The sacramental theology of Robert Isaac Wilberforce

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Abstract of M A Thesis

The subjects of the thesis are determined by the published works of Robert Isaac Wilberforce on the doctrines of the incarnation, baptism and the eucharist.

The study, however, begins with a brief biographical introduction which is concerned to relate Wilberforce to his Oxford contemporaries and to make some assessment of his own intellectual background as well as of his academic equipment.

Wilberforce's three great works constitute the kernel of the three following chapters. His first major work - on the incarnation - is the basis and precursor of the others. In it he develops a doctrine of the incarnation in which the mediatorial and sacramental roles of Christ are emphasised. In other words, his concern throughout will be as much academic as pastoral.

In the following year, 1849, Wilberforce's work on baptism was published. This is the slightest of his works, being primarily a reply to contemporary polemic. It can only be properly assessed in the context of the nineteenth century baptismal controversy.

With the publication of The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, Wilberforce completed his theological synthesis. By far the most remarkable work from his pen, it defies classification with any of the competing understandings of the eucharist in Anglican theology. The key concepts of Wilberforce's doctrine, and especially the understanding of the eucharist as the means of union with Christ's mystical body, are in turn examined.

In these central chapters it has seemed right, as far as possible, to allow Wilberforce to speak for himself.

The study concludes, as it began, in biographical vein. The drift of Wilberforce's theology has been Romewards. The publication of his final work confirmed this assessment: he signified his withdrawal of his subscription to Anglican formularies and became a member of the Roman Catholic Church. His sudden death at a sadly early age marked also the end of his influence as a theologian.

THE SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY

OF ROBERT ISAAC WILBERFORCE

BEING A THESIS PRESENTED

FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN THE UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

BY

MICHAEL KNIGHT

PREFACE

"The Church of England as it now stands no human power can save." So prophesied Thomas Arnold in 1833 in words that too frequently have been employed to introduce studies of the Oxford Movement. The frequency with which the quotation recurs reflects its appositeness. Yet it is too facile to assume, as is all too often the case, that the Oxford Movement proved to be the divine reply to Arnold's prophecy. The problems which beset the Church of England in the early years of the nineteenth century were institutional, spiritual and theological. Could these dead bones of the Establishment live? In that the Church of England still functions as a national institution, it would seem that history has answered in the affirmative; yet the process of revitalisation was no easy one. A Blomfield was required to initiate reform in the structure of the institutional Church; a Keble and a Newman were required to remind men of that long-forgotten fact that the Church of England was no mere state institution, but that it could be an agent of sanctification. Yet even this, mammoth as it is, was not enough to give life to the dead bones. For the Church was entrusted by her Lord with a message to preach to all men. The understanding and communication of that message for any generation is a theological task. Of the English theologians of the nineteenth century, hindsight tends to focus its exclusive attention on Frederick Denison Maurice; to contemporaries, the issue was not so clear. There were many, Gladstone among them, who, if asked, would have placed the name of Robert Isaac Wilberforce in the first rank. Wilberforce's work, though substantial and significant, failed to attract the attention either of his contemporaries or of posterity. To contemporaries he was merely a Tractarian whose submission to the see of Rome only substantiated their worst fears; to posterity he is overshadowed by Maurice. Even when, a century after his debut as a theologian, Dr. E.L. Mascall (in Theology, 1946) tried to arouse

some interest in Wilberforce's theology, he was unsuccessful. Time had caught up with Wilberforce, and there were others who by 1946 had put forward a similar theological point of view. In a thesis such as this, it is important, therefore, that Wilberforce be allowed to speak for himself as much as possible, for his case has yet to be heard. No apology is made for these extensive quotations from Wilberforce, for it is surely better to allow the theologian to speak for himself, than to recast his well-expressed prose in a misguided search for originality of expression.

There is no biography of Wilberforce, though there are short articles on him in DNB, the Dictionary of Catholic Biography, and the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church; David Newsome's The Parting of Friends to some extent supplies this lack. Brief studies of Wilberforce's life up to and after his creative theological period have been included in an attempt to see his work in an albeit cursory biographical framework. Yet Wilberforce was not the sort of theologian who requires a biography, for that biography would soon enough degenerate into the anecdotal. Wilberforce was no Augustine, nor yet a Newman, who felt the need to pen Confessions or an Apologia; he was no Athanasius, whose very life was an adventure story; nor was he a Kierkegaard, whose theology could only be understood in relation to his biography and psychology. More like Keble, Wilberforce was a quiet Anglican pastor, shy and diffident, who felt called to write in order to answer the challenges of his time. His history up to 1848 provides the basic understanding of his own intellectual formation; his history after 1854 reflects his preparedness to carry out the consequences of the intellectual positions he had reached. The tragedy of his life, indeed perhaps the tragedy of English Roman Catholicism in the aftermath of the Oxford Movement was that he did not

live to serve the Roman communion as faithfully as he had sought to serve the Anglican.

BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

William Wilberforce, the Great Emancipator of the slaves, married at the relatively late age of 38 one Barbara Ann Spooner. Their union was immediately fruitful: within the first ten years of marriage six children were born, four sons and two daughters. Robert Isaac was born in 1802, his parents' fourth child and second son. Three years later Samuel was born, and Henry, the last child was born in 1807. The children were born into the Evangelical tradition - more precisely into that tradition as exemplified by the Clapham Sect, a wealthy dynasty of fervent Evangelicals, practising an almost monastic austerity. Life in the Wilberforce household had been admirably described by Mr. David Newsome in The Parting of Friends[1] in terms which suggest that the austerity of the parents was no hindrance to the enjoyment of childhood. But the children were the offspring of a famous father, and that involved them in certain pressures. In 1823 Elizabeth Wilberforce wrote to her younger brother, Robert, "Oh when I think of our name - what is expected of us and what religious advantages we have had - I tremble."[2] That sentence highlights the poignancy of the history of the Emancipator's sons.

Because William Wilberforce had no high opinion of public schools, Robert, like his elder brother William before him, was educated privately until 1810, when both of them were sent to a private school. Robert was sent to a small establishment at Nuneham Courtenay, near Oxford, which was run by the Reverend E.G. Marsh. In 1817 he was joined there by Samuel. Robert remained with Marsh until he went up to Oriel College, Oxford, in February, 1820[3]. In due time both Samuel and Henry also matriculated at

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1. pp 30-38.
2. Quoted ibid, p xxi.
3. ibid, pp 38-39, cf pp 57-62.

this College.

Little is known of Robert Wilberforce's undergraduate career. It would seem that he was solitary and studious in his ways and, then as later, quite without ambition. He was happy to improve his scholarship which at this stage seems to have lacked that polish and assurance which those who had enjoyed a public school education had painfully and surely acquired. At any rate, T. Mozley recorded later that "Robert's industry enabled him to surmount any difficulties, and he was his own teacher."[1] His examiners were also impressed and awarded him First Classes in both Classics and Mathematics. It was, therefore, an obvious decision for him to remain at Oxford after taking his degree to study for a fellowship at Oriel.

Of the fellows of Oriel at that time, the most acclaimed was John Keble. Robert had been one of the first to accept Keble's offer of free lodgings for a Long Vacation reading party at Southrop Parsonage in 1823, the idea having been suggested by the Provost of Oriel. Keble was the first High Churchman Robert had met, and he was perplexed. "What a strange person Keble is," he said, "there is Law's Serious Call; instead of having it about to do people good, I see he reads it and puts it out of the way, hiding it in a drawer".[2] To Robert the reading party was merely a useful opportunity to gain fresh advice on his work amongst friends and pleasant surroundings; to his companions, Isaac Williams and Hurrell Froude, it was the turning point of their lives. Later historians have seen in this accidental gathering the cradle of Tractarianism, but if so, Robert's

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1. T. Mozley, Reminiscences of Oriel and the Oxford Movement, I, pp 98, 104, 102.
2. Newsome, op cit, p 73.

commitment in 1823 is doubtful: significantly he preferred to spend the next summer on a grand tour of Europe with John Venn than to join the others at Southrop again.[1]

Robert was elected to an Oriel fellowship in 1826. Something of the nature of this achievement can be seen from A.D. Culler's survey:[2]

> "An Oriel Fellowship at this period was "the great object of the ambition of half the Bachelors in Oxford." To Mark Patti son it was held up as "the ideal prize to which I was to aspire," and a clerical friend of the Newman family declared that although it was "great in point of emolument, in point of character it was immortality."....
> In the early nineteenth century talent flowed Orielwards, said the college historian, as if by natural law. That law was simply the manner in which elections to Fellowships were made, for in Oriel they were conducted more purely on a basis of merit than was the case anywhere else in the university. In other colleges most of the Fellowships were conferred by the terms of their foundation to persons who were already members of the college or to candidates from a particular locality, but Oriel had never had any of the first sort and only a few of the second. Moreover, ever since the end of the eighteenth century there had been a distinct tendency to relax even the few restrictions that did exist, and the result of this tendency was that by 1822 Oriel had almost a free choice among the best minds of the university. The striking thing, however, was the use which the college made of this freedom. Where the elections elsewhere went largely by intellect or congeniality and were openly canvassed for like any sinecure or political office, the Oriel elections went strictly by examination, and that an examination of a very peculiar kind. "The questions," wrote Dean Church, "were very general, not involving directly much knowledge, but trying how a man could treat ordinary questions which interest cultivated men. It was altogether a trial, not of how much men knew, but of how they knew, and what they could do."....
> "Every election to a fellowship," wrote Copleston, "which tends to discourage the narrow and almost technical routine of public examinations, I consider as an important triumph."

After his election, Wilberforce was in almost daily contact with Newman and Froude, and his contact with Keble developed. Pusey was away

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1. See R.W. Church, The Oxford Movement, p 59, on the accidental origins of the reading party. G. Battiscombe, John Keble, p 47, contrasts the personalities revealed in the encounter.
2. A.D. Culler, The Imperial Intellect, p 26, of Newsome, op cit, p 78.

in Germany studying Oriental languages and contemporary developments in German theology. Initially, Wilberforce inclined to follow Pusey in studying these subjects, the inspiration for this enthusiasm coming, as in Pusey's case, from Dr. Lloyd, the Regius Professor of Divinity.[1] But Wilberforce delayed, for he was not yet sure whether to commit himself to his researches or to pastoral work. He was about to leave for Germany when he heard that Copleston had been raised to the see of Llandaff, an appointment which created a vacancy in the Provostship of Oriel. The succession was effectively in dispute between Hawkins and Keble, the other possible candidate, Tyler, having recently accepted a London living. Keble's intentions were in doubt from the start. On December 3rd, 1827, he wrote to Coleridge, "I know the temper of Oriel well enough to be sure that any interference, even of the most friendly and delicate kind, would not be relished there."[2] Two weeks later the tide began to turn against Keble as Pusey wrote to inform him that his support was pledged to Hawkins.[3] Newman announced his own intentions in a letter to Keble on December 19th,[4] and thereby confirmed Keble in his resolve not to take part in a contested election. Wilberforce, meanwhile, ignored advice from Pusey and Newman, refused to take seriously Keble's decision not to contest the election, and wrote to Hawkins to say that he would vote against him. But by now the result was a foregone conclusion.

The election of Hawkins to the Provostship created a vacancy in the tuition, which was filled by Wilberforce. For the next three years,

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1. For Dr. Lloyd, see H.P. Liddon, Life of Pusey, I, pp 62-4, cf Newsome, op cit, p 78.
2. Bodleian Coleridge Papers, d 134.
3. Liddon, op cit, I p 138.
4. Letters and Correspondence, I, p 174.

Wilberforce worked with Newman and Froude as tutors.[1] Almost from the start both Newman and Wilberforce were troubled by tutorial arrangements as they stood. They disapproved of the practice of allowing freshmen to come into residence at various times of the year, preferring that they come up in a body at the beginning of the year so that they could form a separate class in which teaching could be geared to their needs. Newman also conceived of the office as a pastoral one, not merely as a college lecturer with a general responsibility for maintaining college discipline. Wilberforce and he now proposed that tutors, while retaining their position as lecturers, should also have charge of a limited number of pupils whose academic and moral supervision should be the tutor's first responsibility. Though both Wilberforce and Newman were involved in this reform of the tutorial system, Mr. Newsome has maintained that "Robert's approach to Hawkins was made before any steps had been taken by Newman." He adds that Hawkins, "by himself pointing to the advantage of the moral instruction of a tutor's individual pupils, was not initially opposed to this conception of a tutor's function."[2]

This agreement was not to survive long. In 1829 the University was split on the question of Catholic Emancipation. The controversy centred on the re-election of Peel as the Member for the University. In Mr. Newsome's account, "the furore over Catholic Emancipation in 1829 raged more furiously and viciously in Oxford than anywhere else, and for good

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1. The chronology of the appointments is confused. Culler, op cit, suggests that Wilberforce - interestingly, in view of his letter - succeeded Hawkins, while Froude succeeded Tyler, who was now the Rector of St. Giles in the Fields, London. For an alternative view, see L. Bouyer, Newman, His Life and Spirituality, p 88.
2. Newsome, op cit, p 93. For Newman's own view of the tutorship, see Culler, op cit, pp 64-8.

reason. Peel had committed a volte face and divided the Tory party, and Peel was member for Oxford University. This was the issue which divided Oxford into rival parties and set the stage for the theological contests of the next decade."[1] In the disputed election, Newman and Hawkins were on opposite sides. Wilberforce was not immediately involved. He perceived the expediency of Catholic Emancipation and refused to ally himself with the outcry against Peel.[2] But his refusal to support Newman and Keble against Peel's re-election did not shelter him from the forthcoming clash. In the matter of the tuition, Culler writes,[3]

> "The Peel affair had lent bitterness to the quarrel which arose out of the reform, for Hawkins had been on one side and his four tutors on the other; and in Newman's opinion Hawkins had acted in a way that was peremptory and out of line. Hence, whereas in a letter of February 6, before the matter broke, Newman had praised Hawkins for his part in the college reforms, on February 17, five days after it broke, he spoke of him as "our meddling Provost"; and from that time on all real harmony was at an end.... The New system was put into effect at the beginning of Hilary Term, January 14 1829, but was not discovered by Hawkins until Easter, and even then he did not fully realise the extent of the change. At that time he told the tutors to go back to the old system, but through various misunderstandings this was not done and the matter did not come into the open until Dornford, who was unwilling to persist in the scheme against the Provost's wishes, raised the whole issue in a college meeting of April 24, 1830."

Hawkins demanded that the reform of the previous year be rescinded, and threatened, as was his right, to send no pupils to the tutors who

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1. "Newman and the Oxford Movement" in The Victorian Crisis of Faith, ed Symondson, p 72. The precise details of the affair are often lost from view. They are conveniently set out in G.I.T. Machin, The Catholic Question in English Politics 1820-1850, pp 151-4, or, more fully, in W.R. Ward, Victorian Oxford, pp 70-5.
2. So Newsome, op cit, pp 94-5. M. Ward, Young Mr. Newman, p 176, has suggested that Wilberforce supported Newman and Keble. Sir Robert Inglis was the victorious candidate. For Inglis, see W.R. Ward, op cit, pp 72-3.
3. Culler, op cit, p 71.

defied him. Newman and Froude ignored the request; Wilberforce, cautious as ever, asked for time to think the matter over. In September, 1830, he committed himself to the example of Newman and Froude. "I can sincerely say", he wrote to Hawkins, "that all the reflection I have been able to give to the subject has but the more convinced me that I....should be unable to carry on the tuition in a manner beneficial to my pupils and therefore satisfactory to myself except on the system I have heretofore pursued."[1] The die was cast. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of this episode in Wilberforce's life and development. For some time he had been considering leaving Oxford for pastoral work; indeed, he had only remained in Oxford because he saw the tutorship as a pastoral charge. Now this was to be removed from him. Mr. Newsome has adduced another reason why Wilberforce should have left Oxford at this time. The Wilberforce finances were being depleted by the eldest son, William: the family home at Highwood was put up to let, and a new home had to be found for the aging parents. The onus of responsibility fell on Robert, who, now deprived of his income as a tutor, was obliged to find a living (and preferably a wealthy one) with a house large enough for his parents.

Before he did this, however, Robert decided to fulfil an earlier ambition of visiting Germany. Accordingly, he resigned his tutorship in summer, 1831, and went abroad to pursue those linguistic studies which had been interrupted by his appointment to a tutorship. Although he did not resign his fellowship until 1833, his Oxford career was effectively at an end.

1: Newsome, op cit, p 95.

The visit to Germany was not a success. He became homesick and was wholly out of sympathy with German ways and manners. He took daily lessons in German and paid a man to come and talk with him. "It really is no joke to a slow and modest man like me to commence talking so outlandish a tongue as German.... I am getting on a little in the reading, but the speaking I find exceedingly difficult. I have to mould my notions into such a strange form to get out a sentence."[1] Wilberforce attended some university lectures, but an approaching cholera epidemic cast a shadow over his stay in Bonn. This, together with the news from England that his father's health was declining, determined Robert to return home in December. Within a month of his return, he had proposed to Agnes Wrangham, the daughter of the Archdeacon of Cleveland and later of the East Riding. The marriage took place in Yorkshire in June, 1832.

Meanwhile, Wilberforce had to find a suitable living. In February, 1832, it was rumoured that he was to be offered the Bishopric of Calcutta. Samuel wrote to his brother about this in great delight,[2] and J.B. Mozley thought that "there is nothing so very improbable about it."[3] But Robert had heard nothing, and no approach was made to him. In April, 1832, Lord Brougham, the Whig Lord Chancellor, presented him to the living of East Farleigh in Kent. Wilberforce was anxious lest acceptance should be taken as indicating political sympathy to the party in power. Newman certainly inclined to this opinion, and afterwards wrote to Keble expressing his disapproval.[4] Wilberforce consoled himself that the offer had been made out of personal friendship, and duly accepted the lucrative living. As

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1. Newsome, op cit, p. 137.
2. ibid, p 141.
3. J.B. Mozley, Letters, p 25.
4. Letters and Correspondence ii, p 143.

soon as Robert and Agnes were settled in East Farleigh, Robert's parents decided to join them. Within the year, however, the Great Emancipator was dead.[1]

Two children were born to Agnes - William (usually called Wilfranc) on June 26th, 1833, and Eddy on November 9th, 1834. But tragedy followed: Agnes was taken ill with a violent fever. For four days it raged before its full seriousness became apparent. By the following weekend Agnes was dead. Agnes' aunt and her cousin, both named Jane Legard, came to live with the widower and to look after the children. Cousin Jane was looking for a husband; Agnes had told Robert to remarry; it was natural that they should draw closer together. By January, 1837, they were engaged, and in the following April they were married. After the marriage, the idea of moving to Yorkshire became attractive. There they could be near Jane's family, and Agnes' family and friends. Robert began making serious enquiries in 1838. In April, 1840, he found what he had been looking for: the living of Burton Agnes near Beverley in the East Riding was offered for exchange by the vicar. As the vicar's brother-in-law was the patron and was amenable to the arrangement, the only problem was that of securing the Lord Chancellor's approval. By August, 1840, this had been secured, and the exchange was effected without delay.[2]

At Burton Agnes, Wilberforce hoped he might have more time for study. His first literary venture had been a biography of his father,

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1. He died three days after the passing of the Abolition of Slavery Act, July 29th, 1833.
2. Newsome, op cit, pp 248-9.

which was written in collaboration with Samuel. The biography had a very mixed reception when it was published, and subsequent comment on the work has tended to be adverse.[1] The work is perhaps one of the most tedious monuments ever erected in the name of filial piety. It is, however, the move to Yorkshire which really marks the beginning of Wilberforce's career as a writer. Within his first three years in the north, he published a brief survey of ancient history from the creation to the fall of Rome (The Five Empires, 1840), a novel (Rutilius and Lucius, 1842), and a more substantial treatise on Church Courts and Church Discipline (1843). Samuel, however, urged his brother to press for preferment. Robert's father-in-law by his first marriage had been Archdeacon of the East Riding since 1828, and was contemplating retirement. Samuel saw Robert as his successor. "I am deeply convinced that you ought to keep Archdeacon Wrangham in until you are well established in the living. Next year he might probably resign with advantage to your promotion but not now." So Samuel wrote in June, 1840; six months later Robert was summoned to Bishopsthorpe, and the offer was made.[2]

The significance of Robert's ecclesiastical career is that, although on intimate terms with many at Oxford who became Tractarians, not the least of these being Newman himself, Wilberforce was out of Oxford for the decisive years 1833 to 1845, and he was not invited to contribute to the Tracts.[3] His relationship with the Tractarians was one of broad intellectual agreement with the principles they were

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1. Newsome, op cit, pp 248-9.
2. ibid, Wilberforce's work as archdeacon, see pp 278-283.
3. He did, however, contribute to Lyra Apostolica.

enunciating (though he was always careful to maintain his independence),[1] while being separated from the University by geography. Further, his first major theological work, The Doctrine of the Incarnation, appeared in 1848, after, that is, Newman's submission to the see of Rome, an event which has frequently (following Dean Church) been taken as marking the formal end of the Oxford Movement. Mr. Newsome has acutely pointed out[2] that one of the great deficiencies of the historiography of the Oxford Movement has been that attention has been so concentrated on Newman and his immediate Oxford circle that insufficient attention has been paid to other figures in the movement. Yet it was Wilberforce in the East Riding who provided the theological synthesis of much of Tractarian teaching and Manning in Sussex who extended Tractarian principles to social concern.

1848 was the year of the publication of Wilberforce's first major theological work. It was the year also of revolutions; and the two are not unconnected. The Oxford Movement has frequently been seen as politically reactionary. For Newman, its point of origin was Keble's sermon on National Apostasy which attacked the government's plans to implement sensible reform of the bishoprics of the Church of Ireland. One of its most significant antecedents was Newman's campaign against the election of Peel because he was advocating Catholic Emancipation.[3] Wilberforce was a Tory and in sympathy with these moves. One of his reasons for being reluctant to accept the living of East Farleigh had been that the

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1. For example, by contributing to the Martyrs' Memorial in defiance of the position taken by Newman.
2. Newsome, op cit, p 193.
3. Though see W.R. Ward, op cit, on the religious merits of Inglis.

offer had come from a Whig Lord Chancellor. This conservatism contrasted with the great movements in European civilisation since the French revolution. It is easy to see Wilberforce over-reacting and seeming to become hysterical at certain developments, both political and intellectual. But the eye of history is analytical and emotionless. Intellectually, Wilberforce perceived that the tendency of much German Protestant thought was towards the denial of specific supernatural Christian doctrines, such as the Incarnation or traditional sacramental theology. He saw his duty as to contend for Catholic truth against liberal rationalism, without surrendering to the emotional spiritualism of the Evangelicals. In that he, and his fellow Tractarians, sought to present in the idiom of the day ancient teaching in opposition to the prevailing tendencies, it is incorrect to account them intellectually reactionary. Wilberforce placed great reliance on patristic authors, not merely because he was prepared to allow authority to the teachings of the undivided Church, but also because the errors against which they had contended were precisely those he identified in his own day. It is not Athanasius or Augustine for their own sake merely, but Athanasius against Arius and Augustine against Pelagius that are quoted: for the heresies of the nineteenth century were to Wilberforce's mind but the heresies of the early Church writ large. His opposition to contemporary intellectual trends seems, from the little information available, to mirror his opposition to some political developments. In Mozley's Letters, for example, there is quoted a note which was found amongst Mozley's papers: "A pretty state we are in altogether, with a Radical Pope teaching all Europe rebellion! Every post brings a fresh argument for securing the middle classes if possible - R.I.W."[1]

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1. J. B. Mozley, Letters p 192

Wilberforce undertook the task of answering the rationalism of the day reluctantly. But Manning for one was in no doubt of his ability to supply that systematisation in which Anglican theology was deficient. He wrote to him in October, 1845:[1]

> "Everything, my dear Robert, has conspired to draw us together in brotherly love.... Our meetings have been so few and so hurried, and I long for a time when we can, without interruption and alone, really weigh some of the matters which are now forced upon us.... Nothing can shake my belief in the presence of Christ in our Church and Sacraments. I feel incapable of doubting it: the saints who have ripened round our altars for three hundred years make it impossible for me to feel it a question of safety.
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> But it seems to me our theology is in chaos, we have no principles, no form, no order or structure, or sciences. It seems to me inevitable that there must be a true and exact intellectual tradition of the Gospel, and that the scholastic theology is (more or less) such a tradition. We have rejected it and substituted nothing in its room. Surely divine truth is susceptible, within the limits of revelation, of an expression and a proof as exact as the inductive sciences. Theology must be equally capable of a 'history and philosophy' if we had a Master of Trinity to write them.
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> That is what I want to see either done or shown to be impossible or needless."

