

ABSTRACT

In the early nineteenth century, the Church of England faced a crisis of self-understanding as a result of political and social changes occurring in Britain. The church was forced to determine what it meant to be the established church of the nation in light of these new circumstances. In the 1830s, a revival took place within the Church of England which prompted a renewal of the theology and practice of the church, including the Eucharist. This revival, known as the Oxford Movement, breathed new life into the High Church party. A heightened emphasis was placed on the sacramental life and on the Eucharist as the focus of worship. Adherents of the Oxford Movement developed a Eucharistic theology which promoted a closer connection between the elements and Christ's presence in the Eucharist than did the earlier Anglican tradition.

One of the exponents of this Eucharistic theology was Robert Isaac Wilberforce (1802-1857). The second son of anti-slavery crusader William Wilberforce, Robert was raised in a family of prominent Anglican Evangelicals. At the University of Oxford he came under the influence of his tutor, John Keble, who was one of the four leaders of the Oxford Movement during its heyday. The Gorham case, whose focus was ostensibly the question of baptismal regeneration, turned into a debate on the state's control over the established church. Robert

Wilberforce was called upon to articulate the sacramental theology of the Oxford Movement, which he did in his three major works, *The Doctrine of Holy Baptism: With Remarks to the Rev. W. Goode's "Effects of Infant Baptism,"* *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ in its relation to Mankind and the Church* and *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*.

In attempting to reconcile catholicising and Evangelical views within the Church of England Wilberforce presented an understanding of Eucharistic presence that may be said to be a synthesis of various Christian positions on the subject. Wilberforce views sacraments as natural outgrowths of the Incarnation. In the case of the Eucharist, the elements contain the spiritual presence of the risen and glorified Christ. Wilberforce maintains that as a result of consecration the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. This presence is not a physical one, however. When received by faithful believers in a state of spiritual fitness, the elements convey the gift of God's grace. The importance placed on consecration is consistent with the catholic tradition of Christianity while the emphasis on the spiritual state of the recipient is a feature of the Evangelical tradition.

This thesis examines Wilberforce's writings on sacramental theology to determine how he reached his understanding of presence. We shall see that in addition to turning to Scripture he looked back to the early centuries of the Christian era to find sources that would be acceptable to all Christians. Although he may not have deliberately intended to do so, Wilberforce bridges the gaps between the factions within the Church of England on the subject of Eucharistic presence. By extension, it can be said to appeal to other Christian groups as well.

In looking to the past for answers to the dilemmas of his time Wilberforce was following a path similar to that taken by continental European theologians of the nineteenth century in their efforts to rediscover the roots of the Christian tradition. Wilberforce's approach to this synthesis

foreshadows that taken by various ecumenical bodies in the latter part of the twentieth century, both bilaterally in the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Committee (ARCIC) and multilaterally in the documents on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry published by the World Council of Churches.

Wilberforce is important for Christians today because his work serves as a reminder of the importance of turning to the roots of the Christian tradition to find commonalities. The parallels between his work and the developments in twentieth-century Christian sacramental and liturgical scholarship are striking. The early seeds of the ecumenical movement were just beginning to be planted during Wilberforce's time; nevertheless, he can be seen as a precursor to the ecumenical movements that would follow over a century after his death.

**Veiled in an Earthly Medium: A Theology of Eucharistic Presence as an
Eirenicon of Divergent Christian Positions in the Writings of Robert Isaac
Wilberforce (1802-1857)**

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IN MEMORIAM

Robert Mainwaring

9 March 1956 – 22 April 2012

Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.

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INTRODUCTION

The Eucharist is the central act of worship in the Christian tradition. Believers are bound together by this meal in which bread and wine are taken, blessed, broken and shared in the remembrance of the death and resurrection of Jesus and in anticipation of the Kingdom of God. Over the centuries, Christians have confronted various questions pertaining to Eucharistic theology. The presence of Christ in the Eucharist is one particularly vexatious issue which has been the source of much heated debate in the Christian West. In mid-nineteenth-century Britain, Robert Isaac Wilberforce examined this subject in the context of the changed circumstances facing the Church of England at the time. He described the Eucharist as an experience of “heavenly objects revealed to us by transient glimpses, and through the veil of an earthly medium.”¹ For Wilberforce, this earthly medium was complex and multi-faceted. In this thesis I intend to demonstrate that his understanding of Eucharistic presence contains aspects found in divergent Christian views on this matter.

¹ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, “Christ the Principle of Life,” in *Sermons on the Holy Communion* (London: John and Charles Wesley, 1854), 116.

Over the course of several centuries, a change occurred in the way in which the Eucharist was perceived in the Christian West, as we shall see in Chapter One. By the early medieval era, the Eucharist had ceased to be the community celebration that it had been during the early centuries of Christianity. It had become instead a drama performed by the priest at the altar, and the congregation had been relegated to the role of passive spectators. Increasingly, the focus of the Eucharist became the production of body and blood of Christ in the elements of bread and wine. During the early centuries of the Christian era, Christ's presence was acknowledged in the gathered assembly of the faithful, the Liturgy of the Word and the presider as well as the Eucharistic elements. It was only during the medieval era that the presence of Christ came to be associated primarily with those elements. Medieval theologians became preoccupied with the manner in which that presence occurred, and misunderstandings about the subject arose. The sixteenth-century Reformers reacted to this over-emphasis on the presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements. The Eucharistic thought of some of these Reformers found its way into the Church of England and was transmitted to subsequent generations of Anglican thinkers. By the early nineteenth century, this current of thought included a tendency to downplay the importance of the sacraments in general. It was this low estimate of the sacraments that drew the attention of Robert Wilberforce.

Biography

Robert Isaac Wilberforce was born on 19 December 1802 in Clapham, a village south of the River Thames which is now part of the London Borough of Lambeth. He was the fourth of six children born to William Wilberforce (1759-1833) and his wife Barbara (née Spooner). His siblings were William (1798-1879), Barbara (1799-1821), Elizabeth (1801-1831), Samuel (1805-1873) and Henry (1807-1873). Robert's father was a well-known figure in British politics and the driving force behind many movements for social change. William served as a Member of Parliament for Yorkshire between 1784 and 1812. He had

also been an Evangelical Anglican since a conversion experience in 1784 and during his time in the House of Commons he supported causes to improve society, including the abolition of the slave trade. William also championed the foundation of the Church Missionary Society as well as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.²

William Wilberforce could well afford to fund charitable causes. He had inherited considerable wealth from his father and paternal grandfather, both of whom had made money in trade with Russia from their base in Hull, Yorkshire. Despite their wealth, the Wilberforces would not have been considered members of the upper levels of society. The ruling class in Britain consisted of the aristocracy and the landed gentry. The wealth of both these groups was to be found in their ownership of large parcels of land, and their prestige lay in the fact that they had ably served various English monarchs over the centuries. Many could trace their lineage back to the vassals of William, Duke of Normandy, whose success at the Battle of Hastings in 1066 changed the course of England's history. The Wilberforces, whose commercial success extended back only as far as the eighteenth century, would have been considered "new money" and therefore a breed apart from the aristocracy.

In the early nineteenth century, power and social position lay in one's family background and not in one's business ventures. To make money as a result of trade or involvement in industry was viewed with some suspicion. The concept of social mobility was only just beginning to emerge during this era. Prior to this time, most people expected to spend their entire lives in the social class in which they were born. It would not have occurred to them that it was possible to improve their position in life simply because it was generally not possible to do so. The industrial revolution made material and social

² Most of the biographical information in this section is drawn from David Newsome, *The Parting of Friends: The Wilberforces and Henry Manning* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966).

advancement possible for some, but the distinction between the old aristocracy and new money remained.

