill Perry, eds., *Women, scholarship and criticism: gender and knowledge, c. 1700–1900*

considerable uncertainty surrounding women adopting roles of this kind. Public female prophecy had been a feature of Irvingite premillenarianism (and Quaker women preachers continued to be portrayed as respectable figures) but in general the custom of female preaching was in decline at this point and often dependent upon local custom.[98] However, as literary scholars have observed, fiction provided an alternative context in which Evangelical women could claim an authoritative religious voice. Emma Jane Worboise, for example, used the medium of the novel to sermonize to her readers.[99] Similarly, Christine Kreuger claims that in novels such as *Helen Fleetwood*, Tonna herself assumed the role of the prophet through recounting the parable of Dives and Lazarus in the novel's narrative structure.[100] Literary genres, then, could be exploited by women to lay claim to religious (and thereby public) authority, at a time when the acceptability of female preaching was in flux.

IV

If Evangelicalism could provide women with the justification and confidence to address the nation, Tonna also had to explore secular modes of publicity if she hoped to mobilize a mass audience. This involved projecting a vision of an inclusive political nation to her readership as she explored the various ways in which women might take their part as active political subjects.

In particular, Tonna exhorted women to exert pressure on the government through the use of petitioning. Parliamentary petitions had increased significantly in the political climate created in the wake of the 1832 Reform Act and, despite tighter regulations on the presentation of petitions to the Commons in 1833 and 1834, they remained a hugely popular means to express political views.[101] Early on

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(Manchester, 2000), pp. 204–21; Helen Mathers, 'The Evangelical spirituality of a Victorian feminist: Josephine Butler, 1828–1906', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 52 (2001), pp. 282–312.

[98] Timothy C. F. Stunt, *From awakening to secession: radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain, 1815–1835* (Edinburgh, 2000), pp. 261–4; D. Colin Dews, 'Ann Carr and the female revivalists of Leeds', in Gail Malmgreen, ed., *Religion in the lives of English women, 1760–1930* (London and Sydney, 1986), pp. 70–2. Female messianism was also associated with extreme socialist sects: Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 157–82.

[99] Julie Melnyk, 'Evangelical theology and feminist polemic: Emma Jane Worboise's *Overdale*', in eadem, *Women's theology in nineteenth-century Britain: transfiguring the faith of their fathers* (1998), pp. 107–22.

[100] This was further emphasized through careful juxtaposition as editor. By including an essay on women of the Old Testament in the issue which carried the novel's first instalment Tonna was able to enrich allusions to female scriptural authority. Christine L. Kreuger, *The reader's repentance: women preachers, women writers and nineteenth-century social discourse* (Chicago and London, 1992), ch. 7. See also Kestner, 'Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna', p. 199. Tonna's personal correspondence also revealed a more playful appropriation of such an identity. Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna to Lord Ashley, 17 Dec. 1841, cited in Edwin Hodder, *The life and work of the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, K. G.* (3 vols., London, 1887), I, pp. 392–3.

[101] Jonathan Parry, *The rise and fall of Liberal government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London, 1993), pp. 102–3, 141. For the scope and significance of early Victorian petitioning see Paul A. Pickering, '"And your petitioners &c": Chartist petitioning in popular politics, 1838–1848', *English Historical Review* (2001), pp. 368–88.

in its life the *Christian Lady's Magazine* was cautious on this point, suggesting that the act of petitioning should be divided on gendered lines: 'It rests with you men to prepare petitions to the legislature; and our part is to plead the sacred cause with all who come within reach of our persuasions.'[102] However, it soon became apparent that the magazine anticipated a massive rallying of the people. Men and women were to exert their views, via petitions, on a whole range of subjects, including factory reform, foreign policy, Lord Melbourne, and Irish legislation. On the question of church extension the 'Uncle' declared 'Petition, petition: lay before the throne piles of petitions; let the tables of either house groan under their weight.'[103] Sometimes the magazine even published the full text of petitions that Tonna wished her readers to sign.[104] So vital was this activity to a healthy body politic that Tonna asserted it was actually 'unfeminine' not to pursue such endeavours.[105] At a time when female petitioning was widely practised yet not universally condoned,[106] these statements are revealing as to the ways in which Tonna sought to redefine contemporary notions of femininity to allow for a more public and overtly political role.