Wilberforce, modest and cautious to the last, was not so easily persuaded of his ability to undertake this task. As late as 1850, when he was well into his theological systhesis, he encouraged the clergy of his archdeaconry confidently to expect that "among our many Bishops at home and in the colonies, there will not be wanting surely some Athanasius in the hour of the Church's danger."[2] If pressed, Robert would probably have cast Samuel in this role. In May, 1850, he wrote to Samuel warning him, "It is for you, my dearest brother, to give us

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1. Quoted Newsome, op.cit, p 302.
2. Charge, 1850, pp 35-36.

something to trust to, by showing that the Church claims divine teaching - supernatural guidance, and does not depend either on the strength of a Maskell, or the imbecility of a Sumner. I feel it is wholly dependent (under God's blessing) upon you, whether I, and such as I, have any standing ground left."[1]

Yet in the event it was Robert rather than his brother who synthesised Tractarian teaching; and there cannot be much doubt that he was manifestly well qualified to do so. In his years as a fellow of Oriel, he had learnt Hebrew and German. That he still had a working knowledge of Hebrew is shown by the second chapter of The Doctrine of the Incarnation ("The Office of Christ as the Pattern in ancient Scripture"). Despite his difficulties in learning to speak German, he had clearly by the late 1840's a good reading knowledge of the tongue, and was familiar with works unknown to most of his contemporaries. Both Die Einheit der Kirche and Symbolik by Möhler figure largely in his Incarnation.[2] He himself expressed his indebtedness to Dorner (Lehre von der Person Christi). There are frequent references to Gunther's Vorschule zur Speculativen Theologie and to the criticism of Möhler by Baur. He had also read and discussed Schleiermacher's Der Christliche Glaube and Strauss' Leben Jesu. In addition, he had a mammoth knowledge of patristic sources and a good grasp of Catholic theological writings, a grasp which had been inspired by Manning.

Thus armed, Wilberforce set about the task entrusted to him.

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1. Newsome op cit, p 372.
2. Möhler's Symbolik had been translated into English by J.B. Robertson in 1843.

THE SACRAMENTAL SYSTEM

Mr. Bernard Reardon, writing in his survey of nineteenth century theological thought, From Coleridge to Gore, has recently reminded us that Catholicism may be conceived in one of two ways. It may be interpreted statically, "as residing in a form of order, or dynamically, as an 'extension' of the incarnation, the means whereby the life of the external Christ is imparted to every generation of believers."[1] Reardon's point can easily be illustrated by comparing the tone of Roman Catholic theology during the pontificate of Pius XII with Roman Catholic thinking since the conclusion of the second Vatican Council. V.H. Storr, in an earlier and more limited survey than Reardon's, The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century, 1800-1860, made a similar distinction between a static and a dynamic conception of Catholicism, and attributed the emergence of a dynamic concept of the Church in the nineteenth century to the Oxford Movement. Storr, no apologist for Tractarianism, which he compared with romanticism, defined the change in theology thus: "in place of a theory of a Church as the accredited organ for the transmission of divine truth, was set up a theory of the Church as an extension of the Incarnation, and the channel through which the living Christ works His age-long work of redemption."[2] The increased emphasis which was placed on the sacraments, and more particularly on the sacrament of the altar, was the clearest evidence in Storr's mind of this basic change. Nor is this surprising, for to the Catholic Christian, sacraments are the focus of the faith and the piety of the individual believer; indeed, in Reardon's phrase, they are the

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1. p 99.
2. p 261, cf A.M. Fairbairn, Catholicism, Roman and Anglican, pp 324-330.

"point at which Christ, in symbolic guise, comes to meet him."[1]

At the end of his investigation of the theology of the Oxford Movement, Storr questioned whether "the movement can be said to have produced any great theological work."[2] The question is unfair, for the Movement was popular, not academic, tractarian, not monographic. Yet E.R. Fairweather, no mean authority, in his collection of extracts from the writings of Tractarian theologians, was lavish in his praise of one work: The Doctrine of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, by R.I. Wilberforce. Fairweather hailed this as "Wilberforce's finest theological work and one of the most distinguished pieces of nineteenth-century Anglican divinity."[3] Wilberforce's book is, in effect, the first volume of a three volume systematic theology, in which is presented precisely that dynamic concept of Catholicism which Reardon and Storr have described. The entire theology worked out in the three volumes is based on the Incarnation - "the great objective fact of Christianity", Wilberforce calls it - and its application is sacramental, for the sacraments are "the Extension of the Incarnation".[4]

Before addressing ourselves to the question of Wilberforce's sacramental theology, it is necessary to consider the argument of his work, The Doctrine of the Incarnation, which provides the main basis for that theology.

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1. op cit, p 99.
2. p 262.
3. The Oxford Movement, p 285.
4. Wilberforce, The Doctrine of the Incarnation, p 285, hereafter cited as Incarnation.

The nineteenth century saw the publication of a large number of lives of Jesus Christ. In 1835-6 David Friedrich Strauss published what is usually taken as the first of this series of lives. Strauss denied the historical foundation of all supernatural elements in the Gospels, and assigned them to an unintentionally creative legend developed between the death of Christ and the writing of the Gospels in the second century. The growth of primitive Christianity was rather to be understood in terms of Hegelian dialectic. Christ for Strauss was only incidentally a person. He represented an idea: humanity moving toward the perfection in which the process of history was to be fulfilled. Though Strauss's work exercised a profound influence on subsequent Protestant thought, it cost him his Tübingen professorship. Mention might also be made of J.E. Renan's La Vie de Jesus (1863) which also repudiated the supernatural element in Christ's life, preferring to portray him as an amiable and well-meaning Galilean preacher.[1] These works, and others in the same vein, owed much to the newly-discovered techniques of literary and historical criticism, which, when applied to the Bible, were seen as attacks on traditional orthodoxy. But they also drew inspiration from the philosophy of Hegel and the work of Schleiermacher. Important though these lives of Jesus were, we should take care not to overemphasise their significance. Doubt and unbelief had other sources, than literary and philosophical. Popular opinion focuses on Darwin and the discoveries of the natural sciences as a major challenge to the authority of the Bible, but the Darwinian hypotheses confirmed rather than initiated the attack on Christian belief. Dr. A.R. Vidler

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1. See articles in the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (ed F.L. Cross) and A.R. Vidler, The Church in an Age of Revolution, pp 101-4 (for Strauss) and p 151 (for Renan).

has suggested other reasons for the rejection of orthodox Christian belief in the nineteenth century: "what caused many to revolt from Evangelical or Catholic orthodoxy was the apparent immorality and inhumanity of the Christian scheme of salvation (divine favouritism, the substitutionary atonement, everlasting torment in hell, etc.) and also its bare-faced next-worldliness which seemed to deny both the possibility and the duty of improving the conditions of life in this world. For example," Vidler continues, "it was on these grounds, not on account of the natural sciences or the Bible, that Francis Newman, J.A. Froude, and George Eliot first turned their backs on orthodoxy. What it called upon them to believe, with such sad confidence of its superiority, struck them as morally inferior to their own ethical ideals and standards."[1] That is to say, in addition to the massed ranks of literary, historical and philosophical objections, Christianity had also to contend with ethical and theological objections, the strength of which was drawn from the very teaching of the Gospel. Wilberforce, writing in 1848, antedates the main intellectual battles of the nineteenth century, but throughout his work he is clearly aware of the moral objections which could be levelled against traditional Christianity. His concern is not merely to establish Catholic doctrine in the face of his Evangelical compatriots, but much more: he wishes to defend traditional orthodoxy itself.

The Doctrine of the Incarnation divides unevenly into two sections, The first six chapters concern themselves with the doctrine of the Person of Christ. The remaining chapters (chapters VII to XIV) concentrate on the Work of Christ.

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1. Vidler, op cit, p 113.

The Incarnation, as we have seen, is to be set forth in the work as "the great objective fact of Christianity". For most of the history of the Church men have found it easier to believe that Jesus was God rather than that he was man. In traditional Christology, theologians have sought to move from the divinity of Christ to his humanity; and in this, of course, they are supported by both the Pauline and Johannine writings in the New Testament. But Wilberforce prefers to argue from the humanity to the divinity, an approach more reminiscent of contemporary twentieth century theology than of Wilberforce's own generation. The Incarnation for Wilberforce was not so much the "conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but the taking of the manhood into God."[1]

The first section of The Doctrine of the Incarnation need not detain us. Wilberforce moves to a defence of the Chalcedonian definition of the hypostatic union by way of philosophical arguments and a survey of Patristic writings. His purpose in analysing the Patristic evidence was not only to examine classical Christian thought, but also to indicate that the rationalising tendencies common amongst some Christian writers of his day were merely the heresies of ancient times. He felt confident that if men realised that the early Church had considered and dismissed a host of theological interpretations of the nature of Christ, they would also come to see that many apparently contemporary ideas were really of ancient currency.

But having argued the Chalcedonian position, Wilberforce directs his attention to the consequences for the human race of the Incarnation.

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1. Incarnation, p 55.

Cur Deus homo? For Wilberforce the answer to that question lies in the mediation which Christ as both man and God alone can undertake: the Incarnation broguht into lasting relationship the finite with the Infinite. "Our Lord's Mediation," he writes, "is not a work which is arbitrarily undertaken, but results from His being the real medium through whom Godhead has been pleased to communicate with Manhood.... By virtue of His Mediation He is the sole channel of intercourse between God and man. And so it must continue during his mediatorial kingdom."[1] How does the Incarnate exercise this mediatorial role? Before the Ascension, Christ fulfilled his vocation by his ministry of teaching and preaching in Galilee, by prayerful obedience to the Father, and, supremely, by the sacrifice of himself on the Cross of Calvary. But the Church lives in the period after the Ascension, and it is basic to Wilberforce's entire sacramental theology that the hypostatic union in the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth is continued in his heavenly life. The corollary of the humility of God at the Incarnation is the simultaneous exaltation of human nature.[2] And after the Ascension, the presence of Christ with his disciples, predicted by Scripture, is a presence of Christ as Man as well as of Christ as God. Recorded in the Gospels are quotations from the prophets of the Old Testament which "look to the restoration of that which was about to be lost to (the disciples) - the presence, namely, of Our Lord according to His human nature."[3] The assertion of the continued presence of the Ascended Lord with the disciples does not imply a neglect of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

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1. Incarnation, pxii, Cf Wilberforce, Sermons on the New Birth, pp 273, 139, 209.
2. Incarnation, p 97, cf Sermons on the New Birth, p 55.
3. Incarnation, p 273.

on Wilberforce's part. The Holy Spirit has its own function within this scheme of salvation: "Now, it was for the very purpose of uniting men in this wise to their great Mediator the man Christ Jesus, that the gift of the Holy Ghost was bestowed. It is His especial office that those in whom He takes up His dwelling are joined by grace to that man's nature which by personal union is one with God."[1] That is, the Holy Spirit is the agent of Christ's own work of mediation. Were it not so we would be led to infer that some channel of salvation other than Christ existed.[2]

The work of mediation is, of necessity, a two-way process. Christ the God-man in whom finite and Infinite cohere represents both man to God and God to man. When Christ represents man to God he exercises a ministry of intercession; he is the perpetual heavenly intercessor pleading for fallen humanity. But when Christ represents God to man his ministry consists in an offering of himself: he guarantees his presence. "All the blessings which Our Mediator bestows, are comprehended in this one, or consequent upon it.... For on His Presence Who is Mediator between God and Man, is our whole life dependent; the winds may rage, the waters swell, but while He is in the ship it cannot perish; those who are assured of their union with Him have only the pledge of safety: 'My Father which gave them Me is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand'."[3] We may express this work of mediation diagramatically: God: Christ :: Christ: Man. Christ represents man to God and God to man, and so it is vital in Wilberforce's understanding of the work of mediation that Christ did not merely show

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1. Incarnation, pp 288, cf p 292.
2. ibid, p 289-292.
3. ibid, pp 296-270.

in their perfection certain moral qualities which pertained to humanity, but, much more "that He conferred upon it a power which was above nature. Through the union of Godhead and Manhood in His single Person, there was infused into that humanity, which he shared with us, such grace as sufficed for the whole generation of His kindred."[1] So, Christ was not simply a man; he was the man, the Pattern Man, the Second Adam, the head of the renewed race. And for the Christian salvation depends upon union with that manhood, not as an act of imitation of outstanding qualities, but as "an actual and real union, whereby all renewed men are joined to the second, as they were by nature to the first Adam."[2] As in nature Adam represents the fallenness of the human race, so in the kingdom of grace Christ appears as the type of restored humanity. In both instances, the character of the race echoes and is dependent upon the character of the head. In the kingdom of grace, Christ as the Pattern Man restores that perfect image of God in which man was originally created. And fallen man can only be restored to the life of grace by union with Christ. "....it is only by a real union with this New Man, that we can eradicate those evils which attached themselves to our race, through the transgressions of the old.... Upon this union depends our right as well in that work of redemption which He effected upon the Cross, as in that work of Intercession whcih He is performing in heaven."[3]

This emphasis upon the work of Christ as mediator challenged and offended many of Wilberforce's generation for its apparent neglect of the doctrine of the atonement. The main thrust of his theology was less

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1. Incarnation, pp 297-8.
2. ibid.
3. ibid, pp 301-2.

the benefits of the Cross of Christ extended to individuals, and more the presence of Christ vouchsafed to the Church. That the Church was at the same time the vehicle of Christ's mission and the tabernacle of his presence Wilberforce did not doubt. Salvation, he has thus far argued, is the consequence of a believer's union with the manhood of Christ; and now he tells how this union is effected. It "is brought about in our union with the Church, which is His body mystical.... For that which joins men to Christ's mystical body the Church, is their union with His man's nature; and their means of union with His man's nature is bestowed in His Church or body mystical."[1] So intimate is the Christ-Church relationship that it is not possible to know whether membership of the Church is a consequence of owning Christ as Lord, or whether the affirmation of Christ's Lordship flows from Church membership. So intimate is this union that Church and Christ are almost interchangeable: the mystical body, he writes, is "the whole family of those who by the Holy Ghost are united in Church ordinances to His man's nature." Again, ".... the Church is Christ Himself manifest in His mystic body," and, "....the Church of Christ is His Body; His Presence is its life; its blessing the gift of spiritual union with His man's nature."[2]

This most remarkable doctrine of the Church anticipates by nearly seventy years the independent expression of the concept of the Church as Christ's mystical body in the writings of such Roman Catholic theologians as de Lubac, Mersch and Vonier. Indeed, their teaching was not crowned with papal approval until as late as 1943 when Pius XII devoted an

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1. Incarnation, p 317.
2. ibid, pp 317-8, 332, 356.

encyclical, Mystici Corporis Christi, to commending the doctrine which, "making manifest the inestimable boon of our most intimate union with so august a Head, has a surpassing splendour which commends it to the meditation of all who are moved by the divine Spirit, and with the light which it sheds upon their minds, is a powerful stimulus to the saluatry conduct which it enjoins."[1]

The articulation of such a doctrine witnesses to Wilberforce's profound spiritual and theological insight, in an age when it was considerably easier to view the Church as an organisation rather than as an organism. Whence did Wilberforce derive his doctrine of the Church? St. Augustine of Hippo was responsible for the coherent formulation of the concept of the Church as Christ's mystical body, though in less clear form the motif may be found in the writings of St. Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, and especially St. Cyril of Alexandria.[2] During the period of the Reformation, it once more gained currency, finding a lasting place not least in the Book of Common Prayer. Richard Hooker, one of the main streams from whom Wilberforce drank, gave expression to a similar and parallel idea - that of the Church as the rib of Christ.[3]

How is the individual believer bound to the mystical body which is the Church? Just as the Holy Spirit is the principle of union in the Trinity, so too it is the principle of union between Christ and the individual Christian. The unity already existing within the Trinity is

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1. Paragraph 1.
2. See J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, pp 403-6, 412-7.
3. Ecclesiastical Polity, V, 56-57. The idea derives from St. Irenaeus. Wilberforce quotes Hooker, Incarnation, p 412.

extended to the believer through the mediation of Christ. "To assert the truth of Christ's Presence - the reality of that union which binds the whole mystic body of His Church to the manhood of the Incarnate Word - is to maintain the reality of His Mediation, and the absolute necessity of that bond by which heaven and earth are united."[1] Wilberforce terms this theology of salvation through the Church, the Church-system. Man's salvation can only be effected through supernatural regeneration, which is a gift offered to humanity in Christ. Against the Church-system must be set the system of rationalism, in Wilberforce's mind a form of Rationalism in which man by his own exertions can achieve salvation for himself.[2] The gift of supernatural regeneration, offered in the Church-system, has to be communicated to the individual believers. In order to effect this, various means have been ordained as "instruments whereby the sanctified manhood of the Mediator diffuses itself as a life-giving seed through the mass of humanity." That is to say, the external ordinances of the Church derive their importance "from the fact on which Christianity is dependent, that through the Incarnation of the Mediator, the corrupted race of man has been regenerated by a heavenly nature." This is particularly though not exclusively true of the sacraments of the Church.[3] There is no question for Wilberforce of the importance of the sacraments: they are essentially aids to help the believer approach God and to receive his blessings. But Wilberforce is not prepared to assert an exclusive approach to God, via the sacraments. He instances the members of the Society of Friends, the Quakers, as a group within the Christian community of faith, placing insufficient

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1. Incarnation, p 326.
2. ibid.
3. ibid, pp 327-8.

weight upon the external ordinances of the Church. He will acknowledge that God can and does act upon the minds of the individuals concerned; but he will also sound a note of caution. No matter how honourable or sincere an individual Quaker may be, on Wilberforce's reckoning, the system to which he belongs tends to substitute natural for revealed religion. "The characteristic doctrine of the Gospel, that God and man were permanently made one in the Person of Christ, was superseded by a dreamy notion of the abstract intercourse between the minds of faithful men, and the governing Mind of the Universe."[1]

And so Wilberforce brings into full focus his doctrine of the Incarnation initially on the Church as the mystical body of Christ, and then on the sacraments as the means whereby the believer, united to the Church, is also united to the Manhood of his Lord. That the outcome of this line of reasoning is not some rigid, formalised system of ecclesiastical disciple, Wilberforce is quite adamant. Rather, "these doctrines are....our right security against substituting the Church as a formal system in place of its head.... So long as the Church is regarded as an external system, based on certain laws, and administered by certain leaders, it can never fail to enlist a measure of that party spirit which belongs to men's nature, and thus to draw away attention from the holy purposes for which it was instituted. The only safeguard against this danger is due subordination of its external framework to its internal principle; and the constant recognition that its life depends, not on the gifts of government but on the gifts of grace."[2] So Wilberforce

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1. Incarnation, pp 335, cf pp 331f.
2. ibid, p 351.

writing in 1848 anticipates by more than a century some of the deepest insights of the second Vatican Council.

Having surveyed Wilberforce's doctrine of the Incarnation, particularly as it is brought to bear upon his doctrine of the mediatorial work of Christ and the Church as Christ's mystical body, we are better prepared to consider the place of the sacraments in this scheme.

Wilberforce devoted a chapter to the theology of sacraments in his Doctrine of the Incarnation, and later developed his thought in a most remarkable collection of sermons, Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature (1850).

In The Doctrine of the Incarnation Wilberforce's main concern is to set forth the sacraments dynamically as "the Extension of the Incarnation". And so he begins his discussion with a functional definition, drawing upon classical Anglican authorities. Sacraments are the means by which the Christian is united to the human nature to the Incarnate Lord. Witness Article XXV of the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion: on the one hand sacraments are "badges or tokens of a Christian man's profession" and on the other they are "certain witnesses and effectual signs of grace". Viewed from one angle they are human ordinances; from another they are divine ordinances. Richard Hooker, to whom Wilberforce was frequently indebted, defined sacraments as "channels to the faithful of those supernatural gifts, whereby God renews the soul." And, again, "Christ and His Holy Spirit, with all their blessed effects, though entering into the soul of man we are not able to apprehend or express how, do notwithstanding give notice of the times when they use to make their access,

because it pleaseth Almighty God to communicate by sensible means those blessings which are incomprehensible."[1] Because sacraments are divine institutions they can provide a point of stability in times of doubt and worry - no mean consideration for Hooker, writing in the immediate aftermath of the upheavals of the Reformation. And so it follows for Wilberforce that sacraments serve as an "antidote to pride", because "all inward movements of man's soul, even though we admit them to be God's works, may yet blend and confuse themselves with our own agency"; but "where God doth work and use these outward means, wherein He neither findeth nor planteth force and aptness towards His intended purpose, such means are but signs to bring men to the consideration of His own omnipotent power, which the use of things sensible would not be marked."[2] Since, therefore, sacraments are the appointed means whereby Christians are united to their Head, it is but groundless prejudice to regard them as being of arbitrary appointment. Far from being groundless, Wilberforce wishes to establish that the sacraments are an integral part of the entire scheme of our salvation. He sees them functionally: they exist in order to effect union between the believer and Christ, and from that union other means of grace result. "Allow the scheme of Mediation to be essential to man's recovery, let it depend on union with that Personal Being in whom holiness and truth became incarnate, and the sacramental system follows of course."[3] The hypostatic union in Christ finds its natural and proper corollary in the Sacramental system: "....as the man Christ was joined to Deity by Personal union, so is He allied to His brethren of mankind by sacramental grace." This statement Wilberforce

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1. Incarnation, p 411; Ecclesiastical Polity, V, 57, 3.
2. Incarnation, p 412. Ecclesiastical Polity, VI, 6,11.
3. Incarnation, p 414.

presses to its utmost limit, equating the union of believers with the Mediator through the grace of sacraments with the union of the two natures in Christ. For "in the union....of God's nature with manhood in the Person of Christ lies the cause of our union with the man Christ Jesus by Sacramental grace."[1] And so recurs the diagram: God: Christ :: Christ: man.