For many years, William Wilberforce was involved with a group known as the Clapham Sect, whose members shared his Evangelical convictions and worked for social change. Like Wilberforce, the members of this group were drawn largely from wealthy families who had made money as merchants. Many of them were either interrelated or at least interconnected. Robert Wilberforce was a third cousin of John Bird Sumner, who served as Archbishop of Canterbury, and his brother Charles Sumner, Bishop of Winchester. In addition, Henry Manning's father, William, had been a merchant in the West Indies and his first wife had been a cousin of Wilberforce Senior. Robert Wilberforce was born into this tightly-knit group of like-minded individuals.

Until the age of nine, Robert was educated at home by private tutors. In 1810, he was sent to a private school with his older brother William and later to another private school near Oxford run by the Reverend E. G. Marsh.³ His studies consisted mainly of classics.⁴ In 1820, he entered Oriel College, Oxford.⁵ He graduated from Oriel in 1823 with a Bachelor

³ Unlike the sons of the aristocracy and the landed gentry, the Wilberforce boys did not attend one of England's "public" (i.e. fee-paying) schools such as Eton, Harrow or Rugby despite the fact that their wealthy father could easily have afforded to send them. One explanation for William Wilberforce's decision to send his sons to another type of school may lie in the circumstances of English public schools of the time. In the early nineteenth century, standards of academic performance and student conduct were very lax in the public schools. Incidents of drunkenness and violence were common among both students and teachers. This situation did not improve until the middle of the century. For a fuller treatment of this subject, see Desmond Bowen, *The Idea of the Victorian Church: A Study of the Church of England 1833-1889* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1968), 211-222.

⁴ In the early nineteenth century there were scores of small private schools such as the one Robert attended. In these schools, a few students lived together in the house of a clergyman and were given lessons together with the clergyman's sons. The pupils were treated as part of the family circle. See Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 40.

⁵ The University of Oxford was not the obvious choice for the sons of William Wilberforce. At the time, the University of Cambridge was strongly associated with Evangelical Anglicanism and it would therefore have

of Arts degree in both mathematics and classics, receiving double “firsts” (i.e. honours) in both disciplines. It was in 1823 that Robert struck up a friendship with John Keble (1792-1866), a tutor at Oriel renowned for his scholarship. Robert was part of a group that stayed at Keble’s parsonage in Southrop during a study break. He was both in awe of Keble’s academic achievement and perplexed by some aspects of his behaviour. Robert’s Evangelical background was much in evidence when he commented that he found it odd that Keble kept a devotional book in a drawer instead of in the open where people might pick it up and read it, thereby learning from it.⁶ Keble was a High Churchman of the “high and dry” variety. This adjective was applied to Keble and others of his ilk because of their restrained expression of their faith. They viewed the “enthusiasm” (i.e. unbridled emotionalism) of the Evangelicals with suspicion.

Robert remained at Oxford to prepare for an Oriel Fellowship, which he won in 1826. By coincidence, three of the leading figures of the Oxford Movement also held Oriel Fellowships. Hurrell Froude (1803-1836) won his fellowship in the same year as Wilberforce. John Henry Newman (1801-1890) had won his in 1822 and Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-1882) in 1823. From 1826 onward, Wilberforce had almost daily contact with Newman and Froude. In 1827, he was ordained to the diaconate. In the same year he accepted a tutorship at Oriel. In 1828, he was ordained to the priesthood. From 1828 to 1831, Wilberforce, Newman and Froude served together as tutors at Oriel College. In 1829, Newman offered Wilberforce a position at the church in Littlemore, but Wilberforce declined the offer.

seemed logical for the Wilberforce boys to attend that institution. Wilberforce Senior had doubts about the quality of the Evangelicalism at Cambridge, however, and was equivocal about his own experience there as an undergraduate. In addition, William Junior had been expelled from Cambridge in 1819 for bad behaviour. This event may have been a contributing factor in the father’s decision. See Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 57-62.

⁶ Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 73.

While little is known of Robert's theological views during his undergraduate years, he revealed some of his thoughts in 1827 when he expressed his views on a fervent Calvinist preacher whom Samuel had encountered in Geneva. He stated that he disliked the "hell-fire" approach to religion and that he had difficulties with the Evangelical doctrine of justification by faith alone.⁷ In that same year Keble's book of devotional poems, *The Christian Year*,⁸ was published. Robert was favourably impressed by the book and began to express his admiration for Keble.

In 1830, Edward Hawkins, Provost of Oriel College, refused to send any more pupils to Wilberforce and his fellow tutors Newman and Froude. Hawkins was annoyed by the tutorial reforms instituted by the trio as well as the success of the High Church party in securing the election of Robert Inglis to Parliament. Inglis defeated Thomas Peel, the candidate supported by Hawkins. By refusing to send pupils to the trio Hawkins in effect dismissed the men from their positions. This event marked the end of Wilberforce's career at Oxford.

In 1831, Wilberforce travelled to Germany. He spent the summer and autumn of that year in Bonn to learn the language and to broaden his theological studies. He appears to have experienced both homesickness and culture shock. Although he made progress in reading German he had difficulty in learning to speak the language, possibly because of his slight deafness.⁹ It was during his time in Germany that Robert became acquainted with the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the theologian and philosopher who attempted to reconcile Enlightenment thought with Protestantism. Wilberforce was likely uncomfortable with Schleiermacher's emphasis on feeling and personal religious experience, which was a very Evangelical idea. He disagreed with Schleiermacher's attempt to downplay the

⁷ Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 80.

⁸ John Keble, *The Christian Year* (Slough, UK: Dodo Press, [1827]).

⁹ Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 137.

mediatorial role of the sacraments and the low estimate that he placed on the spiritual nature of the Church. He would later outline his own position in his book on the Incarnation.¹⁰

In December 1831, Wilberforce returned from Germany and spent time in Yorkshire where he renewed his acquaintance with Agnes Wrangham, whom he had first met two years earlier. In January 1832, Wilberforce proposed to her and they were married in June of that year. A few months later he was appointed vicar of East Fairleigh, near Maidstone in Kent, where he earned a good income.

In 1833, his first son, William Francis, was born. On 14 July of that year, Keble delivered the Assize sermon at Oxford, and the publication of *Tracts for the Times* began in September. Newman called upon Wilberforce to help in the distribution of the *Tracts* and in encouraging the clergy in his district to take up the cause. It was through both Newman and his youngest brother Henry, who was now at Oriel, that Wilberforce was kept abreast of developments in Oxford. On 29 July 1833, William Wilberforce died. Robert was to experience more sadness the following year when his wife Agnes died in November just days after giving birth to their second son, Edward.

Between 1836 and 1838, Robert and his brother Samuel wrote a five-volume biography of their father.¹¹ Through the late 1830s Wilberforce continued to serve as rector at East Fairleigh and was noted for his outstanding pastoral zeal. In 1839, he preached a sermon in Yorkshire for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.¹² In

¹⁰ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ in its relation to mankind and the Church*, 3d ed. (London: John Murray, 1850).

¹¹ Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce* (London: John Murray, 1838).

¹² Founded in 1701 by the Reverend Dr Thomas Bray, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) was an Anglican missionary society whose purpose was to spread Christianity throughout the British colonies. Primarily High Church in its orientation, the SPG's influence is still evident today in the liturgical style of the parishes of the regions where it once served, including Atlantic Canada. In 1965, the SPG

1837, Wilberforce married Jane Legard, a cousin of his first wife. Samuel Wilberforce officiated at the ceremony.