Despite rhetorical gestures to women's 'modest and contracted sphere' in the home,[107] Tonna's desire that women should be not merely Protestants but 'Protesters'[108] led her to encourage women to participate in associational projects. She applauded the formation of the Evangelical Alliance, an ecumenical forum for Protestant mobilization that organized female associations, and she herself attended its founding meeting.[109] On another occasion she noted with pride that she and other women had 'boldly entered' a public meeting on the subject of the Irish clergy.[110] Tonna was keen to publicize her enrolment in the Protestant Society in 1840 and her consequent involvement in its parliamentary activities.[111]

In advocating activism of this nature Tonna was contributing to an emerging phenomenon of female participation in ultra-Protestant activities. The national Protestant Association capitalized upon its high-profile female supporters, noting in 1843 for example that 'Lady Pomfret, Lady A. Bevan, Hon. Mrs. V. Harcourt, the Marchioness of Anglesea, and other ladies of distinction' were present at its annual meeting.[112] Women also comprised the backbone of many of the provincial Protestant Societies established from the late 1830s. In 1840 women were

[102] *CLM*, 1 (1834), p. 254.
[103] *CLM*, 13 (1840), p. 284.
[104] For example *CLM*, 13 (1840), pp. 383–4, printed a petition protesting against Melbourne's influence over the queen. The text of an anti-Catholic petition was reprinted in *CLM*, 15 (1841), pp. 88–90.
[105] *CLM*, 1 (1834), p. 254.
[106] Discussion was common as to whether female signatures should be accepted on petitions: *Hansard*, 26 Feb. 1829, col. 572, and 27 Feb. 1829, col. 610; Midgley, 'From supporting missions', pp. 82–5; Paz, *Popular anti-Catholicism*, p. 274.
[107] *CLM*, 1 (1834), p. 250.
[108] Charlotte Elizabeth, *Personal recollections*, p. 43.
[109] Tonna, 'Concluding remarks', pp. 416–17. J. W. Massie, *The Evangelical Alliance: its origin and development* (London, 1847), p. 444; Evangelical Alliance, *Report of the proceedings of the conference of British members* (London, 1847), p. 103.
[110] *CLM*, 5 (1836), pp. 91–2.
[111] *CLM*, 13 (1840), p. 184.
[112] *Protestant Magazine*, 1 (1843), see pp. 164–202.

estimated to form two-thirds of the local Protestant Society in York, prompting the leaders of the movement in Sheffield to urge their branch to establish a female society. Ladies from the local elite were notable supporters of the movement in Herefordshire, where the Protestant Association profited considerably from female donors; and in Liverpool, too, women predominated at meetings of the local Protestant Association.[113]

Tonna's writings should therefore be seen not as exceptional in their desire to rouse Protestant women, but as part of a vibrant culture of female activism. This involved politicizing plebeian as well as middle-class women. As James Vernon has noted, tory political discourses included the 'disenfranchised as Protestants in the nation's historical crusade against the tyranny of Rome and her allies'.[114] Although Tonna was opposed to the extension of the franchise she too adopted such rhetoric to convey a nation of active, loyalist subjects fully deserving of greater parliamentary sympathy. In both her magazines Tonna encouraged working-class participation in Protestant operatives' societies,[115] and has one of the characters in *Helen Fleetwood* utter the prophecy that 'the time is coming, when every man, woman, and child must know something of politics'.[116] This could be controversial. *The Record* criticized those who encouraged agitation amongst the poor.[117] Nonetheless Tonna was not alone in posing as a champion for the voices of the loyalist poor. As another female tory propagandist Fanny Mayne put it, 'It is a great mistake to suppose that those who have no vote have no power.'[118]

Tonna's defence of British Jewry sheds further light upon her broad conceptualization of the political nation. The belief that the conversion and restoration of the Jews to Israel would precipitate the return of Christ was an abiding preoccupation of the premillenarians.[119] Tonna's involvement in the issue was complex, but it was central to her political identity as an Evangelical Christian,[120] as well as to the public activities of huge numbers of contemporary women. The Philo-Judean Female Association, a premillenarian charity of the 1820s, appears to have been a highly successful venture;[121] and the percentage of female subscribers to the conversionist London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst

[113] *First annual report of the Hereford Protestant Association* (Hereford, 1836), pp. 5, 41–4; *Fourth annual report of the Liverpool Protestant Association* (Liverpool, 1839), p. 7. Paz's claim that female participation declined during the 1840s requires further substantiation: *Popular anti-Catholicism*, pp. 269, 275.