Wilberforce seeks to answer two major and opposite objections. In the first instance, he addresses himself to those whom he labels 'Gnostics'. Their main error, he identifies as a marked tendency so to elevate the understanding of man as a spiritual being, as to neglect his bodily nature - even to the extent of identifying sin with corporeality. Against the Gnostics, Wilberforce insists that the redemption of man was first effected through the assumption by God of the corporeality of man at the Incarnation. It cannot be, therefore, that man is sinful because of his corporeality: man's body was redeemed as was his soul. So, against those who seek to place excessive emphasis on the spiritual Wilberforce defends the material and corporeal. In the second objection he faces, the roles are reversed. In various periods of the history of the Church there have been men who have stressed the material value of the sacraments, usually in crude and unrefined way. Wilberforce is careful, therefore, to assert that the benefits which flow from the sacraments do not result from the inherent efficacy of the elements themselves. Material transmutation would not, he insists, add any greater quantity of sacramental virtue to the elements, whether the water at baptism or the bread and wine at the eucharist. The benefits afforded by the

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1. Incarnation; pp 421-2.

sacraments flow as a consequence of the spiritual influence of Christ. And 'spiritual' in this context should be understood in an objective and real sense, not a subjective and metaphorical sense, for the Christ with whom we are brought into connexion by immaterial influence is an actual Being, external to us. "A spiritual effect of the manhood of our Great Head must proceed through spiritual action from His purified humanity."[1]

These ideas were developed at greater length and in greater depth in a sermon which Wilberforce preached before the University of Oxford on March 10th 1850. "For comprehensiveness and clarity," Mr. David Newsome has judged, this sermon the "The Sacramental System" "must rank as one of the most revealing documents of Tractarian history."[2]

Wilberforce took for his text two verses from the first Epistle of St. John: "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God: and this is that spirit of Anti-Christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come:" (1 John iv. 2-3). The author here announces "as an universal truth, that the main opposition to the Gospel, the principle which deserves to be called Anti-Christian, that which is the Anti-Christ itself, is to be found here - in the denial that the work effected by the Son of God has been effected through His taking our flesh."[3] Strong words for his university audience, but they merely underline the fundamental theological principle which pervades all his writing, that acceptance of the doctrine of the Incarnation is the touchstone of Christian belief: to question

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1. Incarnation, p 429.
2. The Parting of Friends, p 375.
3. Sermons on the New Birth, p 223.

the reality of the Incarnation is to pass from Christ to Anti-Christ. In his exegesis of this text, Wilberforce draws out his doctrine of mediation. "For since the doctrine of Our Lord's Mediation is founded upon His taking our flesh: since its primary law is the re-creation in His person of our common nature, the entrance of divine graces into humanity in its Head and Chief; - therefore some medium is required by which those things, which were stored up in him, may be distributed to His brethren. To speak of the Head as the fountain of grace, is to assume the existence of streams, by which it may be transmitted to His members. Now this function is so plainly assigned to Sacraments, that nothing else can be alleged to supply their place. If union with Christ be union with His Manhood, it is clearly through those means, whereby we become members of His body that we are united to Himself.... On these means of union are built all those affections and sympathies, which ripen into the fullness of the divine life. Prayer, praise, the converse of the thoughts; public worship or private mediation - all these are means of intercourse with Christ, which have their origin in the Christian's oneness with the C hurch's Head. Not that communion with Christ is confined to the occasions of Sacramental approach; but they supply the principle, on which all the other ordinances of grace are dependent. For that real union must underlie them all, whereby men are truly, and not only in name united to Christ. And this union has its being through that Sacramental relation, whereby we are members of His Body, of His flesh and of His bones. And this is the Sacramental, so that which is opposed to it may be called the Anti-Sacramental system."[1]

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1. Sermons on the New Birth, pp 227-8

He then addresses himself to a question made famous by the later controversy between H.L. Mansel and F.D. Maurice. How may the finite reach forth to the infinite? "The answer is given in one word, through the Incarnation of Christ.... (Thus did God) become capable, in the human nature of the Word, of sympathizing with human sorrows; and manhood become capable of being the seed of grace, through its being taken into God. The one was able to participate through its inferior nature in the weakness of limited humanity; the other through its alliance with a superior nature was endowed with heavenly efficacy." Christ's humanity became "that very source of life, which is distributed through Sacraments as the life of His brethren....: and to accept His Mediation as a truth is to receive that Sacramental System, whereby He is come into the flesh as the re-creator of mankind."[1] The same idea is expressed with different imagery in another sermon. "The Manhood of Our Lord.... is the bridge whereby the gulf between heaven and earth has been spanned over. Thus have men become comrades with God's higher servants; the true Jacob's ladder is set up; and 'the angels of God' ascend and descend on the Son of Man."[2]

Having established his mediatorial concept of Christ, the necessary link between God and man, Wilberforce turns his attention to the consequences of this mediation, as found in sacramental religion. "The Sacramental and Anti-Sacramental systems are two different religions, and to rest our hope of salvation on the one, is to say anathema to the other.... To affirm the doctrine of Mediation and to deny it - to

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1. ibid, pp 232-3, cf pp 227-8 and Newsome, op cit, p 376.
2. Sermond on the New Birth, p 273, cf pp 139, 209, and Incarnation, pp 185, 275.

assert the reality of those things, which the Son of Man effected by coming in the flesh, and to call their reality into question - are as much opposed as light and darkness, as truth and error."[1]

This most remarkable and arresting sermon was published independently, and later included in a volume issued under the title, Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature. All the sermons which he collected in this volume elucidate his grand theological design. Each of them in some way treats of the theme of the Incarnation and the sacramental system. The first sermon in the collection ("The Mystery of Humanity") repeats and echoes the argument of The Doctrine of the Incarnation that the wretchedness of man's present condition was the necessary prelude to the work of Christ as the New Adam, the Pattern Man, the Head of the new Humanity. And flowing inevitably from this theology of the work of Christ are the sacraments: "And the very purpose both of Baptism and of the Holy Eucharist is, that the sanctified humanity of the Son of Man may penetrate and leaven the defiled humanity of His brethren."[2] The following sermon on "The Sanctification of Humanity", in less eirenic mood, challenges the exclusive emphasis placed by some on the doctrine of the atonement. "Men who would be shocked if the reality of Our Lord's atonement were questioned do not perceive that the reality of our union with Him is just as fundamental a verity of the Gospel." And he elaborates on the means of this union. "Now the means whereby Christ's human nature acts upon ours is confessedly by Sacraments. In these there is a sort of external machinery, there are outward

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1. Sermons on the New Birth, pp 233-4, cf pp 237-8.
2. ibid, p 8.

elements, there are means which our hands handle, and our lips receive, the use whereof can be subjected to man's laws, and made matter of Church regulation." But here precisely is the problem for some contemporary theologians and preachers, for "some persons have lost sight of the interior nature of these blessed ordinances; their secret significance, as the means whereby we are united to the Incarnate Word, has been forgotten; their real worth has not been estimated; and they have been treated as a mere outward sign, which it is as safe to despise as to reverence". Granted this analysis of the situation, Wilberforce's hope is clear: "What we want then is, to discern that Our Lord's humanity is the vital principle of life in all His people."[1] Thus succintly Wilberforce states not only the aim of all his theological writing: he gives too the aim at the very heart of the Oxford Movement.

A number of modern scholars have written warmly of Wilberforce's Doctrine of the Incarnation. E.R. Fairweather, whose praise of this work has already been quoted, went on to compare Wilberforce and F.D. Maurice. "Indeed," he has written, "with the exception of Frederick Denison Maurice's Kingdom of Christ, published ten years earlier, it is hard to find another English theological production from the first half of the nineteenth century that shows a comparable grasp of the basic pattern of Christian doctrine. Even Newman's systematic works, for all their insights and moments of brilliance, seem rather casual besides Wilberforce's magnum opus. To say nothing more, The Doctrine of the Incarnation is unquestionably the great synthesis of Tractarian teaching"[2]

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1. Sermons on the New Birth, pp 21-2, cf Incarnation, pp 335-6.
2. Fairweather, op cit, p 285.

Dr. E.L. Mascall and Mr. David Newsome also have been deeply convinced of the importance of Wilberforce's work in the Oxford Movement, and therefore in the theological development of Anglicanism.[1]

But, on the whole, there is no doubt that Wilberforce's works have fallen on stony ground. The author of a review article published in the April, 1848 edition of the Church of England Quarterly Review set the tone of much contemporary reaction of Wilberforce's work. Although the reviewer conceded that he had received "very great pleasure from the perusal of Mr. Wilberforce's work", he was deeply concerned about the identity between Wilberforce's thesis and the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. He allowed that The Doctrine of the Incarnation contained no doctrine specifically associated with Roman Catholicism, but wished to call attention to "one grand error which pervades the whole of modern Roman Catholic theology," concerning man's redemption, "from which we are sorry to perceive that the Archdeacon is not wholly free." The error was that of "supposing the Gospel, in its effects upon man, only re-instates us in that condition of blessedness which Adam lost by the fall, as though the recovery was the mere restoration of that form of being which existed before sin and death entered into the world.... None of God's acts are repetitions of former acts: each act is a fresh display of something unknown before." The anonymous reviewer went on to offer the fairly obvious comment that The Doctrine of the Incarnation was a Tractarian work, and added, gratuitously, ".... the more we consider the subject the more we become confirmed in the opinion that Tractarianism is only diluted Romanism, and that those

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1. See articles by Mascall in Theology, 1946 and Newsome, op. cit.

who have courage to act consistently must either retrace their steps and become dutiful sons of the Church of England, or should follow out the principles of Tractarianism to their legitimate consequences, according as they are exhibited in the Church of Rome."[1] It must be remembered that Newman had been received into the Roman obedience only three years before. Thus, in the earliest published review of Wilberforce's Incarnation, are presented the two recurrent themes which bedevilled contemporary assessment of his work. In the first place, there was a failure to accept and appreciate the work as a whole, reviewers preferring to assess it by their own canons of orthodoxy. This approach precluded the possibility of entering into a fruitful and constructive dialogue with Wilberforce's thought. Secondly, the reviewers tended to assess a work as approximating either to the teachings of the Roman Church or to more Reformed teaching, and to offer comment according to his own disposition. However much subsequent generations may lament this theological polarisation and confrontation, it was perhaps inevitable in a decade overshadowed, religiously, by the publication of Tract XC and the subsequent submission of Newman to the Roman See in 1845.

In an age much given to pamphlet warfare, Wilberforce's Incarnation gave rise to a mere handful of replies. Why? No doubt the already noted tendency to label and dismiss (or approve - according to taste) played its part. But the temper of Wilberforce's writing itself was not conducive to virulent controversy. In all his writing, he was eirenical: he had no desire to arouse unnecessary controversy, no desire to indulge in

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1. Vol XXV, pp 284, 269-270.

polemical theology or theological point-scoring. An American theologian, sympathetic to Wilberforce's position, felt that the style and organisation of The Incarnation were unnecessary obstacles to its influence, a comment as much complementary as critical. S.C. Carpenter perhaps had something of this in mind when he wrote that Wilberforce used patristic writings as texts for exposition.[1]

But there were answers to Wilberforce. One of the first came from the pen of C.S. Bird, who had been a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, but was now Vicar of Gainsborough. Bird confessed his reluctance to enter into controversy, and only did so because there had been no earlier attempt to answer Wilberforce. Bird's answer, The Sacramental and Priestly System Explained, originally appeared as review articles in the Christian Observer, and was published in full in 1854. By 1854, however, The Incarnation was into its third edition, and we have Bird's own testimony that it had enjoyed "a rapid sale".[2] It is, therefore, all the more surprising that no reply to The Incarnation was forthcoming earlier.

Bird was not slow to acknowledge Wilberforce's learning and ability, and had the perception to realize that Wilberforce had succeeded to Newman's mantle - though the imagery he used to express this was classical rather than Biblical: "He is the Coryphaeus of the Tractarians at the present moment."[3] But this perception seems to have given way

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1. See J.H. Nichols, The Mercersburg Theology, p 77. The theologian quoted was John Williamson Nevin. Carpenter, Church and People, 1789-1889, p 560.
2. Bird, op cit, p iii.
3. ibid, p xv.

when he addressed himself to Wilberforce's thesis. He sought to establish his case by showing that Wilberforce's teaching and Roman Catholic doctrine are identical. And that was judgment enough. "For what is the System, Theological and Practical, which the Archdeacon proposes for our adoption? It is nothing less than the Philosophy of the Schoolmen, which bewildered and subdued the intellect, and the Sacramental and Priestly System of the Middle Ages, which almost extinguished subjective and personal religion, and reduced Christianity to a round of vicarious performances, equally deadening to the people and the performers. He deliberately, though with much circumlocution and fair speech, recommends us to re-establish this System - which would soon merge into open Romanism." Wilberforce's treatment of the Reformers of the sixteenth century is, in Bird's eyes, equally reprehensible. "He scruples not, though a dignitary in our Church to treat our Reformers with utter contempt in his work on the Incarnation. He does nearly the same with all our Divines, in his work on the Eucharist." Bird should not be dismissed too lightly, for though his prejudices are patent, he voiced, in polite and restrained terms, the 'no popery' fears of many nineteenth century Englishmen.

Less generous in his assessment of Wilberforce's work was an American, S.H. Turner, who wrote a reply to The Incarnation under the pseudonym, Presbyter. Turner was uncompromising: "I must regard the high eulogies which have been passed upon this publication, as by no means indicative of a sound and healthful state of theological constitution. The language is so often vague and misty, that it is difficult, if not impossible, for a plain commonsense reader to get at the thought; and oftener stilll, when he has got it, it turns out to be either a

simple truism which no-one would think of questioning, or a mere gratuitous or unproved assertion.... I think I have seldom read a book containing so much of the show of an argument with so little of its reality."[1] Turner identifies the leading thought of the book as, "that the divine life in man, and all Christian grace and virtue conveyed to man, flow through Christ's natural body, his man's body, as he chooses to call it. Having settled this thought in his mind, it becomes with him a fixed idea; it continually flits before his imagination; it is constantly repeated, and it always appears in the shape of a naked, unsupported assertion, or else dependent on proof quite inadequate."[2] Turner allows the reality of the union of the Christian believer with Christ, and he has no desire to derogate from sacramental means of effecting that union, but the sacramental theology for which Wilberforce is arguing seemed to him "to savour of a refined materialism; and the expositions of Scripture dependent thereon or coincident therewith, to fail in a full appreciation of the true sense of God's word, interpreting solely or chiefly of the outward, what can never be satisfactorily explained, except by combining, as the essential and life-giving element, the inward, spiritual and although invisible, yet most real and efficient."[3]

Turner also raised questions about the relationship between the Incarnation and the Atonement in the theology of Wilberforce. "A view of the incarnation, which dwells on that amazing development of God's

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1. Strictures on Archdeacon Wilberforce's Doctrine of the Incarnation: in a letter to a student of divinity, pp 5-6.
2. ibid, p 38.
3. ibid, p 49.

inconceivable love to fallen man, as it it were almost entirely available by imparting to Christ's Church, through sacramental union his sanctified humanity, is in danger of losing sight of the great fundamental doctrine of the atonement, or at least, of undervaluing its importance; and also of individual duty and interest as regards one's own religious character and personal responsibility.... If, how, we accustom ourselves to regard the incarnation as the introduction principally of a new and life-giving element into human nature, imparting its own sanctification to those who sacramentally receive it; we may fall into the error of not giving sufficient weight to the necessity of atonement in order to satisfy the justice of the infinitely Holy One, and also to the moral means through which in a moral and rational being this sanctification is to be effected."[1] Wilberforce's emphasis on the Incarnation implies a devaluation of the doctrine of the atonement - a point which C.S. Bird also noted.[2]

But not all reviews of the Doctrine of the Incarnation were adverse or critical. The reviewer in The Theologian and Ecclesiastic called the book, "this deeply interesting and deeply instructive volume" and he thought that it was "a valuable addition to our somewhat meagre stock of dogmatic theology, and at the same time a noble testimony to the author's learning and orthodoxy; and, we would add, earnest and reverential piety. It is indeed cheering in these dreary days to find one, who has as he himself reminds us an hereditary attachment to evangelical doctrine, come to the rescue of principles which are falsely supposed to be

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1. Strictures on Archdeacon Wilberforce's Doctrine of the Incarnation: in a letter to a student of divinity, pp 50-1.
2. In The Sacramental and Priestly Systems Examined, pp 89-96.

incompatible with the purity of Gospel truth.... it is cheering.... to see a divine of Archdeacon Wilberforce's station and character come forward as a devoted son of the Church of England, in a thoughtful and uncontroversial spirit to elucidate with all the grace and strength of a refined and logical diction, and with learning most profound and varied, a doctrine which is most necessary for these times."[1]

Cape reviewed the volume for The Rambler in 1849 and took the opportunity both to comment on the difficulties Wilberforce faced in trying to write a dogmatic theology and also on the problems of Anglican theology generally. "....though the Anglican Church has now existed for three centuries, she is still without any thing that can be called a theological system, except by the grossest abuse of language, or an impudent perversion of facts. The Anglican theologian finds that he has everything to do for himself. He has to contemplate and logically to develop the whole doctrine he would expound, without any guide in a living tradition, or in the written or oral teaching of his Church." Cape had made the same point more succinctly earlier in the same review in an epigram which indicates his bias: the Church of England "is systematic only in its scepticism; its only realities are the difficulties it suggests."[2] And that is an assertion which is found echoed in the writings of both Newman and Manning.[3]

From where did Wilberforce derive his doctrine? Principal Fairbairn

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1. VIII (1849), p 88.
2. III, April 1849, pp 591, 584.
3. Newman, Letters and Diaries, XIII, p 68; Purcell, Life of Manning, II, p 35.

was in no doubt of the answer: Wilberforce's Incarnation was "an expansion of Moehler's Symbolik, which, in its turn, is an application of the Hegelian idea to the Catholic church." Fairbairn elaborated this thesis: "....Moehler restricted the divine predicates to the Catholic church; it was the abiding incarnation of C hrist, the Son of God continuously appearing in human form among men, with an existence ever renewed, a being eternally rejuvenescant.... Moehler expressed what we may term an ecclesio- theism, which represented the church as the form in which God existed for the world, and through which the world could reach God.... The notion was audacious, and destined to achieve victories in a field Moehler had never dreamed of; it was adopted by Wilberforce, though stated without the sharp precision which distinguished Moehler." Working from this doctrine of the C hurch, Wilberforce made sacraments "the primary and essential means of grace on which all others depend; they work for our unity with the incarnate Son of God, and through Him with the Father."[1]

Johann Adam Möhler[2] was a Roman Catholic theologian and historian of the early nineteenth century. He taught at Tübingen (1828-1835) and, for the last three years of his life, at Munich. In 1832 he published his Symbolik which appeared in English translation under the title Symbolism; or, Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants, as evidenced by their symbolical writings, in 1843. Möhler sought "to reckon with the situation created by F.D.E.

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1. Fairbairn, op cit, pp 324-6.
2. For the varieties of spelling of Möhler's name in the nineteenth century see W.O. Chadwick, From Bossuet to Newman, p 230.

Schleiermacher in theology and G.W.F. Hegel in philosophy", but his work caused offence to many of his fellow Catholics.[1] Möhler advanced the argument in Symbolik that the Church, "considered in one point of view, is the living figure of Christ, manifesting himself and working through all ages, whose atoning and redeeming acts, it, in consequence, eternally repeats, and uninterruptedly continues."[2] He saw the Church as a visible community of believers, continuing God's redemptive and sanctifying works. "The ultimate reason of the visibility of the Church is to be found in the incarnation of the Divine Word.... since the Word became flesh, it expressed itself as an outward, perceptible and human manner." Thus, a visible human medium is required to preach Christ's doctrine. The Church, like Christ himself, is at once human and divine; indeed, the Church is Christ's permanent manifestation. So, for Möhler, the fact of the Incarnation necessitated a visible Church.[3]

Möhler has written his Symbolik as a reply to criticism of an earlier work of his, Die Einheit. His critics suggested that he had failed to do sufficient justice to the doctrine of the incarnation and that he had been excessively pre-occupied with the concept of the mystical unity of the Church. They further maintained that "the Church is the body of the Incarnate Christ as well as the manifestation of the Holy Ghost."[4] Die Einheit opened with a chapter on "Mystical Unity": we become Christians through the action on the Holy Spirit uniting all

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1. Article on Möhler in the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church.
2. English translation by J.B. Robertson, p 335.
3. S. Bolshakoff, The Doctrine of the Unity of the Church in the works of Khomyakov and Moehler, pp 254-6, cf Möhler, Symbolik, II, pp 5-7.
4. Bolshakoff, op cit, p 253.

the faithful into one spiritual community. Our knowledge of Christ comes only through the Church, and hence for any Christian the Church must be of supreme importance. Möhler goes on to develop a dynamic doctrine of the Church, which he sees as befitting an institution whose foundation is love.[1]

Although there are only two footnote references to Symbolik in the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist and one in The Doctrine of the Incarnation, Wilberforce was clearly indebted to Möhler, most notably for the recovery of the idea of the Church as Christ's Mystical Body. Wilberforce was also aware of the subtly persuasive quality of Möhler's arguments. Professor W.O. Chadwick quotes a piece of gossip from Act on "that when Bath came to R.I. Wilberforce with 'difficulties', he was advised to read Möhler. Having done so, the curate announced that he was joining the Roman Church. 'I expected it,' said Wilberforce."[2]

But Möhler was not the only theologian at whose feet Wilberforce had sat. From Hooker to Gore, and beyond, Anglican theology has had a tendency to emphasise the Incarnation. Indeed, Wilberforce's debt to Hooker is deeper and more extensive than his debt to Möhler. And Alf Härdelin has reminded us that in the thought of the Tractarians, the doctrine of the C hurch is underpinned by what they termed 'the sacramental principle', namely "that God performs his saving work through the mediation or instrumentality of created means which he has appointed. The Church itself is no mere external institution, but a means of grace.

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1. Bolshakpff. op cit, pp 24¼-251.
2. Chadwick, op cit, p 230.

It is not only a means of grace to which the individual is referred, for grace is by its very nature 'social' or 'ecclesial'."[1] Härdelin quotes from an unpublished sermon of Newman's: "It has been the great design of Christ to connect all his followers into one, and to secure this, he lodged his blessing in the body collectively to oblige them to meet together if they would gain grace each for himself. The body is the first thing and and each member in particular the second. The body is not made up of individual Christians, but each Christian has been made such in his turn by being taken into the body."[2] Newman preached this sermon in 1829. The arguments he here applies to the Church, he is elsewhere prepared to see applied to the liturgical forms of the Church. He saw the Church's liturgy as the outward expression of its inward, spiritual principle. "The whole system of the Church, its discipline and ritual, are all in their origin the spontaneous and exuberant fruit of the real principle of spiritual religion in the hearts of its members. The invisible Church has developed itself into the Church visible, and its outward rites and forms are nourished and animated by the living power which dwells within it. Thus every part of it is real, down to the minutest details."[3] Thus the sacramental elements are no mere empty symbols, but a real presence of Christ. This for members of the Oxford Movement was a mystery to be grasped by faith alone.

Pusey took his stand on the same doctrinal ground: the "corner-

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1. Härdelin, "The Eucharist in the Nineteenth Century" in Eucharistic Theology Then and Now, p 81.
2. ibid.
3. Newman, Parochial Sermons V p 47.

stone and characteristic" of the Church-system is "God manifest in the flesh". The Church with all its sacramental ordinances has an incarnational structure. It is a mystery in earthly vessels, but a mystery transcending time and space.[1] Wilberforce's obvious solidarity with the Tractarian tradition means that Principal Fairbairn's suggestion must be corrected. While not denying Wilberforce's indebtedness to Möhler, we must look elsewhere for his prime inspiration. R.W. Church in his classic, The Oxford Movement, instanced S.T. Coleridge's contribution of a better understanding of "the idea, history and relations to society of the Christian Church" and thought that Coleridge "had lifted the subject to a very high level."[2] Col eridge saw the Church as the essential vehicle of Christianity: "My fixed principle." he emphasised, "is that a Christianity without a Church exercising spiritual authority is vanity and dissolution."[3] In the view of John Coulson, Coleridge stood at the fountain head of a common English tra dition, which incorporated both Newman and Maurice, of understanding the Church. "What Col eridge recovered and reintroduced into English religious thinking was the notion of the Church as the living symbol of Christ's presence, and that to speak of the Church as the Body of Christ was to do something more than use a metaphor, employ a figure of speech, or to refer to a mere institution of the State; it was to see the Church as a medium between literal and metaphorical, and, in Coleridge's word, as 'partaking of the reality which it renders intelligible'."[4] Yet in the Apologia Newman quite explicitly acknowledge that it was from Keble that he had

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1. Quoted by Härdelin, op cit, p 83.
2. pp 128-9.
3. Quoted by J. Coulson, Newman and the Common Tradition, p 34.
4. ibid, p 58.

had gained his sacramental understanding of the Church - "the doctrine that material phenomena are both the types and the instruments of real things unseen, - a doctrine which embraces in its fulness, not only what Anglicans, as well as Catholics, believe about Sacraments properly so called; but also the article of 'the Communion of Saints'; and likewise the Mysteries of the Faith."[1]

Newman read Coleridge for the first time in 1835 and was "surprised how much I thought mine, is to be found there." Coulson suggests that this "does not so much establish that Coleridge had a direct influence on the formation of Newman's ideas as the existence of a common way of seeing the Church.... It amounts more to a shared tradition and a common vocabulary that to the influence directly of one mind upon another."[2]

It is natural to fit Wilberforce into this common tradition. He had been greatly influenced both by Keble and Newman, and shared the "common vocabulary" to which Coulson refers. More, like Newman himself, Wilberforce had had an evangelical background. Both received from Keble a symbolical understanding of the Church and both could enrich this understanding with their evangelical grasp of the indwelling presence of Christ to the believer.[3] Unlike Newman, Wilberforce went on further to enrich his thought by his encounter with contemporary German theology. Möhler was a significant thinker, to whom Wilberforce owed a great debt;

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1. Newman, Apologia, ed M.J. Svaglic, p 29.
2. Coulson, op cit, p 58.
3. ibid. But Acton "decisively believed that somehow Möhler had influenced Newman", Chadwick, op cit, p 112. And if Newman, why not Wilberforce?

but Wilberforce's primary debt was to Oxford, not Tübingen; to England, not Germany.