In 1840, Robert was appointed vicar of Burton Agnes in the East Riding of York. This parish was a two-point charge with approximately six hundred worshippers. The following year Wilberforce was appointed Archdeacon of the East Riding and was given a curate. Also in 1841, Wilberforce published *The Five Empires: An Outline of Ancient History*.¹³ In this book he traces the history of human society from the antediluvian era to the early Christian era. Although this work is ostensibly an analysis of history it is nevertheless heavily influenced by theology. Wilberforce views the course of human civilisation as an ongoing effort to recover the perfection lost in the Garden of Eden. In February of that year, Newman published Tract 90, the last of the *Tracts for the Times*. In the wake of the negative reaction to Tract 90, Newman retreated to his vicarage at Littlemore. From this time onwards, Wilberforce grew closer to Henry Manning as Newman withdrew from the public arena and eventually became a Roman Catholic in 1845. In the same year that Newman joined Rome, Samuel Wilberforce was appointed Bishop of Oxford. Robert Wilberforce preached the sermon at the service of consecration at Lambeth Chapel.

In 1847, Robert's mother, Barbara, died. This year also marked the opening of proceedings in the Gorham case. As we shall see in Chapter Two, the Gorham case involved a conflict between a Tractarian bishop and an Evangelical priest over the subject of baptismal regeneration. The following year Robert's work *The Doctrine of the Incarnation* was published, and in 1849 *The Doctrine of Holy Baptism* appeared. These two works, together with *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, which appeared in 1853, were to form a trilogy which became the expression of his theology. Wilberforce's goal was to look back at the

merged with the Universities' Mission to Central Africa to become the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

¹³ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Five Empires: An Outline of Ancient History* (London: James Burns, 1840).

developments of the heyday of the Oxford Movement between 1833 and 1845 and sum up its theology. Both Henry Manning and William Ewart Gladstone, who would later serve as prime minister of the United Kingdom, had called for a systematic expression of the theology of the Oxford Movement. They were keen to have an Anglican equivalent of Johann Adam Möhler's *Symbolism*,¹⁴ a work which presents the confessional statements (or "symbols") of the Protestant churches in an eirenic fashion while also presenting an apologetic for Roman Catholic positions.¹⁵ Robert accepted the challenge.

In 1850, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council delivered its decision in the Gorham case. The restoration of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England and Wales followed just a few months after the delivery of the final verdict in this case. Nicholas Wiseman (1802-1865) became the first resident cardinal in England since Cardinal Pole in the sixteenth century. The final verdict in the Gorham case was perceived by many in the High Church party as an example of Erastianism, namely the intrusion by the state into church matters.¹⁶ As a result of the Gorham decision, several prominent figures in the Oxford Movement decided to become Roman Catholics.¹⁷ Robert's youngest brother, Henry,

¹⁴ Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism: Exposition of the doctrinal differences between Catholics and Protestants as evidenced by their symbolical writings*, trans. James Burton Robertson (New York: Edward Dunigan, 1844).

¹⁵ For the best commentary on this subject see Michael Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation: Johann Adam Möhler and the Beginnings of Modern Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997). The same author has also written an introduction to the English translation of Möhler. See Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism: Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as evidenced by their Symbolical Writings*, trans. James Burton Robertson, introduction by Michael J. Himes (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

¹⁶ The term "Erastian" refers to the notion that the church is subject to the authority of the state. It is loosely derived from the thought of Swiss theologian Thomas Erastus (1524-1583), who was best known for a posthumously published work in which he argued that the sins of professing Christians should be punished by civil authorities and by withholding of sacraments on the part of the church.

¹⁷ For a fuller treatment of the phenomenon of conversions to Roman Catholicism during this time, see Peter B. Nockles, "Sources of English Conversions to Roman Catholicism in the era of the Oxford Movement," in *By Whose Authority? Newman, Manning and the Magisterium*, Ed. V. Alan McClelland (Bath: Downside Abbey, 1996). For a treatment of the conversion of the Wilberforce brothers, see Matthew J. Thomas, "On the

also joined Rome and Henry Manning followed him in 1851. Robert's work *A Sketch of the History of Erastianism* was published during this year.

Robert, too, was distressed by the verdict in the Gorham case. He was sympathetic with Manning and his brother Henry in their decisions to join Rome. Robert might also have become a Roman Catholic around the same time had it not been for two people, Samuel and Jane. Robert's brother Samuel was not involved in the Oxford Movement nor did he have much respect for Roman Catholicism. Robert and Samuel had a very close bond and Robert did not like to hold different opinions from him on any subject. For him to think differently from Samuel was to question his own reasoning.¹⁸ He also feared that he would hurt Samuel if he became a Roman Catholic. Robert was also hesitant to express his views to his second wife, Jane. During the early 1850s, Jane became quite ill and was bed-ridden for much of the time. Robert did not dare to voice his interest in Roman Catholicism to her out of fear that her mental health would be adversely affected.

Robert's attraction to Roman Catholicism was very different from that experienced by other adherents of the Oxford Movement who eventually joined Rome. He showed little enthusiasm for Roman Catholic devotions and liturgy and was not interested in its pastoral system. He seems to have become attracted to Rome because he concluded that the Anglican system was untenable. In his letter of resignation to Archbishop Thomas Musgrave dated 30 August 1854, Wilberforce professes loyalty to Queen Victoria in matters of state but maintains he cannot accept the notion of the British monarch as supreme governor of the Church of England. He wrote to Musgrave, "I desire to state, that I recal [sic] my

Conversion of the Wilberforces," (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association, Congress of Humanities and Social Sciences, Victoria, British Columbia, 2 June 2013).

¹⁸ Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 370.

subscription to the 1st article in the 36th Canon,¹⁹ as believing it to be contrary to the law of God.”²⁰ Wilberforce included his exchange of correspondence with Musgrave in the preface to his work *An Inquiry into the Principles of Church-Authority: Or Reasons for Recalling My Subscription to the Royal Supremacy*, in which he set forth his views on church governance.

In 1853, Wilberforce’s book *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* was published. In this work he made a close association between the elements and the body and blood of Christ. He expected that this book would cause controversy and anticipated prosecution by Musgrave, with whom he had a difficult relationship. During this time he was haunted by the question of his possible reception into the Roman Catholic Church and he anticipated that a confrontation with Musgrave would force him to make a decision.²¹ The death of his wife Jane earlier in 1853 meant that one of the obstacles to his becoming a Roman Catholic had been removed.

Wilberforce was correct in his assumption that Musgrave would take action against him. Following the publication of the book, plans were made to try Wilberforce in an ecclesiastical court. Wilberforce forestalled this prosecution by withdrawing his subscription to the Royal Supremacy and resigning his position. Robert’s mind was now made up, and on 31 October 1854 he was received into the Roman Catholic Church in Paris. Robert and Samuel had discussed this matter for some months before Robert’s reception, and Samuel tried to persuade him not to take the step. Samuel was deeply upset by Robert’s decision to become a Roman Catholic. It was out of respect for his brother’s feelings and his position as Bishop of Oxford that Robert went to Paris to be received into the Roman Church. In 1855,

¹⁹ Wilberforce is referring to the legislation of 1603 proclaiming the sovereign to be supreme governor of the Church of England.

²⁰ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Church-Authority: Or Reasons for Recalling My Subscription to the Royal Supremacy* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854), vii.

²¹ Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 378-9.

the two brothers met for a brief visit on the continent. This was to be the last time the two men saw each other.