[114] Vernon, *Politics and the people*, pp. 301, 332.

[115] *Protestant Magazine*, 5 (1843), p. 304; *CLM*, 13 (1840), pp. 567–8.

[116] Charlotte Elizabeth, *Helen Fleetwood* (London, 1841), p. 300.

[117] Holladay, 'Nineteenth-century Evangelical activism', p. 55.

[118] *True Briton*, 22 July 1852.

[119] Rubinstein and Rubinstein, *Philosemitism*; Mel Scult, *Millennial expectations and Jewish liberties: a study of the efforts to convert the Jews in Britain, up to the mid-nineteenth century* (Leiden, 1978).

[120] Hilary L. Rubinstein, 'A pioneering philosemite: Charlotte Elizabeth (1790–1846)', in Howard A. Freeman, ed., *A portion of praise: a* festschrift *to honour John S. Levi* (Victoria, 1997), pp. 213–36.

[121] *Times*, 23 Feb. 1827. The appeal of such events to women was satirized by W. J. Conybeare in his famous essay, 'Church parties': see Taylor ed., *From Cranmer to Davidson*, p. 293.

the Jews was one of the highest of any nineteenth-century voluntary society.[122] Certainly the Jewish cause was well represented in the *Christian Lady's Magazine*: Tonna's husband contributed articles on the Hebrew language, and Tonna sought to rally opinion on specific issues, such as the massacre of Jews at Mogador in 1844.[123] By this date Tonna represented the views of those who believed, controversially, that once converted to Christianity, Jews should maintain their distinctive cultural identity.[124] This perspective gained the magazine sympathetic reviews in the Jewish periodical the *Voice of Jacob* for whose editor, Jacob Franklin, Tonna forged a great respect.[125] Tonna's interest in the Jewish cause also had further implications for her perceptions of national identity. As Michael Ragussis has observed, by linking the fate of England's spiritual and commercial wellbeing to the resettlement of Palestine, Tonna's widely read novel, *Judah's Lion* (just one of the many conversionist novels authored by women in this period) charts the connections between conversionism, nationalism, and imperialism.[126] The Jewish question therefore formed another avenue through which Evangelical women might conceptualize themselves as political subjects and delineate their own strategies for the salvation of the nation.

V

The range and breadth of Tonna's religious and political interests, as outlined above, demonstrates the inadequacy of many historical accounts of her work. Paz, for example, claims that she 'well fits Victorian ideas about domesticity and separate spheres'.[127] That 'domestic ideology' is too simple a construct with which to understand Tonna's work is underlined if we consider her treatment of child-rearing and education. Tonna was closely attentive to the political socialization of children. She claimed in her autobiography that her own upbringing in Norwich had been central to the formation of her political identity. She noted the vital influence of both her grandmother, who she notes was a 'Protester' and a tory, and her father, the Rev. Michael Browne (a canon of Norwich Cathedral), 'an enthusiastic loyalist … devoted to the constitution in Church and State'. She portrayed a childhood steeped in political activities, from her ardent reading of the newspapers as a five year old, to her involvement in local elections whilst still

[122] Nadia Valman, 'Women writers and the campaign for Jewish civil rights in early Victorian England', in Gleadle and Richardson, eds., *Women in British politics*, p. 96.

[123] For a full discussion see Rubinstein and Rubinstein, *Philosemitism*, pp. 16–17, 133–5.

[124] Charlotte Elizabeth, *Israel's ordinances: a few thoughts on their perpetuity respectfully suggested in a letter to the Right Rev. the Bishop of Jerusalem* (London, 1843). Moses Margoliouth's reply, *Israel's ordinance examined: a reply to Charlotte Elizabeth's letter to the Right Rev. the Bishop of Jerusalem* (London, 1844), paid considerable attention to the *CLM*.

[125] See Rubinstein and Rubinstein, *Philosemitism*, pp. 16–17, 133–6, 150. *CLM*, 15 (1841), pp. 185–92.

[126] Michael Ragussis, *Figures of conversion: 'the Jewish question' and English national identity* (Durham and London, 1995), pp. 44–51. For a discussion of other female conversionist authors see Burstein, 'Protestants against the Jewish and Catholic family', pp. 333–57.