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM

A year after the publication of his work on the doctrine of the Incarnation, Archdeacon Wilberforce published his Doctrine of Holy Baptism. Unlike his other published writings, this volume was a livre de circonstance, being a reply to William Goode's work on the Effects of Infant Baptism. Both these works on baptism were part of a wider debate on the nature of baptismal regeneration between Bishop Henry Phillpotts of Exeter and George Cornelius Gorham, an incumbent in his diocese. And this so-called Gorham controversy may itself be set in the yet wider context of the controversy over the doctrine of baptism which raged in Anglican circles for half a century from 1812. In that year R. Mant delivered the Bampton Lectures at Oxford University. These he published under the title, An Appeal to the Gospel; four years after Mant had delivered his lectures there appeared The Doctrine of the Church of England upon the Efficacy of Baptism, by R. Lawrence.

Mant's purpose as Bampton Lecturer was advowedly polemical, as he indicated in the sub-title to his work - "An Inquiry into the Justice of the Charge, alleged by Methodists and other Objectors, that the Gospel is not preached by the National Clergy". To justify his case, Mant rehearsed various arguments against Calvinist propositions, turning in his sixth lecture to the question of baptismal regeneration. Mant was quite categorical in his conviction that it is the doctrine both of Bible and of the Church of England "agreeably to which I conceive it to be the opinion of the generality of the national clergy, that by that sacrament we are made Chrsitians, and are born anew of water and of the Holy Spirit." In support of this view he quoted some words of Bishop Thomas Wilson of Sodor and Man: "Regeneration or New Birth is that

spiritual change, which is wrought by the Holy Spirit upon any person in the use of baptism; whereby he is translated out of his natural state, as a descendant of Adam, to a spiritual state in Christ; that is, to a state of salvation; in which, if it is not his own fault, he will be saved."[1] And so having stated his position, Mant proceeded to draw evidence for it. The three baptismal services of the Church of England (viz., public baptism, private baptism, and baptism of those of riper years), the rite of confirmation and the Prayer Book collect for Christmas Day, all, Mant claimed, testified to the validity of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration.[2] With this position, the XXXIX Articles of Religion were in agreement.[3] This discourse on baptismal regeneration was, Mant recognised, a footnote to his main argument; but he at the same time perceived the significance of this issue for theology. "Now it is certain," Mant affirmed, "that by being born again, of which our Saviour speaks in such lofty language, something is designed absolutely necessary to be attained by those, who would enter into the kingdom of God. It is a matter, therefore, not of mere idle speculation, but of the nearest and dearest interest, that we examine what is meant by being born again."[4] Mant insisted that the outward washing by water is necessarily attended in baptism by sanctification by the Spirit. The meaning of baptismal rebirth can be illustrated by reference to St. Paul's use of the imagery of burial and resurrection in baptism.[5]

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1. R. Mant, An Appeal to the Gospel, pp 332-3
2. ibid, pp 334-343.
3. ibid, pp 343-345.
4. ibid, pp 348, 351.
5. ibid, p 357, of 1 Corinthians vi,11, Colossians ii,12,13, Romans vi,14,11, Ephesians v,25-27.

Richard Lawrence's purpose in writing was also anti-Calvinistic. His work was more exclusively concerned with the meaning of the theology of baptism than Mant's had been. In 1821 the works of Mant and Lawrence were followed by Bethell's General View of the Doctrine of Regeneration in Baptism. Pusey made his own contribution to the debate with his three tracts on Scriptural Views of Holy Baptism (1835). And G.S. Faber contributed his Primitive Doctrine of Justification in 1837, a work addressed to the question of baptismal regeneration.

This persistent theological debate was brought to popular attention by the greatest ecclesiastical cause célèbre of the nineteenth century, the famous confrontation between Phillpotts of Exeter and George Gorham.

George Cornelius Gorham (1787-1857) seems early to have decided his views on baptismal regeneration. When he was seeking ordination in 1811, soon after his appointment to a fellowship of Queens' College, Cambridge, he was involved in a dispute with Dr. Dampier, then Bishop of Ely, on this question.[1] Gorham managed to satisfy the Bishop, and the matter was resolved by Gorham's ordination and election to the fellowship of Queens'. Thirty-five years later Gorham's views on baptism again came into question. In January, 1846, Gorham was presented to the living of St. Just-with-Penwith in Cornwall, by the Tory Lord Chancellor, Lyndhurst. Phillpotts welcomed the appointment and duly instituted Gorham. Soon, however, Bishop and incumbent fell into disagreement. Six months after his institution, Gorham was appealing for funds to build a district church connected with the evangelical Church Extension Society,

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1. J.C.S. Nias, Gorham and the Bishop of Exeter, p 7.

and applied in a circular to the Bishop. Phillpotts disliked the circular, for in it Gorham had described the Church of England as "the national establishment". Although Phillpotts was willing to subscribe £50, this was conditional on the withdrawal of the district church from communion with the Church Extension Soceity. By September 1846 Gorham and Phillpotts were arguing over a curate. Gorham had advertised in the Ecclesiastical Gazette for a curate who should be "free from Tractarian error". Phillpotts summoned the prospective curate for examination "especially on Baptism the foundation of Christian doctrine". Gorham protested against this private test of orthodoxy, although it seems, in fact, to have been part of Phillpotts' normal practice.[1] Meanwhile, Gorham was finding difficulty in educating his children in his remote parish and asked the Lord Chancellor, now the Whig Lord Cottenham, for a living nearer a town. In August, 1847, this request was answered with the offer of the living of Brampford Speke, a small farming parish of only 400 souls (compared with the 8,000 miners of St. Just-with-Penwith) and an income some £700 less than that of St. Just. But Brampford Speke had the advantage of proximity to Exeter; and Gorham determined to accept it. Phillpotts, however, refused to institute Gorham until he too had submitted to an examination on the soundness of his doctrine. Gorham expressed willingness, but was kept waiting until 17th December, when proceedings began at Bishopstow, outside Torquay. The examination was unusual: solely concerned with the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, it lasted for thirty-eight hours on five days, divided by a Sunday. Even at 5.30 p.m. on 22nd December,

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1. W.O. Chadwick, The Victorian Church, Part 1, p 251 and note 2; cf Nias, op cit, p 7.

Gorham removed some questions to be answered by letter. On legal advice, he said he was willing to be further examined: and for fourteen hours on 8th-10th March, 1848 he and Phillpotts again engaged in doctrinal discussion. Finally, on 11th March, Phillpotts adjudged Gorham's doctrine unsound, and declined to institute him to the living of Bramford Speke.

The matter was ceasing to be of merely local importance. On 3rd April questions were asked in Parliament about the length of the episcopal examination. On 12th April, Gorham addressed a circular letter to the public, describing his examination as "a cruel exercise of episcopal power, stretched beyond the boundaries of reason and decency." In June, he petitioned the Court of Arches to compel Phillpotts to institute him. Judgment in this case was given by Sir Herbert Jenner Fust on 2nd August, 1849, in favour of the Bishop. Gorham next appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, which, on 8th March, 1850, reversed the judgment of the Court of Arches. Phillpotts still refused to institute: he appealed, unsuccessfully, to the Court of Queen's Bench, the Court of Common Pleas and the Court of Exchequer to prevent the implementation of the decision of the Judicial Committee. Despite this failure, Phillpotts was adamant; and Gorham was finally instituted to the living on 6th August, 1850, under fiat of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Gorham died in 1857.[1]

Such was the immediate background against which Goode's and Wilberforce's works on baptism must be set.

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1. Nias, op cit, p 8.

Wilberforce had briefly touched upon the doctrine of baptism in his earlier work on The Doctrine of the Incarnation. In this work there was no polemical purpose, but rather an attempt to illustrate his fundamental theological principle, that sacraments are the means of union with the manhood of Christ. The special purpose of Baptism, he asserted in this volume, is that the blessings of forgiveness and strength should be attained by every individual. "The soul's regeneration, like the body's growth, is of course a protracted process, which the whole of life is not too long to complete. But what gives to Baptism its especial character is, that in that holy rite this process is begun."[1] There is in Wilberforce's teaching no suggestion that Baptism itself is enough, as though it were sheer magic. Salvation is not the automatic consequence of baptism, but rather follows from a life of commitment: "Baptism neither exempts devout men from the necessity of a watchful life, not careless men from the necessity of conversion." But in order to remind his readers of the reality of the grace conferred at baptism, he adds that "Baptism does not determine what shall be man's future state, but what is their present position."[2]

But why Baptism in the first instance? Wilberforce answers that question by reference to the whole salvation history of the human race. Man is a fallen creature, and in order to create anew God's image in man there must be the gift of new life. This new life began in the fact of the Incarnation, an event which itself served to emphasize that the initiative in the great drama of man's salvation was taken by God, and

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1. Incarnation, pp 436-7.
2. ibid, p 444, cf p 446.

not by man. Notoriously, it was the error of Pelagius and his disciples to suppose that the new life in Christ could be enjoyed on the initiative of man. "The flame requires to be kindled without, that it may burn within.... Renovation must have its root in Regeneration."[1] Wilberforce identified two major objections to this position. First, there are those who argue that grace is only given to those who will at the end be saved. Against this extreme assertion of predestination, Wilberforce appealed to the Bible, suggesting, not without a hint of sarcasm, that "those who can reconcile the doctrine of arbitrary decrees with the general invitations of Scripture to repentance and faith, need not object surely to allow that the gifts of grace may be co-extensive with the ordinances of the Gospel." In order to ensure that this point was driven firmly home, Wilberforce asked the rhetorical question, "Do not faith and repentance need grace as an inevitable prerequisite?" In his dismissal of the second objection to his thesis, Wilberforce was more curt. If it be suggested that no visible results attend on baptism, then his reply would be simply that "the very principle of faith is to admit that which sense does not discern."[2] Wilberforce saw regeneration as pointing to that state of freedom in which man was originally created by God. To his mind, denial of baptism as a preliminary act of God before the final regeneration of the Last Day was a tacit admission of Pelagianism. But he was emphatic that of itself baptism was insufficient to guarantee salvation. The positive effect of his doctrine rested, he thought, "plainly on the notion that the benefits of Baptism do not depend upon the present act, but on the future results which attend a devotion to

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1. Incarnation, p 439.- cf p 438.
2. ibid, p 443, cf pp 440-443.

God's service."[1]

Wilberforce returned to the doctrine of baptism in his work of that title, published in 1848. His immediate concern in that volume was to answer Goode's weighty treatise on The Effects of Infant Baptism. And it is this fact which distinguishes his Holy Baptism from all his other works.

Goode's Infant Baptism is mainly a catena of quotations from Reformation and post-Reformation divines, the purpose of which was to show that there are no grounds in orthodox Anglican thought for the doctrine of baptismal regeneration of infants. He stated, in Wilberforce's summary, that "the Church of England does not affirm that all children, duly brought to baptism, are recipients of grace."[2] In his reply, Wilberforce was more discursive. And Manning, who reviewed Holy Baptism for the Guardian, spoke for many readers when he regretted privately to Wilberforce that his work was so mixed up with Goode's work.[3]

Wilberforce stated clearly in his introduction the line of approach he intended to adopt to his subject. Indeed, the very chapter title made this unmistakeably clear: "New Ground taken by the opponent of Baptismal Regeneration - its incompatibility with Calvinism." Goode had claimed that the Anglican formularies were a product of Calvinist theology. Hence, it followed for him, if the doctrine of baptismal regeneration was incompatible with Calvinism, then it was clear that this

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1. Incarnation, pp 446-448.
2. Wilberforce, Doctrine of Holy Baptism p 2 hereafter cited as Holy Baptism.
3. E.S. Purcell, Life of Manning, I, p 515.

doctrine was not intended by those who had been responsible for the writing of the Formularies. Wilberforce challenged this line of argument on three grounds. First, the Anglican Articles of Religion should be taken in their "obvious and apparent" sense, and should not be read with any a priori theological assumptions. Goode seemed on this count to be in danger of holding that the Anglican Reformers believed one doctrine but imposed another. Secondly, Goode's assumption that the doctrine of divine decrees was incompatible with Calvinism was quite erroneous.[1] But it is the third of Wilberforce's arguments which reveals most clearly the point at difference between himself and Goode. Goode's work, as we have noted, was a catena of quotations from Reformation and post-Reformation divines. Wilberforce now reminds him "that the professed purpose of our English Divines, was to reform an old Church, not to construct a new one." Goode's line of approach tends to make Calvinism not merely an aspect of English Reformation thought, but the very basis of the theology of the Church of England.[2] In answer to this, Wilberforce insists on the right to appeal to the witness and evidence of the primitive Church. Yet Wilberforce was in no mistake about the seriousness of Goode's challange: "He assumes, in the face of all the evidence, not only that Calvinists modified our Services, but created them. Give him his standing-ground, and no doubt he will shake the whole world of our Theology, and bring down upon our heads the whole fabric, which God's Providence has raised upon such noble pillars." This was something which Wilberforce felt very keenly, for he was to make a similar point but in more vitriolic form later: "The hot fit of enthusiasm has passed away,

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1. Holy Baptism, pp 3-4.
2. ibid, pp 4-5.

and the true enemy of the Cross of Christ, the chilling apathetic torpor of an Infidel Apostasy, is becoming every day more imminent. Already the deadly forms of unbelief apparent around us. And from what quarter do they arise? They refer for their authority to the very maxims, which were introduced with other ends by the Continental Reformers; and their favourite haunts are the very places which Piety and Faith were supposed to have chosen for their perpetual homes."[1] Nowhere else does Wilberforce express with such force his conviction that the contemporary intellectual tendency of much Protestant thought was a threat to the very heart of orthodox Christian teaching. And here too we are offered a glimpse of why the Gorham Case should have aroused such extreme passions amongst the protagonists - and also of why Wilberforce should have accepted the challenge of Goode with such alacrity.

The main argument of Holy Baptism begins with an attempt to define the key term, 'regeneration'. In so far as regeneration is a gift from God, it implies the existence of two parties - God as the giver of grace and man as its recipient. In accord with the principle underlying all his sacramental thought, Wilberforce earths this in the Incarnation. "Not only is the intervention of the Son of Man the only channel through which the prayers of man can ascend to God...., but through this road is it specifically declared that the gifts of God find their way to the creature.... And this sytem of Mediation is declared to be a new way, by which the old way of nature is superseded."[2] Wilberforce put this same thought in different terms later: "The love of God had flowed forth

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1. Holy Baptism, pp 6, 7, 8.
2. ibid, p 11.

into the Manhood of the Incarnate Son, that thence it might diffuse itself through His brethren."[1] God thus gives grace; what is it that man receives? Because all the blessings of mediation are centred on the manhood of Christ, it follows that they emanate from that manhood.[2] The purpose of Christ's ministry was to bestow a new creation, to reconstruct the very foundations of humanity in Christ himself. Christ's role as the head of the new humanity should in its turn be seen in relational rather than in temporal terms.[3] Regeneration, therefore, Wilberforce defines as "the effect of that gift of grace, which the Father of all mercies was pleased to embody in the Manhood of the Incarnate Son, that thereby Humanity at large might be reconstructed; and which, in Him and by Him, is received by those happy members of the family of man to whom the Gospel comes, and by whom it is not rejected by unbelief or impenitence.... (It is) the gift bestowed by the Mediator.... It is Christ taking up His dwelling in man."[4] Wilberforce's attempt to illustrate this definition fails, however, to ring true. Any attempt to draw evidence on the empirical plane for spiritual reality is bound to fall short of the mark: indeed, Wilberforce freely conceded[5] that although the new nature of Christ has come into existence amongst men, still the old nature has not been extinguished.

Having thus established the ground by defining what he means by "regeneration" in the context of Christian baptism, Wilberforce feels confident to proceed with the argument of his book. But first he

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1. Holy Baptism, p 17.
2. ibid, p 18.
3. ibid, p 19.
4. ibid, p 27-8
5. ibid, p 25.

addresses himself to three objections which he identifies to his doctrine of baptismal regeneration. The first two objections - the inconsonance of the means of baptism to the supposed end and the suggestion that baptism involves the intrusion of physical agencies between God and the souls of his creatures - he speedily dismisses on their way. For both depend for their strength on the (to Wilberforce) erroneous notion that matter is less under divine control than mind: the Incarnation indissolubly related these two elements. And belief in the efficacy of sacraments depends not on some inherent virtue in the words or in the sacramental elements, but on the Incarnation, and, more especially, on the salvific work of Calvary. The third of these criticisms, which Wilberforce elected to answer first, was a matter which he had earlier raised in The Doctrine of the Incarnation; viz, the want of physical effect in baptism. In his earlier work, Wilberforce dismissed this question rather briefly,[1] and although he does not change his answer, he seems more conscious of the weight of the objection, for he terms it "the most formidable objection to the reality of sacramental grace." His answer is this: baptism is a gift which begins a life of spiritual progress; it is not a gift of results.

A survey of the New Testament evidence for the doctrine of baptismal regeneration raises yet further objections. He concedes that there are other channels of grace listed in the New Testament than baptism, but replies that the express purpose of baptism is to unite the candidate to the humanity of Christ. The concern of the sacrament is not merely to remove guilt, but also, and more significantly, to re-create. "When

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1. Incarnation, p 443, cf Holy Baptism, p 32, 34.

Baptism is said to be the appointed means by which this supernatural change is effected, it is because it is the revealed instrument whereby men are stated to be born in Christ, as by natural birth they are numbered among the offspring of Adam." Again, it may be said that to identify baptism with regeneration derogates from conversion and faith. Wilberforce takes his stand here with orthodox Catholic teaching, that to assert that in the sacrament a gift is given in no way mullifies the necessity on the part of the recipient to attain fitness to receive that gift. "Conversion and Faith are essential to the efficacy of Baptism on the part of man; but there must be an actual gift of grace on the part of God."[1] Clearly Wilberforce saw this as both possible and desirable on the part of a candidate for adult baptism, but in looking at the case of infant baptism it is impossible to associate directly the divine gift of grace with the candidate's own conversion to faith. Wilberforce seeks refuge in St. Augustine's solution: conversion may be said to follow baptismal grace in the case of infants, but in adults it must be the accompaniment of regeneration.[2] Both St. Augustine and Wilberforce are seeking to justify a practice long-established; and their embarrassment is patent.

Wilberforce now cuts himself free of Biblical and Patristic testimony, and comes to the pivotal question - that of the teaching of

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1. Holy Baptism, p 47, cf discussion pp 41-46.
2. ibid, pp 47-8. St. Augustine's situation was, of course, somewhat different from Wilberforce's. North Africa in the fifth century was not confronted with the problem of large numbers of baptised people who were not church-goers: heresy and paganism were the great issues of Augustine's society; establishment and indifference predominated in Wilberforce's.

the Church of England on baptism. Yet this section does little to illuminate Wilberforce's own doctrine, and it need not therefore long detain us. Significantly, Wilberforce bases his argument on the liturgical rites of the Church as contained in the Prayer Book, rather than on the Articles of Religion, which are but an appendix to that Book. The point is not so much, in Wilberforce's mind, that liturgy and Articles are at variance, but that it is only in the light of established liturgy that the different Anglican formularies can be made to cohere,[1] though, in fairness, Wilberforce does dwell for some time on the doctrine of the Catechism at the end of his main discussion.[2] Of the drift of Wilberforce's understanding there can be no mistake: the Prayer Book unequivocally teaches the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. In establishing this, he was not a little helped by Goode's concession that the Anglican baptismal service favoured a belief in baptismal grace. Goode's approach to this concession had been indirect: since the Anglican rite of adult baptism indisputably required certain conditions to be fulfilled, these conditions must also be applicable in the case of infant baptism. But Goode, in effect, sought to limit the application of these conditions and the efficacy of baptism to the children of devout parents. And such a limitation, in Wilberforce's view, was a contravention of the canons of the Church and the intention of the rite of baptism. As a final blow against Goode, Wilberforce, admitting that there is a variety of opinion within the Church of England as regards the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, appeals to external authority. Roman Catholics, Dissenters and Infidels, all, he maintains, are unanimous that baptismal

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1. Holy Baptism, pp 53-4.
2. Ibid, pp 101-113.

regeneration is plainly defined in the teaching of the Church of England.