Robert Wilberforce never returned to England following his reception into the Roman Catholic Church. He spent some time at his estate in Connemara, Ireland, which he had purchased in 1852. In 1856 he began his studies in preparation for the Roman Catholic priesthood. Initially he doubted that he would be accepted because of the fact that he had been married twice, but Pope Pius IX arranged for him to study at the Academia Ecclesiastica and he moved to Rome.²² Throughout 1856 he spoke of feeling unwell. In early 1857, his condition deteriorated and he moved from Rome to Albano, just outside the city, to rest. It was there that he died on 3 February 1857. He was buried in the Chapel of St. Raymond in the Church of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, Rome. Curiously, the Latin inscription on Wilberforce's tombstone describes him as "sacerdos" (priest) despite the fact that he died before his ordination in the Church of Rome could take place.

Statement of the Problem

In the 1830s, a revival took place within the Church of England which prompted a renewal of the theology and practice of the church, including the Eucharist. This revival, known as the Oxford Movement, breathed new life into the High Church party.²³ It has been stated that the most important contribution of the Oxford Movement was its sacramental expression of Christianity.²⁴ A heightened emphasis was placed on the sacramental life and on the Eucharist as the focus of worship. Adherents of the Oxford Movement developed a Eucharistic theology which promoted a closer connection between the elements and Christ's presence in the Eucharist than did the earlier Anglican tradition.

²² Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 408.

²³ The distinctions between "High Church" and "Low Church" are explained in a footnote in Chapter One, page 57, footnote 107.

²⁴ William R. Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1989, 215) 85.

The early 1830s marked a time of great change in British society which would have considerable repercussions for both church and state. The repeal of the *Test Act* and the *Corporation Act* in 1828, the extension of the right to vote to Roman Catholic men in 1829 and the passing of the *Reform Act* in 1832 meant that Parliament was no longer composed exclusively of Anglicans. Non-Anglicans now had access to political power, and this power could be used to pass legislation concerning the Church of England. The church therefore could not remain the church of the nation in the way it had once been. Parliament could no longer be called the lay synod of the church.²⁵ These developments caused great consternation among those who considered church and state to be inseparable and who believed that the state, particularly the Crown, had a duty to uphold the Church of England.

Events on the ecclesiastical front also contributed to this sense of unease. In defiance of church opinion, the government of the day chose to suppress and amalgamate certain bishoprics in the Church of Ireland. Like the Church of England, the Irish church was an established church, although the vast majority of the Irish population was Roman Catholic. Under the circumstances the proposed changes were quite sensible, but Oxford clerics found them outrageous.

The legislation introduced in the late 1820s and early 1830s indicated that the character of both church and state were in the process of change. It forced English clergy to examine the nature and identity of Anglicanism. They were obliged to reflect on the Church of England's position in relation to Protestantism on the one hand and Roman Catholicism on the other. They also had to consider how Anglican theology and practice would reflect and continue the heritage of both Scripture as well as the creeds and the theological and liturgical tradition of the early church.

²⁵ Geoffrey Rowell, *The Vision Glorious: Themes and Personalities of the Catholic Revival in Anglicanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 1.

In addition to the questions of self-understanding raised by the above-mentioned political changes, Wilberforce responded to the theological concerns facing the Church of England in his day. The Evangelical Movement, which had revitalised the church during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, had begun to wane by the 1830s. Wilberforce considered the Evangelical emphasis on conversion and personal experience to be excessively subjective. He believed that in its focus on subjectivity and the individual, Evangelicalism ignored the objective reality of the church and church authority.²⁶ He thought that this subjectivity would not serve as an adequate defence of the church in the turmoil of his era. The Oxford Movement would provide a response to the challenges that the established church faced in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

Wilberforce was also combating another trend within the Church of England which he considered to be detrimental to its well-being. In Anglican theology of the eighteenth century, Wilberforce detected the strong influence of Enlightenment thinking. This school of thought, which could best be described as Liberalism, was exemplified by Benjamin Hoadly (1676-1761), Bishop of Winchester, who maintained that the action of the Eucharist and the historic presence and sacrifice of Christ were separate. This position was underpinned by the notion that human nature contains within itself the resources to achieve union with God without the aid of any system of mediation. Wilberforce was critical of both Evangelicalism and Liberalism for their denial of the need for mediation through the sacraments or any ecclesial structure and their tendency to assess religious truth in terms of human experience. He went so far as to label both schools of thought as Pelagian for what he perceived to be

²⁶ Paul Lawrence Cioffi, "The Mediatorial Principle of the Incarnation Analogously Extended to Church and Sacraments in the Writings of Robert Isaac Wilberforce (1802-1857)," Ph.D. diss. (Catholic University of America, 1973, 90.

their assumption that humans could take the initiative in their own salvation.²⁷ He saw in these common points a subtle denial of the Incarnation.

Although Wilberforce's contribution to theology was applauded during his lifetime it has largely been ignored since his death. There are several possible reasons for this neglect. One factor may be the tendency of subsequent generations of scholars to examine the history of the Oxford Movement by focussing exclusively on its four leading figures, Newman, Pusey, Keble and Froude. Another may be timing: the Gorham Judgement of 1850, which will be outlined in Chapter Two, raised many questions about the nature of the relationship between church and state. The controversy surrounding this judgement no doubt overshadowed Wilberforce's careful theological analysis.

In this thesis I wish to draw attention to Robert Isaac Wilberforce as the systematiser of Tractarian sacramental theology and as a forerunner of modern Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue on the Eucharist. The central problem is that his Eucharistic theology has not received the attention it deserves. The work of the thinker who summed up and systematised the theology of the Oxford Movement after its heyday has fallen into obscurity since his death. His book on the Eucharist caused controversy at the time of its publication and this controversy was never fully resolved. In addition, Wilberforce's decision to become a Roman Catholic in 1854 enabled church authorities to dismiss his work as that of a covert "Romanist" and thus imply that it held little relevance for Anglicans.

Adherents of the Oxford Movement placed a heightened emphasis on the sacramental life and on the Eucharist as the focus of worship. Given this emphasis, it is not surprising that the Eucharist, and particularly the nature of Eucharistic presence, became a subject of controversy. Wilberforce was not the only member of the clergy to stir up debate about Eucharistic presence. Pusey was censured in 1843 by the University of Oxford for preaching

²⁷ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, "The Sacramental System," in *Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature* (London: John Murray, 1850), 237.

a sermon in which he promoted the idea of the presence of Christ in the elements. A decade later, George Anthony Denison (1805-1896), Archdeacon of Taunton, incurred the wrath of the Archbishop of Canterbury for espousing the same position.

Wilberforce's 1853 book *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*²⁸ proved to be a lightning rod for criticism by Anglican thinkers. Church authorities were so upset by his insistence upon a real presence of Christ associated with the elements of bread and wine that plans were made to try Wilberforce in an ecclesiastical court. He resigned his position before the trial could take place, however. While his resignation eliminated the possibility of judicial action it also denied Wilberforce the opportunity to further explain his position on Eucharistic presence. He was therefore deprived of a forum in which he might have demonstrated how his understanding of Christ's presence in the Eucharist fit into the broader Anglican tradition. In the century and a half since Wilberforce's death his Eucharistic theology has received little attention. As far as I can determine, there has been no attempt to examine Wilberforce's synthesis of divergent Christian views in his understanding of Eucharistic presence. This thesis is an attempt to correct this lacuna.