[127] Paz, *Popular anti-Catholicism*, p. 273.

in her teens (by which time, we might note, she had become profoundly deaf).[128] In common with other writers, such as Adelaide Kilvert and Mary Atkinson Maurice,[129] Tonna considered how politically informed child-rearing might contribute to a culture that prioritized obedience and deference over individual rights. The rise of radicalism, the magazine asserted, was intimately related to a decline in family discipline.[130]

Tonna therefore shared Edward Bickersteth's horror when the Attorney General, Sir John Campbell, proudly declared that his wife was teaching their children 'that the true origin of power was the people'.[131] This justified, Tonna asserted, her editorial policy of devoting so many pages to politics, for it provided 'proof of what the enemy is doing by means of erroneous and misguided maternal zeal'.[132] The *Christian Lady's Magazine* disapproved of those families in which the nursery was turned into a 'debating society'.[133] 'The child', it pronounced, 'should never be allowed to dispute the parent's authority'.[134] Rather, parents were encouraged to instil in their children the 'sound principles' upon which the constitution was based, and to introduce them to the country's Protestant history.[135] As the 'Uncle' solemnly declared, 'I am now advocating – the early instruction of English Christian children in sound political theory.'[136] Tonna was to claim that one of her proudest achievements as a 'politician' (as she phrased it) was the role she had played in encouraging mothers to train their children, 'even from the nursery, in the sound principles of our matchless constitution'.[137]

An earlier historiographical tradition tended to portray Evangelical motherhood as a passive model of affective love and influence.[138] In contrast, Tonna's

[128] Charlotte Elizabeth, *Personal recollections*, pp. 41–8, 69–71. For an excellent discussion of Tonna's autobiography see Linda H. Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian women's autobiography: the poetics and politics of life writing* (Charlottesville and London, 1999), ch. 2. Alternative interpretations of Tonna's autobiography may be found in Elizabeth Kowaleski, '"The heroine of some strange romance": the *Personal recollections* of Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 1 (1982), pp. 141–53; Valerie Sanders, *The private lives of Victorian women: autobiography in nineteenth-century England* (Hemel Hempstead, 1989); and Mary Jean Corbett, 'Feminine authorship and spiritual authority in Victorian women writers' autobiographies', *Women's Studies*, 18 (1990), pp. 13–30.

[129] A. S. Kilvert, *Home discipline, or thoughts on the origin and exercise of domestic authority* (London, 1841); [Mary Atkinson Maurice], *The patriot warrior; an historical sketch of the life of the Duke of Wellington* (London, 1853), conclusion. Kilvert was married to an Anglican vicar, Francis Kilvert: *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (Oxford, 2004), https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15544, accessed 21 Feb. 2005. The *Oxford dictionary of national biography* asserts that Maurice had a religious and political agenda distinct from that of her brother, the Christian Socialist, F. D. Maurice: https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/51769, accessed 21 Feb. 2005.

[130] *CLM*, 2 (1834), pp. 520–1. See also *CLM*, 5 (1836), pp. 212, 341–50.

[131] *CLM*, 6 (1836), p. 554.

[132] *CLM*, 6 (1836), p. 569.

[133] *CLM*, 1 (1834), pp. 445–6.

[134] *CLM*, 11 (1839), p. 42.

[135] *CLM*, 1 (1834), p. 446; and 7 (1837), p. 240.

[136] *CLM*, 1 (1834), p. 443.

[137] Charlotte Elizabeth, *Personal recollections*, p. 43.

[138] Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, p. 14. For a recent restatement of this position see Thorne, *Congregational missions*, p. 95.

own life provided no exemplar of domesticated womanhood,[139] and her writings often conveyed a functionalist, unsentimental image of child-rearing. In particular, she sought to ensure that the new infant schools, established by the Home and Colonial Society, were inculcating appropriate political principles to the children in their care. Accordingly, the magazine published examples of songs that should be performed in these institutions. These extolled a British nationalism that sought to discourage children from being seduced into political radicalism emphasizing instead the values of the British monarchy and the constitution.[140] Tonna may have been partly inspired by the work of her friend, Mary Ann Stodart. Stodart's ballads for school children constructed a highly politicized version of British history, celebrating national military triumphs and ridiculing the work of reformers – those 'open enemies of our church and constitution'.[141] Whereas many radicals presented the question of educational reform as a means of promoting the maternal role,[142] for Tonna its salience as a political and parliamentary issue was emphasized over gendered preoccupations. She lobbied against Lord John Russell's proposals that religion might be taught in isolation from the main school curriculum and also against the efforts of the Central Society of Education which sought to secularize lower-class education.[143] Tonna therefore encouraged female intervention in public policy, not as mothers, but as active Protestants.