Why was there so much controversy over this doctrine of regeneration? And what practical effect is involved anyway? Wilberforce is keen to insist that conversion to Christian faith and baptism into that faith are completely compatible and complimentary: indeed, it is only as a result of the tendency amongst some theologians to exalt the one and abase the other that confusion over their respective roles has arisen. Viewed positively, the two hang inextricably together.[1] But if the issue at stake were merely to establish the priority of either baptism or conversion, if the concern were merely a theological minutia necessary to complete a theological synthesis, debate at this length would be absurd. Great weight is attached to the discussion for its issues in practical importance in the field of Christian education. Indeed, Wilberforce is so bold as to assert that "Christian education is based entirely upon a belief in Baptismal grace." And if it were not so, the Church would be tacitly admitting that man of his own accord and in a way commensurate with his own abilities could win for himself salvation. And this was tantamount to Pelagianism, Wilberforce's great bête noire.[2]

In its turn, this is related to the fundamental belief of Christianity, that the initiative in the salvation of mankind was taken by God, and that initiative was manifested in the mediation of the God-man. It is upon the divine gift of grace to man that the benefits of regeneration depend. In the Christian covenant the bestowal

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1. Holy Baptism, pp 115-119.
2. ibid, pp 119-120.

of grace follows from the work of mediation effected in the humanity of Jesus Christ. It is the testimony of the Bible that the means whereby Christ propagates that spiritual life which derives from Him is the system of sacraments. Wilberforce's appeal is not only to the Bible but also to Martin Luther who, in his Homily on Baptism, shows, in Wilberforce's summary, that "Baptism is the appointed means, wherein the Second Adam communicates His renewed nature to His brethren.... When we look to the Divine Giver of grace, when we abstract our thoughts from anything, which men contribute towards the work of renewal, we find this rite of Baptism appointed as the specific means, through which God is pleased to bestow his blessings."[1] This is not to deny the existence or the reality of other spiritual influences; it is rather to stress the role of Baptism as the revealed medium through which such influences are communicated to man by God. Consideration of the practical effects of these spiritual gifts necessitates a consideration of man as the recipient of them. And again this assertion is proved by reference to infant baptism; to acknowledge as legitimate the practice of the baptism of infants is effectively to acknowledge the existence of the gift of God which is bestowed in the sacrament, for in infant baptism the will of the recipient of the sacrament is inoperative. And again Wilberforce anchors this argument firmly in his basic sacramental teaching. As he reminds his readers, the question at issue is: "whether God has been pleased really to renew humanity through the action of Christ, or whether He looks only, as a favouring co-operator, upon those who wish to renew themselves. The first.... regards Christ's Incarnation as the Regeneration of Nature, and the Sacramental system as our means of

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1. Holy Baptism, pp 125-6.

participating in this mighty alteration"; the second, although not excluding the divine initiative, veers dangerously towards Pelagianism.[1]

Here we stand at the very heart of Wilberforce's theology. He asserts emphatically that God of his own free will and in his own time initiated the process of the salvation of the world. Against him, he identifies those whom he is pleased to call Pelagians - those who allow men a share in the initiative in the share of salvation. But it is not merely this danger which he identifies. English dissent has, in his day, fallen into the heresy of Socinianism, the very denial of the divinity of Christ.[2] And all is consequent upon the denial of the mediatorial role of Christ in the sacraments, in the analysis proffered by Wilberforce. The issue is not a matter of mere words and meanings; though clearly some confusion is likely to arise in any human discourse, this misunderstanding is always potentially capable of resolution. So, Wilberforce, although he is aware of the possibility of misuse of the term "baptismal regeneration" (for instance, as implying that there is no necessity for conversion) considers it better to keep the time-honoured usage and explain its meaning than to abandon the term. A more serious threat than linguistic usage is posed by those whose own understanding of the sacramental system only becomes apparent in debate over the specific issue of regeneration. The position of this school of thought in relation to baptism may be expressed thus: it does not expect "the renewal of man's nature from any actual engrafting in the manhood of Christ, but from a Divine power acting according to some other law." In considering this position, Wilberforce offers the prognosis

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1. Holy Baptism, p 128.
2. Ibid, p 138.

that it will only be a "question of time and circumstance, whether such persons will not follow the various bodies of Continental Protestants, who have passed from a denial of Our Lord's Sacramental Presence to a denial of His nature." These opinions, it need hardly be stated, are irreconcilably opposed and hostile to those of the Church.[1]

Again at this point, Wilberforce interrupts the flow of his own teaching to return to the debate with Goode. This time he seeks to address himself to Goode's argument concerning the compatibility of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration with Calvinism. Indeed, so great is Wilberforce's concern to counter the advance of Calvinistic theology that, despite his own insistence that he will be directly concerned with Goode's assertions, the unfortunate Goode is in the event referred to only in passing. Wilberforce begins his reply with reference to Goode's contention that the Calvinist doctrines of election, predestination and perseverance are incompatible with the admission of baptismal regeneration. But his concern is not to argue these points: what is of more importance for him is the reformulation of the doctrines of election and predestination in Calvin's own thought. Election is applied, in antiquity, primarily to the election of Christ, and only secondly (and in consequence) to the election of his disciples. Divine election does not supercede the individual responsibility of man, but refers to the re-creation of that common nature of man which is communicated from Christ as the Head of the new humanity to His members. In other words, Wilberforce again forces the issue back to the mediatorial work effected in the Incarnation. The same treatment is meted out to Calvin's doctrine

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1. Holy Baptism, pp 141-2.

of predestination. Wilberforce suggests that what is happening in Calvin's theology is that whereas the great patristic writers were concerned to discuss the gift of grace given by mediation, the Reformer's attention is drawn to the question of the employment of that grace. In his rejection of Calvin's theology, Wilberforce expresses himself in unmistakeable terms: the first characteristic of Calvinism is "its rejection of that Sacramental system, by which the blessings of Mediation are distributed through the Body of C hrist. Its second is the denial of any gift of grace, except to those who shall finally be saved."[1] There is no greater theological rebuke in Wilberforce's armoury. And he sought drive his point yet further home by questioning the right of Calvinists "to claim the sanction of that greatest mind in the ancient Church - so rich, profound and affectionate", namely St. Augustine of Hippo.[2]

Once he has made this position so clear, there could be no doubt about the tenor of Wilberforce's reply to Goode's thesis. He denied emphatically that the doctrinal formulations of the Church of England were the creation of Calvinist theologians. He is adamant that English divines have always maintained belief in the efficacy of baptismal grace, appealing in support of this contention to Cranmer's Catechism (printed in the Book of Common Prayer). Of Cranmer's teaching here there could be no doubt. At the Savoy Conference which was responsible for the revision of the Edwardian and Elizabethan Prayer Book and its re-issue in slightly amended form in 1661 (it received Parliamentary

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1. Holy Baptism, p 179.
2. ibid, p 180.

approval the following year) the theology of the divines was manifestly not Calvinistic. Certainly, this is not to deny that there have been Anglican theologians whose outlook was primarily Calvinistic: such a denial would have been absurd. But Goode's is the opposite mistake, that of assuming that Anglican thought has been moulded in a predominantly Calvinist form.

In a brief conclusion, Wilberforce summarises his argument. He repeats what he sees as the major objections to the Church's teaching on baptism, namely the rationalistic argument that grace was never bestowed through baptism and, secondly, that baptismal grace was not bestowed on all infants who underwent the rite of baptism. These arguments he had first answered in The Doctrine of the Incarnation, and his reply now still bears the ecclesiological mark of its origin.[1]

Holy Baptism is by no means Wilberforce's best work. It was written hurriedly to answer Goode, and betrays evidence of this haste. Further, it is a defensive work, seeking to support a position under attack, rather than a work in which Wilberforce was at liberty to express and expand his own thought. But that Wilberforce accepted the challenge thus offered by Goode, and stepped out of his usual literary milieu in the process, is itself sufficient evidence of the importance which he attached to the question at issue. What were the forces motivating Wilberforce in the writing of this work? Goode himself was of only incidental concern to Wilberforce. Of far great import were the intellectual currents he identified lying beneath the surface of his

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1. Holy Baptism, p 299, cf Incarnation, pp 440-443.

adversary's writing. The mid-nineteenth century, in the aftermath of the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century, was in danger of lapsing into a vague moralism, which Wilberforce saw as akin to Pelagianism. Here indeed there was a serious threat to sacramental religion and thus to orthodox Christianity. If a man had merely to be good to attain salvation, what need had he to bother with organised religion, with sacraments, with worship? As Athanasius in the fourth century responded to the challenge of Arius, and as Augustine in the fifth countered Pelagius, so Archdeacon Wilberforce in the nineteenth century, in all humility, replied to the threats made against the Church, threats which so often seemed as if they came from within belief rather than from without. Nor was he content to wage controversy from the relative security of his study and library. Like a latter-day Athanasius or Augustine, he was prepared to face the issues head on in public confrontation.[1]

Holy Baptism was published in 1849. In August of that year, Sir Herbert Jenner Fust delivered judgement in the Court of Arches for Bishop Phillpotts and against Gorham. Save for his reply to Goode, Wilberforce had so far taken no part in the Gorham controversy, though it may be safely assumed that he had followed the legal proceedings as well as the theological debate with the keenest interest. Wilberforce's position on baptismal grace was not identical with that advocated by Phillpotts: the slight differences which existed put Wilberforce theologically to the "right" of Phillpotts. Archdeacon clung more closely to traditional orthodoxy than Bishop. After the judgment in the

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1. Cf. Wilberforce, Charge, 1850, pp 35-6.

Court of Arches, Gorham appealed to theJudicial Committee of the Privy Council. The prospect of an adverse decision caused alarm amongst Phillpotts' allies. Manning wrote to Wilberforce towards the end of February, 1850, "How can a priest, twice judged unfit for the cure of souls by the church, be put in charge of souls at the sentence of the civil power without overthrowing the divine office of the church?"[1] It is important to note that for Manning and his contemporaries the issue was not that of Gorham's pastoral suitability for the parish of Brampford Speke, but that of his theological beliefs: or, better, that Gorham's theology was the determinant of his pastoral suitability.

A few days after Manning had penned these words, the Judicial Committee delivered its judgement (on 8th March). Goode and Wilberforce were both present to hear the judgment, as was also Baron Bunsen, the Prussian ambassador, who recorded the scene in a letter to his son. "Going out I first met W. Goode (the protagonist of the Evangelicals), with whom I shook hands, and who was blissful: then my way was stopped in the lobby by two persons - and who were they? Archdeacon Wilberforce and Hope. They drooped their heads, and after some silence going on and I following them, Archdeacon W. said, 'Well, at least there is no mistake about it.' In which I heartily concur."[2]

In fact, both parties tended to misread and misunderstand the judgment. In its powers the Judicial Committee was more limited than its contemporaries were prepared to acknowledge. The Committee itself

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1. Quoted Chadwick, op cit, I, pp 263-4; cf Purcell, op cit, I p 259.
2. Frances Bunsen, Memoirs of Baron Bunsen, II, pp 162-4.

conceded in the judgment that "This Court....has no jurisdiction or authority to settle matters of faith, or to determine what ought in any particular to be the doctrine of the Church of England. Its duty extends only to the consideration of that which is by law established to be the doctrine of the Church of England, upon the true and legal construction of her Articles and Formularies; and we consider that it is not the duty of any Court, to be minute and rigid in cases of this sort."[1] In other words, although the practical effect of the judgment was to vouchsafe the position of the Evangelicals within the Established Church, it steered clear of trying to settle a matter of theological dispute in which it did not regard itself as competent. The Judicial Committee was prepared only to say that the view held by Gorham - that the grace of regeneration is not necessarily given in the sacrament of baptism - was a legitimate construction of Anglican teaching. For the Committee, the case was decided solely by a consideration of the Articles of Religion and the liturgy of the Church of England, and without reference to Patristic or Reformation teaching.[2] Subsequent scholarship has tended to agree with this verdict. G.W. Bromily, for example, argued in his Baptism and the Anglican Reformers that the emphatic language of the Prayer Book on the effects of infant baptism does not point to a work done but to a promise made, although he also concedes that "the promise can be counted upon because it is the promise of God who sees the end from the beginning, a promise vicariously realised in Jesus Christ."[3]

But the calm reflections of subsequent generations were not the

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1. E.F. Moore, The Case of Gorham, p 472.
2. ibid, p 462.
3. p 205.

mood of contemporary Tractarians. All they could see and feel was a threat to all that they held dear. A response had to be made. Wilberforce may have left the court with head drooping on 8th March, but on 20th March his name appeared as one of the signatories to a letter to the Times.[1] In July he joined with Manning and W.H. Mill, the Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge University, in circulating a declaration on Royal Supremacy. In the event, this only obtained 1,800 signatures and showed the weakness of the 'extreme' party within the Church. Manning came later to regard this petition as a signal failure.[2] Wilberforce continued his opposition to the Judgment: on 23rd July the London Church Union held a meeting in the concert hall of St. Martin's in Long Acre, at which the speakers were Keble, Pusey, Manning and Wilberforce himself. But by the autumn, other effects of the Judgment were beginning to be apparent. In September, T.W. Allies and Wilberforce's youngest brother, Henry, both made their submission to the Roman see - the first of many such changes of ecclesiastical allegiance occasioned by the Gorham Case.

This feverish activity was not Wilberforce's proper milieu. Though in the enforced emergency he had been prepared to use any legitimate weapon to hand to counter the threat he saw to orthodox Christianity, his natural bent lay toward writing rather than platform oratory. But anyway there was little he could do - save registering his profound dis-

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1. The Times, 20th March, 1850. There were, besides Wilberforce, eleven signatories to this letter, including Manning, Keble, James Hope and Henry Wilberforce. The Times itself had on 9th March welcomed the Judg ment, though this was based on legal rather than theological arguments.
2. Chadwick, op cit, I, pp 266-7.

agreement with the Judgment. He toyed with the idea of establishing a free Church of England, but got short shrift from Manning when he suggested the idea to him. Manning's eyes were already looking in another direction. "No. Three hundred years ago we left a good ship for a boat; I am not going to leave the boat for a tub."[1] Wilberforce, however, though sorely tried by the events of 1850 remained loyal to the Church of England for the time being, and in his archidiaconal charge of that year he reflected upon "The Practical Effect of the Gorham Case".

He began his Charge for 1850 with the customary discussion of the state of his archdeaconry, and then turned to the matters which were uppermost in his mind. Two issues, he suggested, were involved in the baptismal controversy: What is the nature of authority in the Church of England? and, What had the Judicial Committee decided? No longer was the debate a theological matter over the meaning of the word 'regeneration'. The ground had shifted, for what had now emerged was an affirmation of the fact of royal supremacy in theological matters, and it was to this question that Wilberforce turned his first attention.[2] Only when he had dealt fully with this immediate matter did Wilberforce turn to the question which had initiated the whole dispute. Though the Privy Council had "professed to abstain cautiously from giving an opinion" it had not been able to avoid doing so. By determining that Gorham should be instituted to his living at Brampford Speke, the Judicial Committee had implicitly approved his sentiments. And in

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1. Purcell, op cit, I, p 592.
2. Wilberforce, Charge, 1850, pp 6-18.

Wilberforce's reading of it, the Judgment was clear that "Baptismal Regeneration is determined on authority to be an open question in the Church of England, which its ministers are at liberty to affirm or deny, according to their own private judgment."[1] How far, Wilberforce asked, is this a satisfactory position for any of the parties involved? He demanded to know of those who denied the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, "can men be contented to hold that they are allowed to deny this assertion?" If, as they claim, the doctrine is untrue and dangerous, surely they must want a categoric repudiation of the doctrine. On the other hand, the position of those who affirm the doctrine is that they "cannot affirm that they teach it, as they formerly did, on the authority of the Church." So it is that Wilberforce comes to the conclusion that "the Judgment does far less benefit to the first party than it does injury to the second."[2] When he assessed the Judgment at which the Judicial Committee had arrived, he thought it sanctioned the statement "that the limitations confessedly applicable to adult Baptism, are applicable to infant Baptism also; and that since the efficacy of adult Baptism is avowedly affected by extraneous circumstances, therefore it cannot be affirmed that baptized infants are regenerate, except by virtue of some process irrespective of Baptism."[3] The emphasis on these words is Wilberforce's own, and it offers an indication of the weight he attached to them. They usher in a consideration of the Judgment itself, against which he levels three accusations. First, the Judgment contrasts with the language of the Prayer Book. In effect, it has been decided that the services of the Prayer Book "are in all cases to be

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1. Charge, 1850, p 19.
2. ibid, pp 19.21.
3. ibid, p 22.

understood as hypothetical.[1] Secondly, the Judgment would seem to affirm that in reality the grace of Baptism depends on God's foresight of the character of the candidate.[2] The third accusation against the Judgement echoes Wilberforce's own theological position: the Judgment is in conflict with the concept of mediatorial grace. It "is a denial of the reality of those channels of grace, whereby divine gifts are communicated to men." This theme is expanded later: "To affirm generally 'that Baptism is not itself an effectual sign of grace.' 'without reference to the qualification of the recipient,' is equivalent to a denial of Our Lord's Mediation."[3] This, together with his view of theological authority in the Church of England, is the ground on which Wilberforce takes his stand against the Judgment. For him, Anglican theology emerges from the confluence of two streams of theological reflection, the doctrines of the undivided C hurch of the Patristic Age and the Reformers' Articles of Religion, prepared in the sixteenth century. "Hitherto they have been supposed to be of co-ordinate authority:" (that is, they have been held to interpret and balance each other) "it is an entire and hazardous change in our system, that the one should in this way be subordinated to the other."[4]

The baptismal controversy was still at the front of his mind when he prepared his archidiaconal charge the following year (1851), but this charge also marks his final essay on baptism. In the main, the charge is a review of "The Evangelical and Tractarian Movements", but he steps out of his way to insist that, to the Tractarian, the grace of

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1. Charge, 1850, p 26.
2. ibid, p 29
3. ibid, pp 31 and 33.
4. ibid, p 23.

regeneration is given to each candidate in Baptism. And the purpose of that sacrament is to extend to man that renewed nature which had its source in Christ.[1]

How was Wilberforce's teaching on baptism received by his contemporaries? His work was a contribution to a wider debate than that with Goode, and what was ultimately at issue was not the meaning of the word 'regeneration', nor the relative status in Anglican thought of early Christian Fathers and sixteenth century Reformers, but the meaning of the word 'justification'; and that word lies behind almost every disagreement between Catholic Christians and Protestant Christians. C.C.J. Webb, in his work, Religious Thought in the Oxford Movement, has put the Tractarian understanding of that word clearly. By 'justification', the leaders of the Oxford Movement understood "less the imputation to us of the righteousness exhibited by Christ in his death than the impartation to the soul and infusion into it of the righteousness of Christ, processes which depend directly on the exaltation at the Resurrection of his humanity from the state of mortal weakness which, during his life on earth, he shared with all other individual men, to the state of immortal power, in which it is able to become the principle of spiritual life within those who are mystically united with him."[2] With this understanding of justification, it followed that the Tractarians held also the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. Their problem, however, was that although regeneration was clearly taught in the Prayer Book (for so they insisted, despite Gorham and Goode and the Judicial Committee of the

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1. Wilberforce, Charge, 1851, p 14.
2. p 20, cf pp 94-110.

Privy Council), it is hard to see how an infant can meaningfully be described as 'regenerate'. The appeal to tradition and to the need for mystery in religion were used to conceal Tractarian embarrassment. Yet despite this insistence on baptismal regeneration (or because of it) the Tractarians were at one in their conviction that religious experience is rooted in the moral, and that the genuine development of religious experience involves an aspiration after moral perfection or holiness.[1] For his own part, Wilberforce, although he focused his main attention on the word 'regenerate', was not at all clear about what happens in the case of a baptised adult, who, because of age, must be a convert to the faith. On page 47 of his Holy Baptism he quotes with approval the Church's ruling that "Baptism is valid where those things which are required on the part of God, are duly administered, but that its benefit does not come out till fitness on the part of the receiver co-operates with the validity of the rite." This rule was first formulated by St. Augustine in respect of those who had received schismatic (i.e. Donatist) baptism, but it was later extended to apply to unworthy recipients of the sacrament in the Catholic Church. Earlier in Holy Baptism, however, Wilberforce denied the intimacy of the relationship between the benefit of baptismal grace and conversion. "Repentance and faith," he argued, "have no power of condiguity, as some men's language would seem to imply, to impart to Baptism an efficacy, which by Christ's institution it did not before possess. But the necessity of these qualities is, that their absence from the adult mind is equivalent to that state of repugnancy against the Gospel, which renders its blessing unavailing. And therefore is it that in this state of probation, the blessings of a re-created

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1. Wilberforce, op cit, pp 94-110, cf p 153.

nature are not only possessed imperfectly by the best, though the opposition of a conflicting concupiscence; but by many are altogether rejected through the hardness of an impenitent and unbelieving will."[1] This uncertainty on Wilberforce's part reflects the uncertainty that was present in so much of the thinking of the Oxford Movement on regeneration and justification.

It was not to be expected that Holy Baptism would lead into a great debate. As a contribution to the Gorham controversy, it was tangential. Other polemical works and pamphlets would aim more certainly at the central protagonists. But there was, nonetheless, some reply to Wilberforce's book. An "old presbyter", otherwise anonymous, wrote a brief tract on Two Notable Errors of the Bishop of Exeter, during the course of which he commented on Wilberforce's positon. Holy Baptism was, the "old presbyter" surmised, "a work hurried through the press to meet this occasion, and not very decorously put into the hands (as I am credibly informed) of Mr. Gorham's Judges on his Appeal, to influence their opinions. Will it be believed that the Archdeacon adopts the very terms which were so scornfully treated by Mr. Baddeley, when arguing in the Privy Council on the part of the Bishop (of Exeter)?"[2] Later the "old presbyter" returned to attack Wilberforce's doctrine of prevenient grace, seeing it as being in opposition to Article X of the Articles of Religion. The Article teaches, in this interpretation, the God's grace has gone before the believer, enabling him to do good; Wilberforce is taken to say that original sin does not require the remedy offered by

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1. Holy Baptism, p 27.
2. p. 19.

prevenient grace.[1]

One of Wilberforce's own clergy, William Knight of Hull, was moved to print by the Archdeacon's charge of 1850. Had Wilberforce in that Charge merely stated his own opinions, Knight would probably not have resorted to writing this tract. What moved him to act was that the Archdeacon seemed to impute heresy to those who disagreed with him. As Archdeacon, Wilberforce undoubtedly had the right and the duty to ensure that the clergy properly understood the words that they would use at baptism. The clergy were not, however, bound to accept the archdeacon's own interpretation of those words. Knight's method is essentially that of Goode: his intention is "to shew that our sentiments are those of the most eminent of the Reformers, and that they were held by the compilers of our Liturgy."[2] But Knight did not leave the matter there. He tried to meet Wilberforce on his own ground by asking for patristic quotations, to show that the Fathers held, as Wilberforce and Phillpotts held, that all infants are morally and spiritually regenerated by the waters of baptism. And so Knight focused on the different sources of authority which separated Tractarian and Evangelical.

Goode twice replied to Wilberforce's reply to his original work. In a tract occasioned by one of Wilberforce's Charges, Goode called into question the whole manner of Wilberforce's argument. "The Gorham Judgment declares, that the opinion, that spiritual regeneration does not always of necessity accompany the act of infant baptism, is not

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1. ibid, p 19, quoting Holy Baptism, p 58.
2. W. Knight, Remarks on the Baptismal Service of the Church of England, p 4.

repugnant to the doctrine of the Church of England; and therefore the clergy may hold what Romish doctrines they please, and cannot justly be called to account for doing so."[1] The point was a fair one, and Wilberforce conceded it. But for Goode, there was only one source of Anglican doctrine, namely the sixteenth century formularies, and these, he insisted, were complied by Calvinists. Wilberforce, per contra, interpreted the great events of the sixteenth century as a reform of an existing and established Church, not the creation of a new one. He, unlike Goode, had to face the problem of bringing the two sources of authority which he recognised into some viable relationship. Goode's second reply to Wilberforce comes in the second edition of The Effects of Infant Baptism.

Such was Wilberforce's contribution to the great controversy over baptism which raged in Anglican circles in the nineteenth century. It was a costly debate, not only in terms of time and energy expended on arguing the various points; but also in terms of people. Robert's sister-in-law, Henry's wife, became a Roman Catholic in June, 1850. She besought her husband to follow her, and this he did. In September, [illegible] T.W. Allies was lost to the Church of England. Manning and many others followed in the following year. Robert Wilberforce for the time being held back, though he too eventually submitted. But all these left the Church of England, not so much because of that Church's teaching on baptism, but because they regarded the Gorham Judgment as a categoric and untenable assertion of the royal supremacy in deciding the doctrine of the Church.

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1. W. Goode, The Case of Archdeacon Wilberforce, p 3.

But, apart from this human loss of so many and so good men, what were the consequences of the Gorham Case? The legal proceedings had revealed the inadequacy of both high church and low church doctrines of baptism. In both the tendency was too individualising. F.D. Maurice attacked the Tractarians for this in The Kingdom of Christ in 1838. "By representing Baptism as that which confers a portion of grace on each particular child, and not as that which brings him out of his selfish and individual condition, into the holy and perfect body, they do very much, as I think, to destroy the idea of the church...."[1] Wilberforce, of course, would have denied with all the emphasis at his command that he wished "to destroy the idea of the church": his theological starting point was ecclesiological: baptism for him was the admission of the candidate into the Mystical Body. But in that his work was a reply to Goode's, he necessarily had to concentrate on the point of attack, and the question which Goode put to his theological opponents was, do you or do you not hold that the baptised infant is by the grace of that sacrament regenerate? And put in those terms, the reply is necessarily individualistic. But it should also be remembered that Wilberforce's own upbringing had taken place in a strongly Evangelical atmosphere, with all the emphasis on individual salvation.

The half century of debate may be said to have been ended by the publication in 1862 of J.B. Mozley's Review of the Baptismal Controversy. The use, Mozley reminded his readers, of convenient short-hand labels for various doctrines tends to obscure the wealth of meaning lying behind the doctrines. So it is with the concept of baptismal regeneration.

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1. I, p 96; cf, F.D. Maurice, The Church as a Family, pp 32-33.

Although this doctrine is not clearly formulated at the close of the canon necessarily what is involved is a hypothetical regeneration, for in the nature of things there can be no empirical proof. Mozley goes on to deny the possibility of identifying the sign or symbol with the fact of regeneration. And in the divine economy it is quite possible that the grace of regeneration could precede the sign of that grace by an indefinite time.[1] When he turned specifically to the Gorham case, Mozley minimised the significance of the Judicial Committee's Judgment, although he was prepared to concur with it. The Judgment itself had only been concerned with one aspect of baptismal regeneration. It was not concerned with the grace of that sacrament, but with the recipients of that grace. And Sir Herbert Jenner Fust in the Court of Arches, although declaring in favour of Phillpotts, had then allowed that the Articles of Religion leave doubtful the meaning of the phrase, "worthy reception".[2] In an earlier work,[3] Mozley had taken to task the participants in the Gorham affair for their failure to define what they meant by 'election', which, Mozley saw as one of the key words of the debate. (It was in this same work that Mozley first put forward the idea of hypothetical baptismal regeneration, after a lengthy consideration of Scriptural and Patristic evidence).