State of the Question

Robert Isaac Wilberforce has been described as the systematic theologian of the Oxford Movement.²⁹ Despite his status as a leading thinker of the major renewal movement within the Church of England in the nineteenth century, Wilberforce has not been a popular subject for scholars. Library bookshelves are not groaning under the weight of scholarly tomes offering analysis of his theology. A relatively recent introductory work on the Oxford

²⁸ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, (London: John and Charles Mozley, 1854).

²⁹ Alf Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1965), 141. David Newsome, *The Parting of Friends: The Wilberforces and Henry Manning* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 372. Crockett, *Eucharist*, 216.

Movement gives Wilberforce merely two brief mentions.³⁰ One noted sacramental theologian mistakenly refers to him as Richard Wilberforce.³¹ To my knowledge, only three doctoral dissertations³² have been written on his work and all of these focus primarily on his incarnational theology. Artz's work focusses on the union of the faithful into the Body of Christ through the Incarnation. Cioffi's dissertation focusses on Wilberforce's ecclesiology, stressing that the church and its sacraments are rooted in the Incarnation. He acknowledges Wilberforce's anticipation of twentieth-century ecumenism and his attempt to bridge factional differences within the Church of England concerning ecclesiology.³³ Sheeran's work examines Wilberforce's incarnational theology in the broader context of the Oxford Movement. My work focusses on Wilberforce's attempts to reconcile the divergent positions on Eucharistic presence within Anglicanism, his efforts to find sources in the early church that can be accepted by both the High Church and Low Church parties, and his status as the forerunner of the twentieth-century ecumenical dialogue on the Eucharist.

The focus of these earlier doctoral dissertations is hardly surprising given the Tractarian³⁴ emphasis on the Incarnation. Tractarian Christology might best be described as an Incarnation Christology in that it emphasised Christ as sympathiser, the one who shared our human nature and therefore also our sorrow and pain. For Wilberforce, the Incarnation is the means by which God encounters humankind through created reality, be it Christ's

³⁰ Michael Chandler, *An Introduction to the Oxford Movement* (New York: Church Publishing, 2003).

³¹ Kenneth W. Stevenson, *Eucharist and Offering* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1986), 176.

³² Thomas Robert Artz, "One in the Body of Christ: Robert Isaac Wilberforce and the Theology of Concorporation" (Ph.D. diss., Boston College, 1986); . Paul Lawrence Cioffi, "The Mediatorial Principle of the Incarnation analogously extended to the Church and Sacraments in the writings of Robert Isaac Wilberforce (1802-1857)" (Ph.D. diss. Catholic University of America, 1973); Robert Sheeran, *Christ the Center and Source: A Study of Robert Isaac Wilberforce and the Incarnational Theology of the Oxford Movement* [Excerpt, doctoral dissertation]. (Rome: Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a S. Thoma Aq. In Urbe, 1979).

³³ Paul Lawrence Cioffi, "The Mediatorial Principle of the Incarnation Analogously Extended to the Church and Sacraments in the Writings of Robert Isaac Wilberforce (1802-1857)," 313.

³⁴ The term "Tractarian" is explained in Chapter Two.

humanity, Church structures or the sacraments. The sacrament of the Eucharist mediates the Incarnation to humans. Christ's body and blood, received in the Eucharist, bestow blessings upon those who receive it. Wilberforce maintains that this presence in the Eucharist is a dynamic one.

Another work that mentions Wilberforce is Teresa Berger's *Liturgie – Spiegel der Kirche*.³⁵ Berger refers to Wilberforce a number of times but her observations are similar to those made by Alf Härdelin. More significant is Brian Douglas's Volume One of *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology*.³⁶ This extensive survey includes Wilberforce and uses four broad categories into which he attempts to place Anglican sacramental theologians. Douglas's framework will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

Wilberforce goes so far as to say that there are two systems of religion: a sacramental one and an anti-sacramental one. He says that to deny the sacramental system is to deny the Incarnation: it implies that there is a means of communication between God and humans apart from Christ. The attention paid by earlier scholars to Wilberforce's views on the Incarnation is understandable in the light of the importance he attached to the subject. When they have discussed the Eucharist, it has been treated primarily as an extension of the Incarnation and not as a focal point in itself.

Interestingly, the authors of all three dissertations on Wilberforce's theology are Roman Catholic priests. Anglican writers have been strangely silent about Robert Isaac Wilberforce. Although some Anglican scholars have acknowledged Wilberforce's contribution concerning the Eucharist, the main study of his Eucharistic theology was

³⁵ Teresa Berger, *Speigel der Kirche: Eine systematische-theologische Analyse des liturgischen Gedankenguts im Traktarianismus*. Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie, Band 52. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986).

³⁶ Brian Douglas, *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology*, vol. 1, (Leiden/Boston: Brill Publishing, 2012).

undertaken by Alf Härdelin, a Swedish Lutheran convert to Roman Catholicism, fifty years ago.³⁷ Considerable space exists for further study.

This dissertation will focus on Wilberforce's understanding of Eucharistic presence. I wish to demonstrate that Wilberforce attempted to reconcile divergent views within the Church of England, which are also to be found in other currents of Christian thinking on the sacraments. In so doing, he displayed an understanding of Eucharistic presence that in our day could be described as ecumenical. As noted above, the issue of Eucharistic presence was hotly debated in Wilberforce's day and reflected a sharp difference of opinion between the Tractarian and Evangelical wings of the Church of England. Although Wilberforce's work was criticised by church authorities at the time of its publication it is nevertheless consistent with Anglican tradition. In addition, it draws together competing Christian visions of Eucharistic presence. To my knowledge, no one has examined this aspect of Wilberforce's understanding of presence.

There are several possible explanations for the silence from Anglicans concerning Robert Isaac Wilberforce. The timing of his works is a factor in more than one way. Wilberforce produced his trilogy of Baptism, the Incarnation and the Eucharist during the years leading up to the final judgement in the Gorham case and immediately thereafter. The Gorham case revealed a split between the Tractarians and the Evangelical wing of the Church of England. The decision by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council to overturn a judgement given by an ecclesiastical court was perceived by many as an unacceptable intrusion by the state into church matters. Some Tractarians, among them Henry Manning,

³⁷ See Alf Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1965); Eugene Fairweather, ed., *The Oxford Movement*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

were so incensed by this government interference that they became Roman Catholics, clearly preferring to be members of a church not subject to the control of a national government.

Wilberforce's book on the Eucharist appeared three years after the final judgement in the Gorham case was delivered. By this time the tumult caused by the departure from the Church of England of several prominent divines no doubt created more of a stir than did Wilberforce's careful theological work. In addition, the above-mentioned conflict between Archdeacon Denison and the Archbishop of Canterbury began in the same year as the publication of *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*. It may have been easy for church authorities to label Wilberforce as a troublemaker of the same ilk as Denison. Wilberforce's conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1854 provided Anglican authorities with further ammunition with which to discredit him. His work could be dismissed as that of a man whose sympathies had inclined toward Rome for some time and who was therefore of little importance to Anglican theology. Finally, events on the international scene ultimately overshadowed ecclesiastical squabbles. Britain's entry into the Crimean War in early 1854 diverted popular attention away from quarrels within the state church and focussed it instead on foreign affairs.

Wilberforce did not leave a huge corpus of work for future generations to study. Although his works are certainly noteworthy they are not as voluminous as those of other members of the Oxford Movement, notably Newman. In addition to his trilogy on Baptism,³⁸ Incarnation³⁹ and the Eucharist, he wrote books on church authority⁴⁰ and history⁴¹ as well as

³⁸ Wilberforce, Robert Isaac. *The Doctrine of Holy Baptism: With Remarks to the Rev. W. Goode's "Effects of Infant Baptism,"* (Philadelphia: Herman Hooker, 1850).