VI

Female interventions into public debate formed part of a diverse extra-parliamentary culture in which conservative women (broadly defined) could act as conduits and disseminators of political information to wide readerships. In particular, the work of Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna reveals the extent to which pre-millenarian Evangelicalism – sometimes estimated to be the majority Evangelical position by the middle of the century[144] – provided a rich spectrum of debates and

[139] She admitted that as a child she had no desire to assist her mother in 'household cares': Charlotte Elizabeth, *Personal recollections*, p. 72. It was clearly a low priority as an adult also: her second husband noted that their marriage coincided with 'new and extended spheres of usefulness' as her public career became more active. Tonna, 'Concluding remarks', p. 392. Tonna herself did not have children, although for some years she cared for a young deaf mute, Jack, whom she had met in Ireland. She also adopted two of her nephews on their father's death. In her unsuccessful bid to win a government pension she stressed the economic, rather than the maternal support she gave her nephews. 'Memorial of Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna', 27 Mar. 1846, British Library, Add MS 40483, fo. 178.

[140] *CLM*, 10 (1838), pp. 68–9. Other examples of Tonna's support for the association include *CLM*, 8 (1837), pp. 75–6; and 9 (1838), pp. 354–6.

[141] M. A. Stodart, *National ballads: patriotic and Protestant* (London, 1841), iii. The work was warmly received in the *CLM*, 16 (1841), p. 369.

[142] Kathryn Gleadle, ed., *Radical writing on women, 1800–1850: an anthology* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 56.

[143] CLM, 10 (1838), pp. 282–3, 437. For a similar attack on the liberals' education policy: M. A. Stodart, *Principles of education practically considered; with an especial reference to the present state of female education in England* (London, 1844), p. 29.

[144] Lewis, *Lighten their darkness*, p. 101.

attitudes towards publicly active women. Equally, the rhetoric and activism of women in the ultra-Protestant camp, to which premillenarians tended to be disposed, demonstrate the range of fora and modes of action available to them. It is not to be supposed that premillenarian Evangelicalism necessarily politicized women nor that it would obviously lead to a single political position. Rather it is argued here that it provides one route for unearthing what has hitherto been a wholly neglected area: the nature of middle-class women's engagement in Victorian conservatism and the diversity of responses to such efforts. It is also suggestive as to the wide range of political issues with which women were involved in this period. This included debates on the merits of state intervention, government policy towards Ireland, educational policy, and imperial questions, to name but a few. Tonna's treatment of such topics in her wider oeuvre indicates that domestic ideology was not a static, hegemonic creed that simply reflected majority opinion. It was a discourse that might be used deliberately and strategically to appeal to particular audiences at particular times. Tonna, in common with many ardent Evangelicals, was just as likely to impress upon women their duty to act because of their responsibilities as loyal British subjects or their superior economic status as she was to emphasize their maternal feelings or moral sensibilities. Above all, Tonna insisted that by assuming the name 'Protestant', Britons – both men and women – pledged themselves to protest.[145] Her premillenarianism provided her not only with a theological justification for such an assertion; it also inspired alternative conceptualizations of political women. In addition, premillenarianism served to facilitate Tonna's activism by bringing her into contact with a wide network of associational bodies that were lobbying on such causes as anti-Catholicism, Jewish conversion and state intervention.

Whereas it was long supposed that early Victorian culture marginalized women as political agents,[146] what is particularly revealing from an analysis of the *Christian Lady's Magazine* is the sheer lack of consensus as to women's political role. The *Christian Lady's Magazine*'s refusal to reiterate predictable, didactic models of female publicity and its marked ambivalence as to the appropriate model for women's political action permitted a multiplicity of readings (which in itself may well help to account for the success of the publication). Even at its most cautious, however, the magazine insisted that religion and politics could not be dissevered and demanded therefore that righteous women cultivate a detailed understanding of parliamentary politics. As Tonna asked in her autobiography, 'What had a woman to do with the proceedings of senators and governors?' Her reply: 'Everything.'[147]

[145] *CLM*, 3 (1835), pp. 198–9.

[146] Hall, 'Private persons'. Whilst recognizing the opportunities for female publicity Linda Colley has argued that such activity was roundly condemned, writing of the 'unthinking male resistance to female forays into public affairs'. Colley, *Britons*, p. 279.

[147] Charlotte Elizabeth, *Personal recollections*, p. 274.