And so the great controversy was brought quietly to its close. Of its significance both for the Church of England and for the lives of many individuals, there can be no doubt. Wilberforce had made his own contribution, but despite Manning's high praise for the work, Holy

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1. p 206.
2. p 210.
3. The Primitive Doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration (1856).

Baptism is a product of the controversy and integral to it. It is not a great work, nor would its author have claimed that distinction for it. Rather, it is a polemical work, serving at the same time to separate his two more important works and also to act as a bridge between them, illustrating the principles of the first and leading in to the second.

WILBERFORCE'S DOCTRINE OF THE EUCHARIST

Y Brilioth has described the English Church in the early nineteenth century as "one of the low-water marks of sacramental religion." He has further commented that "the revival which began with the Oxford Movement has been above all a revival of sacramental religion.... The rebirth of eucharistic piety is the most active of all the forms of fermentation which the Oxford Movement set working in the spiritual life of England."[1] Yet the initial concern of those involved in the publication and dissemination of the Tracts was not eucharistic. As Webb has urged, the Tractarians were primarily concerned with the theology of man's justification, and hence it was the doctrine of baptism which proved to be the first source of contention between Tractarian and Evangelical.[2] Indeed, baptism was to remain at the very centre of theological debate until the delivery of the Gorham Judgment in 1851. Only in the second generation of the Oxford Movement did the doctrine of the Eucharist emerge from comparative obscurity; and then, tragically, the questions at issue were less precise matters of theological understanding and more matters of ritual.

The evidence of the Tracts themselves shows how little attention was at first paid to the eucharist. No original contribution on eucharistic doctrine was forthcoming, and such interest as was shown was limited to the republication of the writings of certain seventeenth century divines. Extracts of Bishop Beveridge's, The Necessity and Advantage of Frequent Communion, were published on 2nd February 1834 as Tract 26. Beveridge's

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1. Eucharistic Faith and Practice, pp 214-5.
2. Religious Thought in the Oxford Movement, p 90

was a plea for a more frequent celebration of the Eucharist and for more frequent communion. He based his argument on the dominical words of institution and on the history and rubrics of the Church, both before and after the Reformation. In March of the same year Bishop Cosin's History of Popish Transubstantiation appeared in two parts as Tracts 27 and 28. Cosin's title was self-explanatory and his argument clear from the very first page. From the words of institution and from St. Paul's teaching it is clear that the phrase 'the Body of Christ' "is to be understood in a sacramental and mystic sense; and that no gross and carnal presence of body and blood can be maintained by them." The question is not of the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, but the manner of that presence.[1]

What was the background against which these Tracts were issued? Dr. Darwell Stone, in the second volume of his History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, offered as his opinion that "in the early years of the nineteenth century the prevailing Eucharistic doctrine in the Church of England was probably identical with or approximating to that taught by Waterland, whose Review of the Doctrine of the Eucharist has been described as "a treatise which was once considered almost as the text-book of the Church of England."[2] Daniel Waterland (1683-1740) was, besides holding sundry other positions, Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and Archdeacon of Middlesex. It is probable that his work on the eucharist was occasioned by the publication, on the one hand, of John Johnson's The Unbloody Sacrifice and Brett's Discourse concerning the

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1. p 1.
2. Vol II, p 515. Stone is quoting from the preface to Waterland's Review by the Bishop of London in the edition by van Mildert.

necessity of discerning the Lord's Body and, on the other, by the works of Bishop Hoadl y on the Lord's Supper.[1] The publication of Waterland's Review marked what Professor C.W. Dugmore has termed "the triumph of the Via Media".[2] W.H. Mackean in his Eucharistic Doctrine of the Oxford Movement, a work critical of the Movement and published in its centenary year, described Waterland's position as "receptionist", in contrast to the "virtualist" position which Johnson had adopted and the "memorialist" position of Bishop Hoadl y.[3] Though substantially accurate, these brief descriptions of Mackean's must be amplified in order to understand the background against which the Tractarians, and Wilberforce more especially, were writing.

Waterland's eucharistic doctrine was an expression of the central churchmanship prevalent in eighteenth century Anglicanism. For him, the bread and the wine offered at the altar were no mere signa nuda, representing spiritual blessing but not conveying it. They were indeed effective means of conveying that blessing. To illustrate this, Waterland used an analogy from land purchase. A deed of conveyance is not a real estate, but it conveys one, and is, in effect, the estate itself.[4] In a phrase which Waterland forebears to define more closely, the elements themselves contract a 'relative holiness'. Consecration effects no change in the elements: "That are now no more common bread and wine, (at least not during this their sacred application,) but the communicants are to consider the relation which they bear, and the uses

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1. Stone, op cit, Vol II, p 515.
2. Eucharistic Doctrine in England, chapter title.
3. pp 1-30.
4. Quoted by R. Holt, Daniel Waterland. 1683-1740. A Study in Eighteenth Century Orthodoxy, pp 168-9.

which they serve to."[1] The eucharist is, then a symbolical feeding; and Waterland returns to this point when he considers the question of the sacrificial nature of the eucharist. He accepts that the sacrament is a sacrifice, though rejecting the Tridentine teaching of the propitiatory character of eucharistic sacrifice;[2] instead, he links the concepts of the eucharist as a sacrifice and the eucharist as a federal rite, which he had earlier discussed in the Review.[3] In order to do this, he pictures a two-way process: "...if the sacerdotal offering up of our Lord's mystical body be (as St. Austin explains this matter) a sacerdotal devoting all the faithful joining it, and to God's glory: then we may....justly conclude, that the sacramental service is a federal, as well as a sacrificial solemnity."[4] To put the same point more simply, in words which Waterland quotes from Cudworth, "the Eucharist, considered in its spiritual and mystical view, is a feast upon a sacrifice, (viz., the sacrifice once offered upon the cross)..."[5] Darwell Stone commented that Waterland's conclusions are "the same as those in the latest position of Cranmer, namely, that those who communicate worthily receive, not Christ's body and blood, but the virtue and trace of them: and that the sacrificial character of the Eucharist is completely described when there is said to be a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice, a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, and the oblation of the lives of the communicants."[6]

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1. Review, p 92.
2. ibid, p 338.
3. ibid, pp 308-337.
4. ibid, p 386.
5. ibid, p 322.
6. Stone, op cit, II, p 502.

An indication of the importance attached to this work of Waterland's was eloquently given when, in 1868, at the request of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, it was republished (in the edition of van Mildert) together with three of his Charges to the clergy of the Middlesex Archdeaconry. In his preface to this specially commissioned edition, the Bishop of London commended Waterland to all readers, but especially to students in divinity as "a safe and perspicuous guide to those tenets on the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper which, as a matter of fact, have been held by the great majority of the ablest and most learned Theologians of the Reformed Church of England."[1] The implications of this preface need not be laboured: Waterland's work was republished by the ecclesiastical establishment in an attempt to thwart the development of Tractarian eucharistic teaching and to bolster opposition to it.

Yet Waterland's was not the only eucharistic doctrine current in the Church of England before 1833. Pusey maintained that he had always held a "real presence" doctrine of the eucharist.[2] And indeed men like Keble and Pusey himself point to a stream of high church doctrine in Anglicanism which, for most of the eighteenth century, had been running under the surface, but now was about to emerge again into the open. We may take as an early representative of this school John Johnson, sometime Vicar of Cranbook in Kent, whose book, The Unbloody Sacrifice, was published in 1714.

Johnson's intention, as he stated clearly on the title page of his

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1. Review, p vii.
2. A. Hardelin, Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist, p 127, H.P. Liddon, Life of Pusey, I, p 7.

book, was to prove "That the Eucharist is a proper material Sacrifice, That it is both Eucharistic, and propitiatory, That it is to be offered by proper officers, That the oblation is to be made on a proper Altar, That it is properly consumed by manducation" and all is will be established by "the sentiments of the Christian Church in the four first centuries."[1] In Johnson's definition sacrifice is an offering to God either in acknowledgment of some attribute of God or to procure some blessing from him. It receives validation by making use of correct liturgical form, that is to say, in order to be a sacrifice, the offering must be made at a proper altar by a proper officer. And the sacrifice is sealed by the consumption of what has been offered in the appointed manner (though Johnson does allow room for the disposal of the offering in some suitable way other than consumption).[2] Having thus defined sacrifice, Johnson now seeks to establish the sacrificial nature of the eucharist. For this purpose, he concentrates his attention on that part of his definition which asserted that a sacrifice is an offering to God. The basis of his argument is Patristic teaching and the doctrine contained in the New Testament. Taken together, these two sources affirm that the eucharist is an oblation of the sacramental body and blood of Christ. But Johnson has to face a particular difficulty: if, at the institution of the eucharist on the first Maundy Thursday Christ may be said in some sense to have offered to God his body and his blood, how is this offering reconciled with the other offering of Christ's body and blood made on the cross of Calvary on Good Friday? This, Johnson

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1. The Unbloody Sacrifice, I (title page). A second edition was published in 1724, which was later to form the basis for the edition in the Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology.
2. ibid, I, p 97.

conceded, "looks like a mighty objection in the eyes of some modern writers," but it is a problem of which the Fathers of the Church were quite unaware.[1] The solution which he himself offered was "that the one personal oblation, performed by our Saviour Himself, is not to be confined to any one instant of time; but commenced with the Paschal solemnity, and was finished at His ascension into heaven, there to appear in the presence of God for us."[2] A question still remains: What is meant by the eucharistic body and blood of Christ? Notions of transubstantiation are rejected by Johnson, preference being given to a concept, established only by a rather devious argument, of Christ's sacramental body.[3] Mackean was, therefore, correct to classify Johnson as a virtualist,[4] that is, as one who denied the reality of the presence of the natural body and blood of Christ in the eucharist, but who nevertheless insisted that the grace, or virtue, of that body and blood is communicated in the eucharist. But the key to understanding Johnson's position is his refusal to divide into separate categories the various events of Christ's history from Maundy Thursday to the Ascension. The saving events of the Passion, Resurrection and Ascension formed one complex: and in this unity he saw the insurmountable obstacle to a doctrine of transubstantiation.[5] A corollary of this doctrine of the eucharist put forward by Johnson is the insistence on frequent communion. How frequent is frequent? Johnson avoids answering that question

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1. ibid, I, p 212
2. ibid, I, p 164, cf pp 144-5.
3. ibid, I, pp 166, 165.
4. Mackean, op cit, p 3. But Härdelin has warned about the inadequacy of these labels in pre-Tractarian theology, op cit, pp 29-30.
5. Johnson, op cit, II, p 5. This sense of unity raised difficulties for the point put forward by Cudworth, and taken up with enthusiasm by Waterland, that the Eucharist is a feast upon a sacrifice, op cit, pp 180-88.

directly, though it may be inferred from the opening paragraph of this section of his treatise that he would not be unhappy if the words 'frequent' and 'daily' in this context were taken as synonomous.

Johnson has been taken as an example of a strain in Anglican thought, and also because he was one of the theologians who caused Waterland to write. It would, therefore, be very misleading to see Johnson's own work in complete isolation from the work of his contemporaries. G.W.O. Addleshaw, for example, has argued that in seventeenth century Anglican thought the doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice centred on the idea of the community being joined in the eucharist with Christ's self-offering. According to Addleshaw, this idea stemmed from no less an authority than Cranmer himself in Defensio Verae et Catholicae Doctrinae de Sacramentis (1554), though its pedigree may be traced back to St. Augustine of Hippo who had taught "that the Church is offered in the Eucharist and an altar is made one with the victim of Calvary."[1] But those working in succession to Cranmer perceived two dangers - that of Pelagianism and that of a threatening unreality. Hence they, unlike Cranmer, sought to stress the immediate connexion between the eucharist and Calvary.

In addition to these two broad schools of eucharistic thought which we have represented by the names of Waterland and Johnson, there were sundry other eucharistic doctrines current in the pre-Tractarian Church of England. Mackean made use of the name of the famous

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1. G.W.O. Addleshaw, The High Church Tradition, p 179. For a full discussion, see pp 177-187.

Latitudinarian Bishop Hoadly of Bangor (1676-1761) to designate memorialist teaching, though Professor Dugmore has subsequently indicated that this is a line of thought already appearing during the Commonwealth period.[1] The memorialist obeys the Lord's command to break bread and share the chalice, and does so in memory of the Lord, crucified and risen. No sacrifice is offered, and no special grace is received.

Mention should also be made, albeit briefly, of the work of Richard Hooker. Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity was, like Wilberforce's work in the middle years of the nineteenth century, an attempt at a theological synthesis, from the starting point of the Incarnation. Hooker held that the consecrated elements in the eucharist actually impart Christ, though he called short of teaching transubstantiation. The sacramental presence of Christ is perceived and partaken by the believer through faith. The presence is not localised in the sacrament itself.[2] The drift of this doctrine is towards receptionism, though R. Bayne, in his heavily annotated edition of Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity has urged that Hooker himself "has no thought of denying an objective presence."[3]

Early in the nineteenth century there appeared the work of Alexander Knox (1757-1831), a man whom Vernon Storr described as "the prophet of the Oxford Movement".[4] Knox wrote, probably in 1826, a Treatise on the Use and Import of the Eucharistic Symbols, which was

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1. Mackean, op cit, pp 7 - 11.
2. V, 68.
3. p LXVI. Keble, of course, was responsible for a highly influential edition of Hooker's work.
4. Storr, Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century, p 251.

edited at the beginning of the twentieth century by Archbishop Maclagan of York and published in Knox's collected works under the title, The Grace of Sacraments. According to Knox, the early Church held that the eucharistic elements became effectually what Jesus had named them.[1] This idea of the eucharist as an effectual sign is one which recurs throughout Knox's work. He speaks, for example, of "the mysterious communication which the Eucharist imparts, being a pledge of the same divine presence, in, and with, the Christian Church, as the Jewish Church had enjoyed, in the inner sanctuary of the Temple."[2] The effectual sign is mysterious. Knox traces this concept to St. Paul, whose language on the eucharist is said to be "not figurative, but it is mysterious and transendental."[3] In a Postscript to the Treatise on the Eucharist these ideas received further development and elaboration. The concern of the Postscript is largely the relation of the individual Christian to Christ and of Christ to the individual Christian, a relationship which finds its most profound expression in the eucharist. But the mystical approach followed by Knox necessitates a consideration also of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the eucharist. Indeed, Knox suggests that the eucharist on the face of it might seem to be usurping the functions traditionally accorded in Christian theology to the Comforter.[4]

The work of Knox represents a significant shift of emphasis in Anglican thought. Hitherto theologians, writing in the shadow of the

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1. Knox, The Grace of Sacraments, p 186.
2. ibid, p 216.
3. ibid, p 203.
4. ibid, pp 227-268.

Reformation controversies, had tended to address themselves primarily to the question of the nature of the change which took place in the eucharistic elements as a result of consecration, if, indeed, any change at all took place. Knox's concern, however, was less with the nature of the divine presence and more with the spiritual effects consequent upon being a communicant. When he speaks of "the mysterious communication which the Eucharist imparts" he is at the same time breaking with the established theological tradition of concentrating on the eucharistic presence, and hinting at theological developments more precisely worked out by the disciples of the Oxford Movement.

To trace the history of the early Tractarian's understanding of the eucharist is to chart the confluence of various streams of thought. Alf Härdelin, in his monumental, The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist, has suggested that the Tractarians, and especially Newman, tended at first to favour a doctrine of receptionism.[1] Newman himself did not address himself at any significant length to eucharistic doctrine whilst an Anglican. In his Apologia he is content merely to affirm that he accepted the doctrine of transubstantiation when he became a Roman Catholic, and not before.[2] Keble and Pusey, we have already noted, tended to allow an imprecisely defined doctrine of a real eucharistic presence. However, from their diverse positions the Tractarians came to agree by about 1837 that the eucharistic gifts are the body and blood of Christ, a position which was demanded by the belief in the incarnation and in the sanctification and restoration of man in Christ.[3]

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1. pp 129-30. But Newman at least quickly moved from this position, pp 132-4.
2. ed., M.J. Svaglic, p 215.
3. Härdelin, op cit, pp 132, 134-141.

In Tract 81, a Catena Patrum dealing with the testimony of writers of the later English Church to the doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice something of this position becomes apparent. Though the doctrine of transubstantiation is rejected, that rejection is not held to involve or even imply a rejection of the doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice; and the corollary of a doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice must be a doctrine of the real presence.

R.I. Wilberforce's own position on the eucharist during this period still tended toward receptionism. In a sermon which he preached in Lent, 1839, entitled "The Personal Presence of Christ with his Church", he moved from a general discussion of Christ's presence in the Church to the specific question of his presence in the eucharist. There, he said, Christ "gives Himself for the benefit of His people. The outward elements of bread and wine...become to those who duly receive them, the sacred memorials of His dying love." But his main theme in this sermon is the benefits which flowed from the eucharist, rather than with the nature of the eucharistic presence.[1] Wilberforce returned to this theme in another sermon, published in 1846, on "The Resurrection Festival", wherein he suggested that the object of Holy Communion was "to be united to Christ.... To be a Churchman, is not merely to differ from others by profession, it is to be united to Christ."[2]

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1. Printed in Sermons by XXXIX Living Divines of the Church of England, ed Dugard and Watson, p 639. The emphasis is mine. In this same sermon, Wilberforce asy "unscriptural" the doctrine of transubstantiation, p 641. condemns
2. Printed in Sermons for Sundays, Festivals and Fasts and other Liturgical Occasions, ed Watson, II, p 102.

Wilberforce was not at this time preaching as 'high' a doctrine of the eucharist as that put forward at this time by Pusey, whose Letter to the Bishop of Oxford spoke of "a true, real, actual though spiritual (or rather the more real because spiritual), communication of the body and blood of Christ to the believers through the holy elements."[1] In his famous sermon to the University of Oxford on The Holy Eucharist. A Comfort to the Penitent Pusey preached that the eucharist is the means of sustaining life. Emerging from the sermon was a doctrine of the real presence, expressed in terms of great clarity. And Pusey's stress was unmistakably on the act of consecration. The starting point of this was the incarnation: "This is....the order of the mystery of the Incarnation, that the Eternal Word so took our flesh into Himself, as to impart to it His own inherent life; so then we, partaking of It, that life is transmitted on to us also, and not to our souls only, but our bodies also...."[2] It was a result of preaching this sermon that Pusey was banned from the university pulpit for ten years!

Wilberforce's first attempt to write a theology of the eucharist appeared in his Doctrine of the Incarnation, in the chapter entitled, "Of sacraments as Means of Union with the Manhood of Christ", though this was also supplemented by a discussion in a previous chapter (on worship) on the eucharist as sacrifice. As always, Wilberforce begins from the premise that sacraments are "the extension of the Incarnation". Through sacraments, Christians are united to Christ's human nature.[3] Here Wilberforce concentrates his attention on baptism, the sacrament of the profession of Christianity, and it is only after he has developed

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1. p 128.
2. p 11.
3. Incarnation, p 410, cf p 452.

his thesis in respect of this sacrament that he turns to the eucharist, the sacrament sustaining the life of the Christian. We should attach no more importance to this than mere chronological priority. Wilberforce begins with an expression of regret that the doctrine propounded by Hooker of "the union with Christ's manhood by mystical participation" which is "put forth as the leading characteristic" of the eucharist, has been superceded by the memorialistic doctrine advocated by Bishop Hoadly.[1] But from an examination of Scripture, and particularly what are seen as the prophetic words of the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel, Wilberforce urges that "the eating and drinking of Christ's Body and Blood" are "a mystical means of obtaining heavenly benefits."[2] This thesis is supported by a reflection upon the circumstances under which the observance of the Lord's Supper was begun. For it was the Ascended Lord who provided "that principle of supernatural union whereby all His members were to be engrafted into Himself. Now, it is through the Holy Communion that this connexion is especially maintained. Its great purpose is to bring the members of Christ into mystic union with their Head."[3] The power of the Spirit brings to the eucharist the presence of Christ, whose body is the medium by which spiritual gifts are mediated.

This first attempt of Wilberforce's to express a doctrine of the real presence without carnal implications cannot be accounted a success. He had attempted to relate the spiritual presence of Christ as both God and Man to the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, but his argument

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1. Incarnation, p 452.
2. ibid, p 453.
3. ibid, p 456.

fails to convince. He had stated a case, not argued a position.

But Wilberforce's concern in this part of his Doctrine of the Incarnation was not only with the eucharistic doctrine of real presence: he also discussed the doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice. On the whole, Anglican theology has tended to allow that in some way the eucharist is sacrificial, though it has shown a deep reluctance to expound and clarify the meaning of sacrifice. So Wilberforce offers his own definition: he will use the word 'sacrifice' first, in the sense in which that word was commonly used in Scripture and by men; secondly, and more specifically, in relation to Christ's self-offering on the cross. The question, then, is that of the relationship of the sacrifice of Calvary with that of the Christian eucharist. In what way it is possible to say that the eucharist is a sacrifice, an offering of the body and the blood of the Lord, since it is basic to all Christian teaching that Christ has already died? Wilberforce answers that Christ's material body, which he took from the Virgin Mary, is in Heaven, and that there he pleads still the sacrifice of Calvary. Hebrews x, 12, is adduced in support: "For thus is Christ consecrated 'a Priest for ever', and His offering is 'a perpetual sacrifice'."[1] And it is part of the mystery of the eucharist that through the elements of bread and wine, "that which is offered as a true sacrifice in heaven, is present as a real though immaterial agaent in the Church's ministrations." What follows from this linking of the heavenly and the eucharistic sacrifices is that Christians are threby enabled to be connected "with that slain Humanity of the Incarnate Word, which is

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1. Incarnation, pp 374, 376.

present by spiritual power in holy ordinances."[1] If it be argued that this fails to ascribe sufficient reality to the eucharistic sacrifice, Wilberforce replies that the eucharist is as truly a sacrifice as the Passion itself. The reality of the spiritual character of the eucharist depends upon the reality of those functions which Christ continues to discharge in Heaven as the Word made flesh. If, alternatively, it be argued that too much reality is given to the eucharistic sacrifice, and that the existence of a sacerdotal system in the Church is inconsistent with the privileges of Christians and incompatible with the prerogatives of Christ, then Wilberforce's reply will be, that Christian privileges stem from that very union with the manhood of Christ which is maintained by the sacerdotal system. To suppose that the sacerdotal system is incompatible with the prerogatives of Christ is to assign too little to Christ and too much to men. Indeed, implicitly, the counter-argument to Wilberforce's thesis is supposing the unreality of Christ's mediation and the reality of man's. It is from the fact that Christ is perpetually interceding for the Mystical Body which is his Church, to which in common worship Christian people are associated, that the reality of sacrifice in the Christian dispensation arises.