³⁹ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ in its Relation to Mankind and the Church* (London: John Murray, 1850).

⁴⁰ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Church-Authority, or Reasons for Recalling my Subscription to the Royal Supremacy* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1854).

⁴¹ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Five Empires: An Outline of Ancient History*. London: James Burns, 1840.

a novel.⁴² Two books of his sermons⁴³ were published as were various charges to the clergy of the East Riding of Yorkshire.⁴⁴ Unlike some members of the Oxford Movement, Wilberforce did not produce works that captured the popular imagination. He was neither polemicist nor poet: he did not contribute to the *Tracts for the Times* nor did he write stirring devotional works, as did Keble. His major works are theological treatises unlikely to have held much appeal for general readers. His sermons are largely restatements of his theological works, although they contain a definite pastoral slant.

As stated above, Wilberforce's intended task was to present a systematic expression of Tractarian theology after the heyday of the Oxford Movement had passed. He did not boldly lead the vanguard of the new revival movement but rather gave a coherent

⁴² Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *Rutilius and Lucius; or, Stories of the Third Age* (London: J. Burns, 1842).

⁴³ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *Sermons on the Holy Communion* (London: John and Charles Mozley, 1854); Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature* (Philadelphia: Herman Hooker, 1850).

⁴⁴ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *A Primary Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of the East Riding* (London: James Burns; York: Robert Sunter, 1941); Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *A Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of the East Riding at the Ordinary Visitation* (York: R. Sunter, 1842); Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *A Charge, Delivered at the Ordinary Visitation* (York: R. Sunter, 1843); Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *A Charge, to the Clergy of the East Riding, Delivered at the Ordinary Visitation, A. D. 1844*. Hull: T. Freebody, Printer, 1844; *A Charge, to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of the East Riding at the Ordinary Visitation, A. D. 1845* (London: John Murray; York: R. Sunter, 1845); Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *A Charge, to the Clergy of the East Riding, Delivered at the Ordinary Visitation, A. D. 1846* (London: John Murray; York: R. Sunter, 1846); Robert Isaac Wilberforce *A Charge, to the Clergy of the East Riding, Delivered at the Ordinary Visitation, A. D. 1847* (London: John Murray; York: R. Sunter, 1847); Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *Relations of Church and State. A Charge, to the Clergy of the East Riding, Delivered at the Ordinary Visitation, A. D. 1848* (London: John Murray; York: Robert Sunter, 1848); Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Practical Effects of the Gorham Case. A Charge, to the Clergy of the East Riding, Delivered at the Ordinary Visitation, A. D. 1850* (London: John Murray; York: Robert Sunter, 1850); Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Evangelical and Tractarian Movements. A Charge, to the Clergy of the East Riding, Delivered at the Ordinary Visitation, A. D. 1851* (London: John Murray; York: Robert Sunter, 1851); Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Appeal to Convocation. A Charge to the Clergy of the East Riding, Delivered at the Ordinary Visitation, A. D. 1852* (London: John Murray; York: Robert Sunter, 1852); Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Real Presence Taught by the Prayer Book. A Charge, to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of the East Riding, at the Ordinary Visitation, A. D. 1854*, in *Sermons on the Holy Communion* (London: J. and C. Mozley/London and Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1854).

presentation of its theology after the movement had reached its apex. Some of this theology, notably the emphasis on the Incarnation and the importance of the sacramental principle, had been articulated by others before Wilberforce although not in a systematic fashion. In his own time and immediately thereafter Wilberforce was thought of not as an innovator but as a synthesiser. For this reason his work may have been accorded less importance than that of the earlier writers of the Oxford Movement.

Wilberforce is notable not only for his efforts to systematise Tractarian theology. This forward-looking aspect of his theology has received attention. E. L. Mascall states that Wilberforce's work finds echoes in the main themes of the writings of Mersch, Congar and de Lubac.⁴⁵ P. L. Cioffi observes that Wilberforce anticipated the direction that the Roman Catholic Church would take in the twentieth century.⁴⁶ He states that the revival in ecclesiology and sacramental theology which was such an important part of the Second Vatican Council has its roots in the nineteenth-century re-examination of the notion of church by theologians such as Wilberforce.

Hypothesis and Methodology

The hypothesis of this work is that Robert Isaac Wilberforce's theology of Eucharistic presence represents a synthesis of divergent Christian views on the Eucharist. Wilberforce draws together the different facets of the Eucharist highlighted by Tractarians and Evangelicals within the Church of England. He does so by looking to Scripture, ancient liturgies and the works of the early church fathers. Wilberforce is reappropriating the classical approach to Eucharistic presence, which consists of the acknowledgement of an objective presence in the sacramental signs as well as a response from the recipients.

⁴⁵ Eric Lionel Mascall, *The Recovery of Unity: A Theological Approach* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958), 164.

⁴⁶ Paul Lawrence Cioffi S.J., *The Mediatorial Principle of the Incarnation analogously extended to Church and Sacraments in the writings of Robert Isaac Wilberforce (1802-1857)*, 312.

Wilberforce associates a real presence of Christ with the elements of bread and wine. For Wilberforce, the real presence is not a physical presence but a spiritual one brought about by the union of the outward sign of the sacrament and the inward grace conferred by it through the act of consecration. Wilberforce addresses the issue of transubstantiation, which was a much misunderstood concept within the Church of England for centuries. For Wilberforce, Christ's presence in the Eucharist is dynamic and operative, not static. That presence mediates the divine to humans. The very fact of the real presence provides Wilberforce with the basis for his doctrine of the Eucharist as sacrificial worship.

In drawing together these facets, Wilberforce charts an Anglican *via media* between the wider catholic tradition of Eucharistic theology with its emphasis on the effects of the act of consecration and the focus on the spiritual state of the receiver and the practical effects of the Eucharist found in some Protestant Eucharistic theologies. Wilberforce may not have deliberately attempted a reconciliation of positions. His synthesis is nevertheless important because, unconsciously or not, he tied together the different aspects of the Eucharist emphasised by various Christian denominations. In his view, all aspects carry equal weight and all are essential to a full experience of the Eucharist. His theology reflects a breadth that was atypical in the nineteenth century but one that would later be reflected in twentieth-century ecumenical agreed statements on the Eucharist, such as those published by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission and the World Council of Churches.

Wilberforce attempted a synthesis of a range of opinions concerning Eucharistic presence. In examining this synthesis I intend to show that Wilberforce reached back beyond the Reformation, the Scholastic debates of the later medieval era and the era of Eucharistic controversy in the Christian West to the early centuries of the church in an attempt to find common sources that might be agreed upon by most Christians. Wilberforce drew on ancient liturgies, the writings of the early church fathers, the New Testament and the Book of

Common Prayer to support his argument. In this thesis we shall examine Wilberforce's major works, notably *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*,⁴⁷ *Sermons on the Holy Communion*⁴⁸ and *Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature*.⁴⁹ I shall identify his sources and also consider the importance of his contribution to subsequent ecumenical dialogue on the Eucharist.

Review of the Literature

As stated earlier in this chapter, Robert Wilberforce did not leave behind a huge body of work. For the purposes of this thesis his most relevant works are *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* and *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ in Its Relation to Mankind and to the Church*. Together with *The Doctrine of Holy Baptism*, these works form a trilogy on the Incarnation and the sacraments. Wilberforce's *Sermons on the Holy Communion* could be described as a homiletic counterpart to his book on the Eucharist. Similarly, his collection of *Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature* is a pastoral restatement of the subjects he addresses in his books on Baptism and the Incarnation.

These were not Wilberforce's only works, however. In 1838, Robert and his brother Samuel co-authored a five-volume biography of their father.⁵⁰ An abridged version of this biography appeared in two volumes in 1843.⁵¹ In 1834, Robert Wilberforce edited a collection of family prayers composed by his father and wrote an introduction to it.⁵² Several years later he attempted a theological interpretation of ancient history in *The Five Empires*,

⁴⁷ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ in its relation to mankind and the Church* (London: John Murray, 1850).

⁴⁸ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *Sermons on the Holy Communion* (London: John and Charles Mozley, 1854).

⁴⁹ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature* (Philadelphia: Herman Hooker, 1850).

⁵⁰ Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce* (London: John Murray, 1838).

⁵¹ Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce* (London: Seeley, Burnside and Seeley, 1843).

⁵² William Wilberforce, *Family Prayers*, ed. Robert Isaac Wilberforce, (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1834).

which purports to show that the four major empires preceding the Christian era were a preparation for the coming of Christ. The year after the publication of *The Five Empires* Wilberforce produced a novel entitled *Rutilius and Lucius*, which provides two separate stories of bravery by Christians during the era of persecution. In 1843, Wilberforce's work on ecclesiastic courts appeared, entitled *Church Courts and Church Discipline*.⁵³ In 1851, one year after the delivery of the verdict in the Gorham case, Wilberforce first expressed his concerns about the Royal Supremacy in *A Sketch of the History of Erastianism*.⁵⁴ He expanded upon these concerns in his 1854 work *An Inquiry into the Principles of Church-Authority: Or Reasons for Recalling my Subscription to the Royal Supremacy*. During his years as Archdeacon of the East Riding of Yorkshire Wilberforce produced annual pastoral charges to his clergy, including one on the Evangelical and Tractarian Movements and one in response to the Gorham case.

The most notable secondary source on Robert Wilberforce's Eucharistic theology is Alf Härdelin's book *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*,⁵⁵ in which the author devotes approximately fifty pages to Wilberforce's sacramental theology. Härdelin places Wilberforce's thought in the broader context of Tractarian Eucharistic theology. In his above-mentioned work, Brian Douglas devotes sixteen pages to an analysis of Wilberforce's Eucharistic thought. An important source of biographical information about the Wilberforce family, David Newsome's *The Parting of Friends: The Wilberforces and Henry Manning*⁵⁶ includes approximately twelve pages on Robert Wilberforce's Eucharistic theology.

Eugene Fairweather's anthology *The Oxford Movement* includes sizeable excerpts from Wilberforce's writing. He has included three chapters from Wilberforce's book on the

⁵³ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *Church Courts and Church Discipline* (London: John Murray, 1843).

⁵⁴ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *A Sketch of the History of Erastianism* (London: J. Murray, 1851).

⁵⁵ Alf Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1965).

⁵⁶ David Newsome, *The Parting of Friends: The Wilberforces and Henry Manning* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966).

Incarnation, among those the chapter in which Wilberforce states that the sacraments serve as a connection between humans and Christ. Fairweather has also included excerpts from some of Wilberforce's sermons concerning the mediatorial role of Christ's humanity as well as lengthy excerpts from Wilberforce's book on the Eucharist. Although Fairweather does not undertake an analysis of Wilberforce's work the very fact that he includes sizeable excerpts from it suggests that he considers Wilberforce to be an important figure in the Oxford Movement. Also noteworthy is Fairweather's choice of excerpts. His selection of passages that underscore Christ's role as mediator as well as the link between Christ and the sacraments indicates that he places significance on these matters.

Note on Inclusive Language

The use of inclusive language was not a matter of concern during Robert Wilberforce's era and his writing reflects this fact. Fairness and inclusion are quite important to modern scholars, however, and I have attempted to avoid any gender bias in writing this thesis. When quoting Wilberforce I have nevertheless chosen to leave his text in its original form. Readers will find numerous examples of gender-specific references in citations from his work. While Wilberforce no doubt intended the use of male-specific pronouns and possessive pronouns to refer to the whole human race, such a practice is no longer considered acceptable. Rather than disrupt the flow of Wilberforce's original text by adding the Latin adverb "sic" to denote archaic usage or attempt to insert modern terms to replace his I have decided to allow his work to stand as is. I have adopted the same policy with the other writers quoted in this thesis whose texts include gender-specific terms.

An Exploration of the Eucharistic Theology of Robert Isaac Wilberforce

Chapter One provides a summary of the thought of major figures in Anglicanism on the subject of Eucharistic presence from the early Christian era until the early nineteenth century. Anglicanism is part of the broader Christian tradition, so the chapter begins with the

early centuries of the Christian era. Since Wilberforce's focus is on Eucharistic presence, this chapter explores only that subject and does not examine the issue of sacrifice. In this chapter, we shall see that multiple strands of thought were held in tension in the centuries preceding Wilberforce.

Chapter Two provides an overview of the world in which Robert Isaac Wilberforce lived. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the broader context in which Wilberforce found himself and the larger forces which helped to shape his life and thought. It includes a description of the political events and economic currents that shaped the society of his time. It outlines the major events of early nineteenth-century Britain and continental Europe. The French Revolution created fears in Britain about the stability of the social order. There were fears that the Church of England might suffer if the social order were to be disrupted. Wilberforce's work on sacramental theology was an attempt to strengthen the church's understanding of its own catholic heritage during a time of uncertainty.

At the same time, Britain faced its own challenges as political and social changes created turmoil. In 1801, political union between Britain and Ireland resulted in a sudden and dramatic increase in the Roman Catholic population, who did not enjoy the same civil rights as Anglicans. After much debate, in 1828 and 1829 the discriminatory legislation against them was finally repealed and in 1832 the *Reform Act* brought about changes to the electoral system. The industrial revolution created challenges as large numbers of people moved from the countryside to the cities in search of jobs. Poverty and inadequate public services were major problems.

The Church of England faced its own problems during this era such as the matter on non-resident clergy. A need for reform was necessary. Anglican liturgy of this time was generally subdued. The Evangelical Revival that had begun in the late eighteenth century carried on into the early part of the nineteenth century. William Wilberforce and the

Clapham Sect were the prominent figures in the Evangelical wing of the church. In 1833, the Oxford Movement developed in response to the perceived interference of the state in church matters. The Roman Catholic Church of this era was greatly misunderstood and subject to considerable prejudice. Perhaps not surprisingly, it tended to maintain a low profile. Romanticism replaced the rationalism of the Enlightenment to become the prevailing intellectual influence of the era. In Germany, scholars such as J. A. Möhler looked for common ground between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.

Chapter Three explores Wilberforce's sacramental theology and its roots in the works of the early church fathers and Anglican liturgical sources. For Wilberforce, sacraments are extensions of the Incarnation. Christ is the second Adam. Wilberforce's understanding of the sacraments is twofold: it includes the Incarnation itself as well as the benefits bestowed upon humankind by it. Since Christ is both fully human and fully divine He is the perfect mediator. The sacraments are channels of grace through which humans are united to God. There is a connection between the outward sign of the sacrament and the inward benefit derived from it. God freely offers this gift of sacraments but nevertheless respects the freedom of the human will. Humans are therefore free to reject this gift if they choose. Wilberforce makes a distinction between sacramental religion and anti-sacramental religion. Wilberforce believes that the denial of sacramental efficacy is both wrong-headed and an improper system of religion. Like other adherents of the Oxford Movement, Wilberforce advocates frequent reception of the Eucharist, preferably weekly. The faithful must be properly prepared to receive the Eucharist: the proper disposition of the recipient is essential if the grace offered in the sacrament is to be effective.