After the appearance of The Doctrine of the Incarnation, Manning wrote to Wilberforce, welcoming his work, but at the same time urging him to revise the terms he had used. "What I would wish," he wrote in 1849, "would be that you should revise your terms. In the chapter on the Real Presence you use in opposition such terms as 'bodily contact' and 'spiritual power'; and again 'material' in a way which does not

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1. Incarnation, pp 376-7.

convey a clear view to me. Moreover, they seem to me to be a departure from the usual theological language as used by St. Thomas, Vasquez, Suarez, etc., and therefore to produce verbal and apparent differences, when no real differences can exist. And this seems to me a hindrance to better understanding. I may be wrong, but I should like to go into it with you with books by us."[1] This advice was repeated in the following year, but now Manning was keen that Wilberforce should concentrate on writing a book on the eucharist. "What I should like from you would be another book on the Sacrament of the Altar, related, as the Book on Baptism, to your larger work. But before you do it I would wish you to analyse the language of St. Thomas, Vasquez, and Suarez. I will show you....some remarkable passages, which I think will satisfy you, as they do me."[2]

Wilberforce was also in correspondence with John Keble, whose influence was of a more restraining nature than Manning's. Commenting on the teaching on the eucharist put forward in The Incarnation, Keble admitted that he was "not quite sure that I know what an 'objective' Presence means. The saying which I feel most satisfactory is 'a Real, Sacramental Presence', by which I understand a Presence for all the purpose of the Sacrament: for worthy receivers to make them partakers of the Body and Blood of our Lord; for unworthy to make them guilty of the same; for those who turn away, to condemn them as the Jews were condemned; for all whom the Oblation is made, to unite their spiritual sacrifices to the never ceasing memorial of the one Bloody Sacrifice -

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1. Purcell, Life of Manning, I, p 31, note 1.
2. ibid, I, p 521.

the continued Eucharist which our Lord is offering for us in Heaven. But not a Presence for purpose unconnected with the Sacrament, as to fall on the ground, to be accidentally thrown away, to be lifted up, carried about, burned, spilled, or otherwise outwardly treated for honour or dishonour. The danger of a carnal belief, i.e. of a belief which admits such accidents as I have endeavoured in the above definition to exclude - lies mainly in this, that it trains ordinary people to be present without real reverence; to a sort of behaviour like that of the heathen to their images. I do not well know how it can be said that, according to the Roman statements, 'the material structure is not altered', at least as ordinary people would understand them. If the Bread and Wine have entirely vanished, how can the material structure be the same?"[1]

Two years' later, Keble reminded Wilberforce - was reminder necessary? - of the importance of the work of the early Fathers of the Church. "We ought," he wrote on 22 June, 1853, "continually to bear in mind that however evident the doctrine of Antiquity has made itself to those who have leisure and still read the Fathers, it has never come before Universal Christendom in the sense of a distinct synodical decision, so that there is much larger room for material as distinguished from formal heresy on this subject than for instance on the Trinity.... We have been put on the defensive, and there, unless we could see that we have erred, we must try to make our stand. I cannot believe that people would think it a duty to expel us, though it is plain that a

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1. Quoted in W.J.A.M. Boek, John Keble. An Essay on the Vindication of Imaginative Thinking, pp 139-140. The letter is dated July 8th, 1851.

great many do."[1] Keble's concern in the last sentence is with the hostile reactions which the Tractarian Movement had provoked in the Church of England, and more immediately with the aftermath of the Gorham Judgment.

Wilberforce's Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist was first published in 1853, and was explicitly designed to be, as Manning had hoped, related to his earlier work on the Incarnation.[2] From "the grand objective fact of Christianity" Wilberforce passes to the present reality and fulfilment of that fact within the Church. His appeal, as Keble had hoped, was an appeal to the teaching of Scripture and of Antiquity. But this could not be used merely to bolster Anglican positions. If the teaching of the Fathers ran contrary to any given Anglican doctrine, then it was the latter and not the former which stood in need of correction or amendment. And indeed the Church of England had failed in some instances to accept the conclusions which follow from a study of Patristic teaching."[3]

The central concerns of the enquiry he was about to undertake are stated with consummate clarity. From the evidence afforded by Scripture and the Early Church, (by which is meant the ante-Nicene Church and the Fathers of the fifth century) it is possible to arrive at conclusions concerning whether Christ is present in the eucharist whether the sacrament should be adored and whether the eucharist is a sacrifice.[4]

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1. Boék, op cit, pp 139-140.
2. Wilberforce, The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, p 1. Hereafter cited as Eucharist.
3. ibid, p 2, cf pp 37, 369.
4. ibid, pp 5-6, 9, 15.

And the focus of the eucharistic rite, and so of the argument, is the act of consecration. The reality and necessity of this act at the eucharist is affirmed by the testimony of the ancient Church, and is witnessed to in the canonical injunction that only a duly ordained priest can celebrate the rite and effect consecration. Indeed, the very validity of the eucharist depends "upon the setting apart of the sacred elements" from all other similar species. Here is the point at which eucharist is most clearly distinguished from baptism. Though both sacraments were instituted by Christ, and though both are immediately concerned with "those blessings which He bestows upon His Mystical Body," the medium of grace in baptism is an act; in the eucharist it is the elements which are basic to the act. The water of baptism is not invested with any specific characteristic, and its being set apart for the sacramental purpose of baptism confers upon it on a "relative holiness". "The inward grace is associated with the act, and not with the element," and so neither the priestly office nor specific elements are required to vouchsafe the validity of baptism.[1] The reverse of all this obtains when our attention is directed toward the eucharist. Specific elements of bread and wine together with an authorised priest are essential to the validity of the ordinance. And the corollary of this is that the inward blessing conveyed by the eucharist is bestowed through its outward form. "The consecrated elements.....are not only a pledge assuring us of the inward gift, but they are the means through which that gift is communicated."[2] The sixteenth century Swiss Reformer, Zwingli, was the first to deny this position. He argued that the

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1. But without a priest there can be no branch of the Christian Church, ibid, pp 16-17, cf pp 17-18.
2. ibid, p 21.

eucharist "does not depend on Christ's acts towards us, but upon our acts towards Him" and further asserted that "the characteristic of the ordinance was not the consecration of the elements, but the disposition of the receiver."[1] Zwingli's error, to Wilberforce's mind, lay in his failure to recognise the perpetual importance of Christ's manhood for the communication of divine gifts. In other words, he denied the mediation of Christ as an abiding reality.[2] Calvin is also taken to task for teaching that the benefit of the eucharist depends merely upon the intention of the divine Giver. In Calvin's thought the elements in the eucharist are merely "indications of the purpose of God"; they are a seal or a pledge which convey to Christians "an assurance of God's inward action."[3] What is being denied in both theories, Wilberforce objects, at least by implication, is the objective efficacy of the sacrament. In contrast, he put forward a third approach, the Church-system, as he called it. By the "Church-system", the validity of the eucharist is made dependent upon the consecration. The elements are rightly regarded as the vehicles of the gift offered in consecration. Consecration thus becomes an effective act, causing a change. Though the change effected is "real" it is not "common": consecration makes sacramentally present that very body which once became incarnate from the womb of the Virgin Mary, and which once suffered on the cross.[4] And in support of this, Wilberforce makes appeal to the general insistence in the teaching of the ancient Church that the gift bestowed in the eucharist is bestowed through the elements. Liturgies,

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1. ibid, p 28.
2. ibid, pp 27, 29-30.
3. ibid, pp 35-6. Hooker is accused on this basis of teaching a "receptionist doctrine, pp 44-46.
4. Härdelin, op cit, pp 181-3, cf Eucharist, pp 91-2.

theologians, and customs are all summoned to witness that consecration is a mockery, unless the elements are rendered sacred.[1]

But what, more precisely, is the nature of this gift which is offered and received in the eucharist? Or, to rephrase the question, what is Wilberforce's teaching on the eucharistic Presence of C hrist? We have already seen that the attempt made in The Doctrine of the Incarnation to express a doctrine of the Real Presence without succumbing to crudely carnal implications cannot be accounted a success, and that both Manning and Keble both tried to help clarify his mind by offering their own thoughts. The result was that in The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, Wilberforce tries to present what has been called "an investigation of eucharistic theology, in which a 'scholastic' terminology was coupled with a synthetic thinking of considerable originality."[2]

Wilberforce yet again takes his stand with the Fathers of the early Church. The predicate of the words of institution of the eucharist, he insists, refers to Christ's body and blood, in his human nature. But by virtue of the hypostatic union the presence of Christ's deity is necessarily and inevitably involved also. "When Our Lord....spoke of His Body and Blood as bestowed upon His disciples in this sacrament, He must have been understood to imply that He Himself, Godhead, Soul, and Body, was the gift communicated. His Manhood was the medium through which His whole Person was dispensed." Or, in words which Wilberforce

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1. Eucharist, pp 47-88, cf p 86 especially.
2. Härdelin, op cit, pp 162-3.

quotes from Jeremy Taylor, "....when we say we believe Christ's Body to be really in the sacrament, we mean that Body, that Flesh, that was born of the Virgin Mary, that was crucified, dead, and buried.... I know none else that he had or hath; there is but one Body of Christ, natural and glorified."[1] This doctrine is not to be accounted impossible considering our ignorance of the nature of material substance, nor improbable considering that hereby Christ's body is regarded as the channel of grace.[2]

And it is in this doctrine of the Real Presence that we may perceive the climax of all Wilberforce's theology. His incarnational ecclesiology reaches its summit at this point. Because Christ is really present in it, "the Holy Eucharist is the carrying out of that act which took effect in the Incarnation of the Son of God.... It was by the Incarnation that God and man, the finite and the Infinite, were brought into relation; and that the graces which were inherent in the one, were communicated as a gift to the other. Now the medium through which these gifts are extended is not the Deity, but the Manhood of Christ. 'The bread which I give is My Flesh, which I will give for the life of the world'."[3] Or, more succintly, "....Our Lord's real Presence in the Holy Eucharistis a natural sequel to the doctrine of the Incarnation."[4]

The argument hitherto has been based exclusively on the witness of the Fathers, more recent authors being used only to support a position

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1. Eucharist, pp 91-2, Taylor, The Real Presence of Christ, i 11.
2. Eucharist, pp 94-101.
3. ibid, p 101.
4. ibid, p 109, cf p 108.

already established. But there is one question which, though it has seemed important to all theologians since the Reformation, did not weigh on the Church of the early Christian centuries - what is the relationship between the presence of Christ in the eucharist and the more precise presence in the eucharistic elements? In Western Christendom, the answer which had emerged during the mediaeval period was the doctrine of transubstantiation, the teaching, based on Aristotelean philosophy, that although the substance of bread and wine becomes at the consecration the very body and blood of the Lord, the accidents, what is felt, smelt, tasted, seen, remain constant. This doctrine, reaffirmed and clarified at the Council of Trent, was one of the major issues of theological dispute during the Reformation period, and has remained so since; in passing, we may note that transubstantiation has never been an article of faith in the Eastern Church. In the course of his discussion here, Wilberforce not only propounds his own doctrine of sacramental identity; he also gives precise definition to much scholastic terminology.

Wilberforce followed St. Augustine in distinguishing in the eucharist three parts - the *sacramentum* or outward part, the *res sacramenti* or the thing signified or inward part, and the *virtus sacramenti*, or the effect of partaking. With the aid of these terms, he worked out the distinctive character of the eucharist in relation to baptism. In baptism, the *virtus sacramenti* and the *res sacramenti* are identical; or, rather, in baptism, there is no *res*, only the *sacramentum* and the *virtus*.[1] In the eucharist, on the other hand,

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1. *ibid*, pp 119-121.

though the res and the virtus are communicated through the sacramentum, they are separate. The eucharistic elements themselves are instruments, but, in Hooker's distinction, not physical instruments but moral instruments: "By a physical instrument," Wilberforce explains, "is meant one which acts of itself, by means of those qualities which are inherent in it: by a moral instrument, one which derives its efficacy from the perpetual intervention of its employer's will."[1] The distinction is made with greater clarity by Härdelin: it is the difference between causation by the law of nature and causation by the law of grace.[2]

Great weight is attached in this discussion to an analysis of the copula 'is' in the dominical phrase, "This is my Body". Either it may be taken to express representation or it may indicate identity. But the very absence of any real or significant connexion between bread and wine on the one hand and the body and blood of Christ on the other, together with the absence of any special fitness of these elements (save on the sacramental principle) to represent body and blood is held by Wilberforce to be a sufficiently weighty objection against the first alternative of representation.[3] If the copula does not express representation, then it must, because there is no third possibility, express identity. But if identity, in what sense? Since Wilberforce has already argued that the eucharist is a moral and not a physical instrument, he denies that there is a physical identity between the elements and Christ's body. Rather, the identity exists sui generis, and

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1. ibid, pp 14-15.
2. Härdelin, op cit, pp 141-147.
3. Eucharist, pp 113-7.

"depends upon that mysterious law of consecration". He calls this, "sacramental identity": the sacramentum and the res sacramenti "make up together a real, but heterogeneous whole."[1] If two dissimilar things are thus united, whilst still retaining their own separate identities, in the sacrament, then the full idea of the sacrament means that this balance must not be upset. Four systems which have upset this balance are listed:

1. Omission of the res sacramenti destroys the very purpose of the sacrament. Yet this was the course which Zwingli adopted, and which was later followed by Hoadly, in acknowledging merely a symbolical presence of Christ in the eucharist.

2. The people of Capernaum fell into the opposite (and very rare!) error: they denied the reality of the sacramentum, by holding that Christ's very flesh was to be divided among faithful disciples. As an example of this error, Wilberforce can only name Anastasius Sinaita, who wrote against a sect of the Eutychians in the fourth century.[2]

3. Luther, more relevantly, confused the sacramentum and the res sacramenti. He was prepared to admit the reality of Christ's eucharistic presence, but denied its efficacy. Whilst recognising the existence of the res, he was prepared to treat it only as some form of emblem.[3]

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1. ibid, p 117.
2. ibid, pp 123-5. The Capernaumites are rarely mentioned in antiquity, yet Wilberforce dwells on them here and also in Sermons on the New Birth, p 89.
3. Eucharist, pp 129-137, cf p 137 especially.

4. The fourth erroneous system listed by Wilberforce is that of Calvin, who unduly distinguished between the eucharistic elements and the eucharistic gift. To put it in Wilberforce's terms, he separated the sacramentum from the res sacramenti, whilst assigning full value to the virtus sacramenti.

The balance which Wilberforce is advocating is a belief in a real presence in the eucharist, connected with the gifts themselves. And this involves him in defining more clearly what he means by the res sacramenti.

The presence of Christ in the eucharist is of the supernatural order, not of the natural. By virtue of the hypostatic union, both humanity and deity must be present.[1] But the presence of Christ is also sacramental, and not sensible: it is not susceptible of analysis by the human senses. It is this assertion which relieves Wilberforce of any difficulties which might arise were the eucharistic presence said to be spatial. Christ's natural body is now in heaven, but in the eucharist, his presence in a supernatural and sacramental way is vouchsafed, "- the presence, that is, of a res sacramenti, which is not, in itself, an object to the senses of men. We have no reason therefore to suppose that form and outline belong to it; because these are the conditions through which things become an object to the senses of men."[2] Thirdly, and lastly, the eucharistic presence is real, and not merely symbolical (as Zwingli) or virtual (as Calvin). This is the necessary

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1. ibid, pp 155-6, cf p 158.
2. ibid, p 164.

consequence of holding not only a sacramentum and a virtus sacramenti, but a res sacramenti also.[1] This distinction is illustrated thus:

> "The Emperor Charlemagne might be said to be present figuratively, or symbolically, throughout his vast empire, because justice was everywhere administered in his name: he was present throughout it virtually, for such was the energy of his character, that his influence was everywhere felt: but really, he was only present in his palace at Aix-la-Chapelle. If Our Blessed Lord's Humanity had no other than that natural presence which belongs to common man, His Real Presence would in like manner be confined to that one place which He occupies in heaven. But by reason of these attributes which His Manhood possesses through its oneness with God, He has likewise a supernatural presence; the operations of which are restricted only by His own will. And His will is to be present in the Holy Eucharist; not indeed as an object to the senses of the receiver, but through the intervention of consecrated elements. So that His Presence does not depend upon the thought and imaginations of men, but upon His own supernatural power, and upon the agency of the Holy Ghost. He is present Himself, and not merely by influence, effects and operation; by that essence, and in that substance, which belongs to Him as the true Head of mankind. And therefore He is really present; and gives His Body to be the res sacramenti, or thing signified."[2]

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1. ibid, pp 165.6.
2. ibid, pp 177-8.

And the natural consequence of this teaching was that "the Holy Eucharist, like the Incarnation itself, is thus rendered an objective fact, which has an existence independently of our conceptions and feelings."[1]

Is it possible to apply any tests to this doctrine of the real presence? Wilberforce thought that there were such tests, and two particularly which had been of service in the early Church were relevant to his situation in the mid-nineteenth century. First, it was a test of a man's doctrine if he were prepared to treat with adoration the eucharistic elements. "The plainest proof which men can give that they suppose Christ to be really present in the Holy Eucharist, is to render Him Divine honour."[2] The second test was the manducatio indignorum, natural consequence of the doctrine of sacramental identity, and evidently implied by St. Paul's words to the wayward Christians of Corinth: "It follows that anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of desecrating the body and blood of the Lord."[3] Although the sacramentum and the res sacramenti are, according to Wilberforce, indissolubly linked, the virtus sacramenti depended upon the state of the communicant. Christ's eucharistic presence is an objective reality, but the saving effect of that presence is not an automatic, mechanical process, for the divine presence is not after the natural order, but the supernatural. The eucharist is a moral, not a physical, instrument. This point was brought into the

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1. ibid, p 173.
2. ibid, pp 297-8.
3. ibid, pp 307f. St. Paul's injunction (1 Corinthians xi, 27) is clearly in mind in the quotation from St. Cyprian.

centre of the nineteenth century eucharistic controversy during the legal proceedings over the doctrine taught by Archdeacon Denison, and Denison was indeed condemned for holding the manducatio indignorum.[1]

Inseparable from any consideration of the doctrine of the real presence is the doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice, for this latter is implied by and illustrative of the former. In Wilberforce's understanding, the permanence of Christ's mediation as the God-man is shown in his heavenly intercession as High-Priest, continually pleading the merits of his sacrificial death. The heavenly liturgy is of its essence sacrificial. And the necessary corollary and counterpart to this heavenly sacrificial liturgy is the sacrificial worship offered by the Church on earth, truly participating thereby in the continual mediation of Christ. "The Holy Eucharist...is fitly called the Christian Sacrifice, not only because it is the chief rite of common worship, but because it is the peculiar act, wherein the effectual intercession which is exercised in heaven by the Church's Head, reaches down to this lower sphere of our earthly existence. It is no repetition of the sacrifice of the cross, nor any substitution of another victim...."[2] The efficacy of the eucharistic sacrifice is based entirely on the efficacy of the sacrifice of Calvary: the sacramental character of the eucharist is the root of its sacrificial character. We may note that Wilberforce placed greater stress on the historic sacrifice of Christ in The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist than he had done in his earlier work on the incarnation, whilst at the same time

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1. Härdelin, op cit, pp 174-6. Keble and Pusey petitioned against the verdict.
2. Eucharist, p 351.

being clearer as to the precise nature of the eucharistic sacrifice in the later work. But in both works the relation of the eucharistic sacrifice to the heavenly intercession of Christ is a constant.

If the eucharist can truly be said to be a sacrifice, what is the oblation? This question revolves around another - whether both the sacramentum and the res sacramenti are offered, or whether, as most would readily agree, it is the sacramentum only which is sacrificially offered. Wilberforce argues for the former position, but is also concerned to nail the latter. If, as most would agree, the sacramentum alone is offered, then the eucharist becomes a memorial or a commemorative offering. The eucharistic elements are used to conjure up the recollection of what Christ did on the night of his betrayal. This understanding of the eucharist is but a prelude to a full understanding of the eucharist in which the res sacramenti, Christ himself present, is offered.[1] None of this must be taken as a denial or devaluation of the devotions of the faithful, for it is the Christian community itself which is involved in the oblation. Following St. Augustine, Wilberforce insists that the Christian sacrifice is the sacrifice of "the many who make up one body in Christ." It is indeed, "the offering up of the collective Church, Christ's Mystical Body, but it is also the offering up of Christ Himself, by whom that Body is sanctified."[2] Eucharistic sacrifice is thus related not only to the offering of Calvary and the perpetual heavenly intercession of Christ, but also to the very community, the Church, which pleads the sacrifice. Here Wilberforce

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1. ibid, pp 373ff and especially p 389.
2. ibid, pp 390-392, quoting St. Augustine, de civitate Dei, x, 6.

anticipates by over fifty years the rediscovery of this Patristic insight by a number of Roman Catholic theologians. Vonier, de Lubac and Mersch all teach a similar doctrine. And their work was awarded the seal of papal approbation when Pius XII published the encyclical Mystici Corporis Christi in 1943, taking up these ideas and offering them to the faithful.[1]

Clearly all this was very unwholesome fare for contemporary evangelicals. But Wilberforce's own circle welcomed it with great enthusiasm. Samuel Wilberforce, it is true, was not altogether convinced. He wanted to insist that the disposition of the communicant was an essential factor in the reality of the divine presence. And, further, he felt that his brother's work was more concerned with the mode of the presence that with asserting the reality of it. As he wrote to Robert, "...you...confound when you come to argue on this matter, the assertion of the reality of the fact of the presence with the opinion as to what is necessary for such reality which you have formed, and which reality your mode of reasoning about it seems to me to treat as being a natural reality, to be argued about according to natural laws." Samuel followed this letter up with another a few days later asking Robert if he taught a full sacramental presence or merely a partial one.[2]

Newman, in one of his surprisingly rare comments on Robert Wilberforce's work reported to Robert himself that The Doctrine of the

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1. See, e.g. works by Vonier, Mersch, de Lubac.
2. R.G. Wilberforce, Life of Samuel Wilberforce, II, pp 105, 240-2.

Holy Eucharist "has excited great interest among Catholics, and our Bishop was speaking of it in terms which would please you," though Newman's own keen desire to welcome Wilberforce into the Roman communion casts a shadow across this remark.[1] But that Robert's work was not altogether pleasing to Roman Catholics is confirmed by another letter of Samuel's in 1853: "I hear that the perverts in their secret communications regard your work as the most dangerous entire denial of the great doctrine of Transubstantiation ever put forth."[2]

But perhaps it was from the pen of Gladstone that the most fulsome praise was forthcoming. At the end of October, 1853, he wrote to Wilberforce: "I cannot remember the appearance of any work of Theology from which I should expect anything like the same amount of real revival and progress, both in doctrine and in the habits of thought by which doctrine is embraced and assimilated, that yours I trust is destined to produce.

"If there is an especial feature of your book which beyond all others gives it strength, it seems to me to be this, that you have maintained so faithfully the historical and traditional character in it, and have theorised so little; except in those parts where theory was appropriate and even necessary, viz. the rationale you have given of the Lutheran and Calvinian opinions, and of the tendency of various

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1. Letters and Diaries, XV, pp 495-8. Newman's only other recorded reference to Wilberforce's theological work is contained in a letter written after his premature death, in which he lamented Wilberforce's ignorance of the doctrine of the immaculate conception when he wrote the Incarnation. See Letters and Diaries, XIX, p 437, cf XIII, 456-7 and Newman, Meditations and Devotions, 115-126.
2. Quoted, Newsome, op cit, p 381.

schools in the Church from peculiar circumstances to derange the equilibrium of the true doctrine."[1]

Pusey too was appreciative of the work and seems to have been influenced by it. He celebrated the tenth anniversary of his controversial eucharistic sermon with another on The Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist; with a certain defiance this, like its predecessor, was preached before the University of Oxford. Pusey acknowledged in this sermon the temptation to be too precise about what happens in the eucharist, but if we are prepared to take the Bible at its most simple, there is the double affirmation that "the outward elements remain, and still that there is a real Presence of the Body of Christ".[2] This is the starting point from which he develops a doctrine of the real, sacramental presence, though insisting that that presence is objective.[3] This similarity of language between Wilberforce and Pusey emerges more clearly in Pusey's The Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ..., a reply to William Goode's The Nature of Christ's Presence, which, in its turn, was an aswer to Wilberforce's Holy Eucharist. In his book, Pusey followed Wilberforce's doctrine of the real, sacramental presence, and seeks to justify both adoration of the sacrament and also the manducatio indignorum. The doctrine and the touchstones of the doctrine are Wilberforce's.[4]

But it was Archdeacon Denison who carried the torch of Wilberforce's

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1. Newsome, op cit, p 381.
2. pp 12, 14.
3. ibid, p 22.
4. p xv, xix.

doctrine. In Wells Cathedral he preached two sermons on the real presence in the eucharist, the first on 7th August and the other on 6th November, 1853. In the first sermon he made the claim that he had always held the doctrine he was enunciating, and no question of his sincerity or his truthfulness is intended in saying that this doctrine is the same as that put forward by Wilberforce. The reality of Christ's presence in the eucharist is categorically, almost defiantly, asserted, though, unlike Wilberforce, Denison does not investigate the mode of this presence. Three integral parts to the doctrine of the eucharist are identified: the fact of the real presence, the spiritual character of that presence, and the fact that all who communicate at the altar receive the real presence. It is this last point which is developed in the second sermon. The manducatio indignorum alone is the best test of the doctrine of the real presence, for Lutherans, holding as they do a doctrine of consubstantiation, could adore the elements. In a third sermon, without title, Denison came yet closer to Wilberforce, making use of the latter's distinction of sacramentum, res sacramenti and virtus sacramenti.[1]

That Wilberforce's friends should have greeted his work on the eucharist with approbration was to be expected. But assessment of his work cannot rest exclusively on the reactions of friends and theological sympathisers. That his work was in demand cannot be doubted: within a year, Holy Eucharist had gone to a third reprinting, and even in 1885, by which time advances in the historical and linguistic study of the Scriptures had put theological questions into a new perspective, it was

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1. Denison, The Real Presence, pp 47, 101-124.

still viable from his publisher's point of view to produce a uniform edition of his works. But perhaps the surest guide to an author's significance lies with his critics. That so many Evangelical writers found themselves taking up their pens to counter Wilberforce's doctrine is a more valuable assessment of the reaction he provoked among his contemporaries than all the congratulatory notes of his friends. But, we must be careful to note, this evangelical reaction is part of a general reply to the later developments of the Oxford Movement.

The first reply to be published to Wilberforce's Holy Eucharist was a short, anonymous tract, marked by eirenical temper and so strangely removed from the impassioned fervour which characterised the debate about the eucharist in the second half of the nineteenth century. This Ratification on Archdeacon Wilberforce's Work on the Eucharist[1] began with criticism of Wilberforce for slipping rather deftly from the witness of the first four Christian centuries to the witness of the sixth and seventh, as though there were no difference (though the anonymous author notes, as Wilberforce had done, that there is a dearth of liturgical material from the ante-Nicene age). The position of the tract is that the essence of the eucharist is commemoration: it is an act of solemn remembrance, similar to the passover meal, which in origin is what the eucharist was. But integral to this commemoration is communion, and Wilberforce is criticised for advocating non-communicating high masses. In fact, Wilberforce had merely pointed out that in the early Church a daily eucharist was the norm, and though this was impracticable in the nineteenth century, a

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1. Published in 1853.

return to more frequent celebration of the sacrament might mean that some would not communciate, for the simply reason that they had not sufficiently prepared themselves to do so.[1]

The great rush of reaction to Wilberforce came in the following year, 1854, and the temper of this reaction was unmistakably hostile.

C.S. Bird in his The Sacramental and Priestly System examined: or, Strictures on Archdeacon Wilberforce's works on the Incarnation and Eucharist acts as a spokemen for many of Wilberforce's theological adversaries when he writes, "Sacramental religion, and spiritual religion, cannot co-exist peaceably in the bosom of the same Church."[2] Bird presses this point: the distinction between sacramentum, res sacramenti and virtus sacramenti which Wilberforce has drawn and the use of the manducatio indignorum as test of Christ's real presence are simply alien to the teachings of the Church of England as set out in The Book of Common Prayer and the XXXIX Articles of Religion. Like so many of those who published answers to Wilberforce's doctrine, Bird bases his case on the formularies hammered out in the sixteenth century, and almost raises these to the status of definitive, not to say infallible, pronouncements on doctrine. Because Wilberforce has gone against such pronouncements, his own loyalty to the Church of England is automatically called into question. But Wilberforce had made it quite clear in Holy Eucharist that the method he would follow

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1. See the lengthy discussion in the concluding chapter of Eucharist, pp 428-482. Härdelin, op cit, pp 287-90, makes the useful point that the token of a doctrine may be used as the test of that doctrine.
2. Eucharist, p 146.

would be the traditional Anglican one: preachers "were not to propound anything except that which is consistent with the teaching of the Old and New Testament, and that which the Catholic Fathers and ancient Bishops have deduced from its teaching." Again, in the final chapter, "The preceding chapters have been addressed to those who recognize the interpretative office of the Primitive Church, and suppose themselves to retain every fundamental principle which she admitted. Such has always been the profession of the Church of England, as avowed in her Canons and Formularies; and her most approved writers have constantly declared, that they believe her to approach the nearest of any Christian community upon earth, to the primitive model." Wilberforce does not hesitate to push home the real meaning of this assertion. "If there should be any point, therefore, of vital importance - anything which goes beyond those variable questions of external regulation, which may fairly be left to every age and nation - anything affecting the foundation of her faith or practice, in which our Church has departed from the maxims of Antiquity, her own principles demand that it should be examined and amended."[1]

Bird had singled out Wilberforce's doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice and the manducatio indignorum for criticism, and in doing so he had adumbrated the points of contention which later, and more formidable, Evangelical writers were to take up. A two-volume work on The Nature of Christ's Presence in the Eucharist came from the pen of Wilberforce's old adversary, William Goode, in 1856, but Wilberforce shared the brunt of the attack with Pusey and Denison. Like Bird before him, Goode used

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1. Eucharist, pp. 2, 428. The emphasis is mine.

the Anglican formularies as the norm of Scriptural interpretation, and from this position asserted a spiritual presence of Christ in the eucharist which tended toward receptionism. His denial of the doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice was based on a nice interpretation of the Fathers: whereas they had been driven to postulate a real presence doctrine because they asserted the sacrificial nature of the eucharist, Goode's denial of the real presence relieves him of the embarrassment of the notion of sacrifice.[1]

Somewhat later, T.S.L. Vogan, a canon of Chichester Cathedral, published his True Doctrine of the Eucharist (1871). This was, in fact, a rewriting and re-editing of his earlier work, Nine Lectures on the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which, in its original form, had been delivered to trainee teachers and to theological students at Chichester in 1848. Vogan's own theological position was unchanged in the two works, but the second book afforded him the opportunity to consider the teaching of the Oxford Movement on the eucharist. For himself, Vogan was content to believe that Christ's presence in the eucharist was by representation and in spiritual power and effect. He denied the real presence and eucharistic sacrifice, and so was led also to deny that the faithful could or should adore the eucharistic elements and that the unworthy do in fact receive the body and blood of Christ. He called the doctrine of the real, objective presence, of which Wilberforce was the foremost advocate, a mutilation and an ignoring of the dominical words of institution.[2] With, or so he claimed, stern common sense, Vogan

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1. II, Appendix A.
2. p 100.

dismissed Wilberforce's idea that the gift received in the eucharist is the glorified body of Christ on the grounds that at the time of the first eucharist (or Last Supper), Christ had not yet suffered, let alone been glorified.[1] A simple insistence on the words of institution afforded Vogan sufficient doctrine: these words allowed that Christ was present in some, unspecified way in the eucharist, and made questionable such descriptions of that presence as 'real' or 'objective'. In the second part of his book Vogan turned to the issue of eucharistic sacrifice. He begins with an inconclusive search for a definition of the word itself, and goes on to reject as "illogical and inconclusive" Wilberforce's own teaching on eucharistic sacrifice. The eucharist is not, Vogan maintained, the sacrifice of either the sacramentum or the res sacramenti, but of praise.[2] Yet, for all this disagreement, Vogan was not unappreciative of Holy Eucharist, considering that it showed learning equal to that of Pusey, but with a method somewhat more logical. "I know not whether his sad defection from our Church has lessened the esteem in which his work was at first regarded: but its great ability and deep piety will ever secure a high character for it amongst other words on this subject."[3]

One of the grounds on which Vogan had criticised Wilberforce was his exegesis of St. John vi, which Wilberforce had used in defence of a doctrine of the real presence.[4] Theophilus Secundus, the pseudonym used by the author of another tract, The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist,

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1. ibid, p 122.
2. ibid, p 419, cf p 477.
3. ibid, p 89.
4. Eucharist, pp 181ff.

as propounded by Archdeacon Wilberforce..., had earlier asserted that St. John vi is not primarily concerned with the eucharist, and that, therefore, Wilberforce's argument falls to the ground. But most modern scholars would take Wilberforce's side on this matter of exegesis, seeing St. John vi as dominated by the theme of Christ as the bread of life, and inexplicable apart from the Christian eucharist.[1] More interesting is the argument used in this tract that the doctrine of the real presence interferes with the office of the Holy Spirit. But this line had been anticipated by Wilberforce. His answer was that to follow this thought through involved the implication that the actions of Christ and the Spirit are successive and not coincident: and that implication Wilberforce labelled Sabellianism.[2] Further, the gift in the eucharist is said to be that same body which was born of the Virgin Mary, supernaturally present. The agent of this supernatural presence was, and could be, none other than the Holy Spirit.[3]

Mention must also be made of one final tract - John Taylor's Appeal to the Archbishop of York. Taylor was a clergyman in Yorkshire who, in common with many of his contemporaries, had a passionate opposition to everything which savoured of Roman Catholicism. His purpose in addressing an appeal to his Archbishop was not to accuse Wilberforce of heresy, but rather to demonstrate the identity of the Archdeacon's teaching with that of Rome, and its antagonism to that of the English Church."[4]

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1. e.g. C.H. Dodd, C.K. Barratt in their commentaries on the Gospel.
2. Eucharist, p 313.
3. ibid, pp 334-5. This is another point at which Wilberforce anticipates some of the insights of twentieth century theology, witness the concern with the epiclesis in Anglican liturgical revision.
4. pp ii-iii. Theophilus Secundus, amongst others, touched on this point also, op cit, p 13.

Taylor focuses his attention on the doctrine of transubstantiation, before noting the identity of Wilberforce's teaching with that of the Tridentine decrees: indeed, at twenty-five points Wilberforce agrees with Roman Catholic eucharistic teaching. What, Taylor asks, is Wilberforce doing as an Anglican?[1] The following year saw the publication of a calmer and more detailed answer to Wilberforce from Taylor: but the latter work marked no change in Taylor's theology.[2]

A sense of profound sadness is engendered by reading these attempts to reply to Wilberforce's most scholarly and thoughtful work. There is no attempt to answer him in his own terms, or, at least, on the basis of his own authorities. Instead, there is the futile and headlong clash between those in the Church for whom authority resided in the teaching of the undivided Church and those whose emphasis lay with the sixteenth century Reformers. Indeed, the evangelicals, steeped as they were in study of Scripture and Reformation doctrine, could not match Wilberforce's acquaintance with the Fathers. But the sadness does not rest exclusively at the level of scholarship. Many of the evangelical reactions to Wilberforce reflect a nervousness in English society to the so-called papal aggression. By 1853 both Newman and Manning (amongst many others) had become Roman Catholics, Pope Pius IX had restored the Roman Catholic hierarchy and Wiseman had issued his excited and defiant pastoral letter, 'From the Flaminian Gate'. The Oxford Movement and all associated with it were felt as a threat to the purity of English religion: the barriers must go up; the citadel defended.

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1. pp 74-5, 76, cf pp 37, 40-70.
2. The True Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist.

And in such an atmosphere of passionate fear, calm and sober reflection are at a discount.

There is a third cause for sadness: Wilberforce's own submission to the Roman see and his premature death stifled any useful discussion about his teaching. To the evangelicals who had urged Wilberforce to become Roman Catholic, this was the final confirmation of their fears. The voice of prejudice identified the reading of his works with following their author to Roman Catholicism. To the Roman Catholics, the fact that Wilberforce had written his theological works as an Anglican was sufficient to render them suspect. From the moment of its publication, the history of The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist was inextricably linked with the personal history of its author: and it is to that history that we must now turn.

THE ROAD TO ROME

With the publication of The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, Wilberforce completed his theological synthesis. But there was yet one more book to write - his last - and that book was intimately linked with his own history.

As early as 1849 a writer in The Church of England Quarterly Review had offered Wilberforce some gratuitous advice: he should "follow out the principles of Tractarianism to their legitimate consequences, according as they are exhibited in the Church of Rome."[1] It would be pleasant to think that this advice was based on a perceptive assessment of Wilberforce's thought. It is more likely to have been born of bigotry and the memory of 1845, for the spectre of Newman's conversion to Roman Catholicism still haunted the Anglican mind. But when did the process which led to Wilberforce's conversion begin? It would be dangerous to attempt a precise dating. Wilberforce's mind was slow, scholarly, careful, not inclined to impetuous acts. But if date must be given, it was the Gorham Judgment in 1851 which raised in Wilberforce's mind the question of church-authority, and, more particularly, the months after the publication of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist which witnessed, in Newsome's phrase, "The Battle of Burton Agnes". For Wilberforce's was not a lone struggle of conscience: there were those already within the Roman fold who beckoned him to join them - Newman, Manning, and, a former curate of his, William Henn all used reason and emotional appeal to secure his conversion. On the Anglican side, there were those who were urging him to stand firm - Gladstone, Keble, Hook,

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1. Vol XXV (1848), p 284.

Pusey, and his brother Samuel. Justly has Newsome commented that "perhaps never in the history of man have two such formidable teams of contestants arrayed themselves on rival sides to dispute for the prize of an individual soul."[1] And, while all this was going on, Wilberforce himself was further weighed by matters of serious concern in his domestic life. His brother-in-law was dying at Burton Agnes; his wife, Jane, herself died in January, 1853. His younger son was having difficulty settling down.[2] The situation was almost unbearable.

But there was some consolation. Gladstone, for one, was in no doubt of Wilberforce's significance as a theologian. He wrote to welcome The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist in October 1853:

> "I cannot remember the appearance of any work of Theology from which I should expect anything like the same amount of real revival and progress, both in doctrine and in the habits of thought by which doctrine is embraced and assimilated, that yours I trust is destined to produce.
>
> If there is an especial feature of the book which beyond all others gives it strength, it seems to me to be this, that you have maintained so faithfully the historical and traditional character in it, and have theorised so little; except in those parts where theory was appropriate and even necessary,

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1. Newsome, The Parting of Friends, p 383. In this and the following section Newsome movingly relates the circumstances and events of Wilberforce's last months as an Anglican.
2. ibid, p 397.

viz. the rationale you have given of the Lutheran and Calvinian opinions, and of the tendency of various schools in the Church from particular circumstances to derange the equilibrium of the true doctrine."[1]

Gladstone wrote to Wilberforce a long series of letters in 1854, when he realised that he was drifting away from the Church of England. Perhaps the most remarkable of these letters is the last, written when Wilberforce had in fact already resigned his preferments:

"It is something much deeper than the Royal Supremacy which is at the root of my anxiety. Under an impulse as one had hoped of Almighty God, you have for many years past brought your whole time and strength to bear upon the vital and central truth of Christianity, have resusitated in many souls a faith which had sunk to the condition of dry bones, and have by the sheer force and merit of your labours established an association between your own name and the living tradition of the Catholic faith in the Church of England respecting the Incarnation, which I can only compare, in our smaller sphere, and on a lower level, to what the association was between the name of St. Augustine and the doctrine of original sin, or the name of St. Athanasius and that of the Trinity. I am not as I trust a flatterer, and I am not speaking of degree but of kind when I venture to affirm so remarkable a parallelism.

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1. Correspondence on Church and Religion of W.E. Gladstone, ed D.C. Lathbury, ii, p 288.

> It is at any rate not invented for the occasion; for I have long seen or seemed to see, and said to others, that the care and charge of this great dogma and of it consequences had in the Providence of God evolved for our day and generation upon you."[1]

But, in the event, it was not Gladstone's, but Manning's voice which carried the day. The question of church-authority had been in Wilberforce's mind since the Gorham Judgment. In 1851 he had published a Sketch of the History of Erastianism, and had included in it, as appendices, two sermons on "The Reality of Church Ordinances" and "The Principle of Church Authority". Manning was not slow to take the cue. He offered Wilberforce some advice after the publication of The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist as to his next work. "Your private judgment has convinced you of the Incarnation, Baptism, the Eucharist. Apply it now to the third and last clause of the Baptismal Creed, 'I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Catholic Church.' Write a book on this next. To go on with details of doctrine is to wink hard at the point."[2] The advice was accepted, and Wilberforce published his findings in his last work, An Inquiry into the Principles of Church-Authority.

In his book, Wilberforce moved straight into the attack against those who elevate Scripture above the Church: "the Church", he affirms, "was in existence before the New Testament was given"[3] Again, "The mystical Body of Christ has an organic life, like His Body natural;

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1. ibid, i, pp 367-8.
2. Purcell, Life of Manning, ii, p 35.
3. Principles of Church-Authority, p 9.

for Christ was personally Incarnate in that Body which was slain, but by power and presence will He be Incarnate in His Church till the end of the world. As the Gospels are the record of His Presence in the one, so is Church History that of His Presence in the other."[1] It is the Church which determines and guards Scripture; and it is, therefore, the Church which also is the proper interpreter of Scripture.[2] But the Church's authority extends not only over matters of Scripture, but also over all matters of faith.[3] And, granted that the Church had authority, it cannot but be the case that that authority is perpetual, for its authority is founded upon the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in it.[4]

Wilberforce then turns his attention to the origin of the episcopate and the primacy of St. Peter, before considering the more specific issue of the standing of the Church of England after the Reformation. He concludes:

> "The Church's authority....depends on that presence of the Spirit, which gives it life. This authority has resided first in its completeness in the Person of Our Lord, when He was manifest in the Flesh. He was pleased to bestow it in a plenary manner on the College of His Apostles. From there it has descended to their successors, the Bishops throughout the world. But to preserve the unity of this

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1. ibid, p 5.
2. ibid, p 25.
3. ibid, p' 34-6.
4. ibid, p 39.

wide-spread commission, Our Lord was pleased to give an especial promise to one of His Apostles, and to bestow upon him a name and an office derived from Himself.... The Primacy of St. Peter ripened into the Supremacy of the Pope.

"But there comes a change. There arises a powerful monarch in a remote land, who resolves to separate the Church of his nation from the unity of Christendom. He effects his purpose by force or fraud, and bids it recognise a new principle of unity in himself. He passes to his account, and his children rule after him. But this new principle of unity is found in time to be insufficient. No sooner is the grasp of the civil ruler relaxed, than a host of parties divide the land. The very thought of unity, and hope of concord, is gradually lost. The national Church is surrounded by sects, and torn by dissensions. Intra muros peccatur ab extra. And can it be doubted what advice would be given to its children by the great Saint, who looked forth upon a somewhat similar spectacle in his native land; and whose life was expended in winning back his brethren one by one to the unity of Christendom? He did not think that the national unity of Africa was any pledge of safety to the Donatists; or that the number and succession of their Bishops entitled them to respect. 'Come, brethren, if you wish to be inserted in the vine; for we grieve, when we see you lie thus cut off from it. Number the Bishops from the very seat of Peter, and in that list of Fathers see what has been the succession; this

is the rock, against which the proud gates of Hell do not prevail."[1]

Thus Wilberforce's mind was made up: the die was cast. But what was now inevitable was briefly delayed. In his letter of October, 1853, Gladstone had touched on the quiet welcome which had been accorded to The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist. "I was a short time ago greatly astonished at the circumstance which you had mentioned, and which I had noticed - namely, that there was no uproar, and even no controversy, about the work: but since I have read, and witnessed the manner in which you have set out the doctrine, my surprise has vanished. Your method of proceeding by what is positive rather than by what is polemical has the effect of placing you within the guard, so to speak, of opponents."[2] And, indeed, the quiet welcome has already been noted. But now in the summer of 1854 rumours of prosecution stayed Wilberforce's hand. On receipt of the first proofs for The Principles of Church Authority, Wilberforce wrote to the Archbishop of York, recalling his subscription to the Articles of Religion and offering his resignation from all his preferments. In the course of his letter, he indicated that though The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist had been before the public for some sixteen months, no legal actions had been taken against him, despite rumours to that effect.[3] Archbishop Musgrave replied the following day (August 31st), accepting the resignation. But six days later, The Yorkshire Gazette announced that the Archbishop

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1. ibid, pp 283-4. The Principles went to a second edition in 1854, but this final chapter was not included in that edition.
2. Correspondence on Church and Religion of W.E. Gladstone, ii, p 288.
3. Principles of Church-Authority, p vii.

himself had determined to take legal action. Wilberforce wrote to him immediately, asking that, were the reports true, he be allowed to stay his resignation in order to face the charge and defend his views. Musgrave replied icily:

> "My dear Sir, I saw in the Yorkshire Gazette the paragraph to which your letter of this morning alludes. By whom, or at what suggestion that paragraph was inserted, I have no knowledge whatever, any more than you have.
>
> On the receipt of your resignation, dated August 30, I gave orders to discontinue all further inquiry on the subject of the 'complaint' which had been laid before me. To that I adhere, as well as to my acceptance of your resignation. I am, my dear Sir, Your faithful servant, T. Ebor."[1]

In October, he sought refuge in Paris, and there, on All Saints Day, he was received into communion with the see of Rome. The French capital had been deliberately chosen in order to avoid embarrassing Samuel, who, since 1845, had been Bishop of Oxford. Samuel was keenly pained by Robert's decision; he felt "as if my head should go": "it is a hard and sad blow". But he admired Robert's courage and offered him his prayers.[2] Manning, on the other hand, was overjoyed.

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1. ibid, p ix.
2. Quoted in P. Thureau-Dangin, The English Catholic Revival in the Nineteenth Century, ii, p 58, who also quotes Gladstone's view that Wilberforce, by leaving the Church of England, had "inflicted upon it the greatest injury which it was capable of enduring". Cf R.G. Wilberforce, Life of Bishop Wilberforce, ii, pp 258-266.

"My dearest Robert - I have this moment opened your letter. My first act was to say a Gloria. I know what I must have cost you; for I know what it cost me. No one but God knows how much. Only one sorrow in life ever approached it.[1] But the consolation is sevenfold, and has grown, deepened, and multiplied year by year. I know what it means to be 'refreshed with a multitude of peace'."[2]

The last four years of Robert's life in the Roman obedience were not happy. Manning had once suggested that Wilberforce might establish a community of priests, devoted to "study, writing and preaching"; but nothing came of this suggestion.[3] After his submission, Wilberforce seems at first only to have considered the possibility of lecturing on geology and mineralogy at Newman's University at Dublin.[4] But in 1856 he decided to prepare for orders. He was hesitant about the fact that he had been twice married, but this obstacle was removed by the Pope himself, who arranged for him to be enrolled at the Acadamia Ecclesiastica, where Manning also had studied. After a holiday in Germany, he began his studies in Rome, but his health was not good. In January 1857 he was much affected by the wet season in Rome, and eventually managed to escape to a healthier climate. But to no avail. On February 3rd, he died at Albano, a few months before he was due to be ordained priest. Newman spoke for more than himself when, years

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1. The reference is to the deaty of his wife, Caroline.
2. Purcell, op cit, ii, p 44.
3. ibid, ii, p 33.
4. Newman, Letters and Diaries, XVI, p 476 (4 June 1855). As late as November 1856 Wilberforce's name was being mentioned in connection with the Irish University, the Bishop of Kerry thinking that he might be a suitable candidate to succeed Newman as Rector, Letters and Diaries, XVII, p 462, cf, p 501, note 3.

later, he commented that the death of Robert Wilberforce was the only time he found it impossible to accept God's will.[1]

As some twenty years before, the journey to Germany had effectively marked the end of Wilberforce's Oxford career, so, in hindsight, the journey to France and then to Rome marked the end of his career as theologian and writer. To speculate on what might have been is as fascinating as it is dangerous. For Wilberforce was the one man capable of acting as a mediator between Manning and Newman: he alone of the converts to Roman Catholicism had been intimate with both men in their Anglican days. How different the history of English Roman Catholicism in the second half of the nineteenth century might have been, had there been such an intermediary. But in 1857 Wilberforce was dead, and with him were buried these hopes, and indeed, his own theology.

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1. So M. Trevor, Newman. Light in Winter, p 157. But the quotation has not been located in Letters and Diaries.

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