Chapter Four examines Wilberforce's understanding of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. The Holy Spirit brings Christ's presence into being. The elements of bread and wine are sanctified through the act of consecration. The sentences "this is my body" and

“this is my blood” indicate an identification between the elements and Christ and not simply a figurative representation. The presence of Christ in the Eucharist is sacramental and therefore cannot be perceived by the senses. Wilberforce is critical of the Eucharistic theology of both Huldrych Zwingli and John Calvin, whom he considers to have negatively influenced currents of Anglican thought. In making his arguments, Wilberforce is careful to use sources that can be accepted by all Christians. He considers Scripture to be the ultimate source and when it is unclear he looks to the writings of the church fathers for clarification. Wilberforce makes a point of stating that he draws on sources no later than the eighth century. After this date the Eucharist became a subject of controversy. By choosing sources that predate these controversies, Wilberforce demonstrates that his primary concern is to overcome disagreements within the Church of England, and that by extension his thought has this wider appeal.

Chapter Five focusses on the role of the spiritual fitness of the recipient in the efficacy of the Eucharist. God’s grace is conveyed through the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine but in order to receive the benefits of this grace, recipients must be properly disposed. Wilberforce stresses that the faithful must do their own spiritual work in preparation for the reception of this grace. His emphasis on the importance of both consecration and the state of the recipient ties together different aspects of the Eucharist highlighted by various Christian groups. It bridges the gap between Evangelicals and Tractarians on the subject of Eucharistic presence. It also ties in the positions of Roman Catholics, Eastern Christians and those Protestant groups rooted in the classical Reformation traditions. Although Wilberforce did not likely intend his position to be ecumenical, it nevertheless has an ecumenical tone to it. Rather than a synthesis it might better be described as an *eirenicon*. In this chapter we see the opposition expressed against Wilberforce’s work during his lifetime. In addition, we see

how the broad themes of his work, notably the importance of the Incarnation, influenced Anglican thinkers of the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Chapter Six examines the influences on Wilberforce's Eucharistic thought as well as his own influence on others in the twentieth century. As we shall see, Wilberforce's themes are reflected in various ecumenical documents, both bilateral and multilateral. They are also to be found in the work of several twentieth-century theologians. This chapter also describes Wilberforce's association with Henry Manning and his decision to become a Roman Catholic.

In this work we shall examine the hypothesis that Robert Isaac Wilberforce's theology of Eucharistic presence represents a synthesis of divergent Christian views on the Eucharist. We shall see that through his examination of Scripture, ancient liturgies and the writings of the early church fathers, Wilberforce manages to gather up the different aspects of the Eucharist highlighted by the High Church and Low Church parties within the Church of England. In so doing, Wilberforce is reviving the classical understanding of Eucharistic presence, which acknowledges an objective presence in the elements of bread and wine as well as a response from the faithful believers. To fully appreciate the significance of Robert Wilberforce's Eucharistic theology, his motives and the reception of his views, it is necessary to begin by examining Anglican Eucharistic thought in the broader Christian tradition. In Chapter One we shall see an outline of this trajectory of thought.

Chapter One

An Overview of Anglican Eucharistic Theology

Introduction

Robert Wilberforce lays great importance on the use of sources that predate the Eucharistic and historical controversies of the ninth century, as we shall see in Chapter Three.¹ Wilberforce's Eucharistic theology must be examined against the background of the trajectory of theological discussion in the wider Christian tradition and, in particular, within the context of the Anglican tradition. In his examination of Eucharistic presence Wilberforce is keen to draw on sources that are acceptable to all Christians, hence his decision to turn to texts written before opinion about the Eucharist became divided. This emphasis on the early, undivided church is an important part of Wilberforce's thought, and indeed that of other Anglican thinkers. This chapter provides a brief overview of Anglican Eucharistic theology. Given that Anglicanism is part of

¹ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (London: John and Charles Murray, 1854), 3.

the broader Christian tradition, the chapter begins with a short history of the understanding of Eucharistic presence from the early centuries of the Christian era.

The current chapter will provide a summary of the thought of major figures in Anglicanism on the subject of Eucharistic presence up to the early nineteenth century. The focus of this thesis is Robert Wilberforce's understanding of Eucharistic presence, and in fact it is his primary contribution to Anglican Eucharistic theology in the nineteenth century. I have therefore deliberately chosen to concentrate on presence and have not examined the issue of sacrifice. Although the notion of sacrifice is a debated aspect of Eucharistic theology, it was not the main issue that Wilberforce addressed.

It is necessary to define the terms used in this thesis in order avoid confusion. The ambiguity of the expression "real presence" has caused much misunderstanding due to the fact that it can be interpreted in either a broad or a narrow manner.² Over time it has acquired a broad meaning in Anglican theology to indicate the general presence of Christ in the Eucharistic service and not exclusively a presence associated with the elements. In this thesis the term "real presence" is used in its original meaning. It implies the acceptance of a change in the elements of bread and wine themselves that is effected through consecration.³

The term "spiritual presence" refers to the position that at consecration the elements become the body and blood of Christ not in substance (as though they were identified with Christ's body and blood on the Cross) but in power.⁴ Christ's presence belongs to the order of grace rather than to the order of nature. The doctrine of "transubstantiation" affirms that at

² *Doctrine in the Church of England (1938): The Report of the Commission on Christian Doctrine appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in 1922*, Introduction by G. W. H. Lampe (London: SPCK, 1982), 167.

³ *Doctrine in the Church of England (1938)*, 170.

⁴ *Doctrine in the Church of England (1938)*, 170.

consecration the substance of the bread and the wine becomes the substance of the body and blood of Christ, while the accidents of bread and wine remain.⁵ The term itself emerged in the late twelfth century and was defined *de fide* by the Fourth Lateran council in 1215. Thirteenth-century scholastic philosophers elaborated upon it and it found its classical formulation in the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Aquinas insisted that Christ's body and blood are present in the sacrament invisibly and that this presence is spiritual.⁶ They are not perceptible to the senses but to faith alone. "Receptionism" indicates a Eucharistic doctrine which affirms that Christ is present only in the hearts of worthy believers who receive the sacraments. Christ is present to and in the believer in the acts of communion. His presence is not associated with the elements themselves but is in the sacramental act. One tenet of Receptionism is that grace is conveyed through the act of receiving the Eucharist.⁷

Finally, the term "objective presence" requires clarification. Wilberforce uses this term not to imply that the presence of Christ is demonstrable but rather to contrast it with the notion of Receptionism, which insists that Christ's presence depends on the faith of the recipient. The conventional meaning of "objective" as something evident to all does not apply in this case.

The Patristic and Medieval Eras

Controversy about the Eucharist was almost completely unknown during the early centuries of the Christian era. Speculation about the Eucharist was not at the forefront of

⁵ Owen F. Cummings, *Eucharistic Doctors: A Theological History* (New York/Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 2005), 137.

⁶ William R. Crockett: *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1989), 115. The primary source can be found in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Questions on God* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), S.T. III, q. 76, p. 100.

⁷ *Doctrine in the Church of England* (1938), 178.

Christian thought.⁸ It was believed that Christ's presence was found in the entire action of the liturgy, namely in the gathered assembly of believers, in the presider, in the proclamation of the Word and also in the Eucharistic elements. The focus on the bread and the wine in isolation from the larger activity of worship would not take place until the later medieval era. In the era prior to the First Council of Nicea in 325, Christian writers generally identified the elements of bread and wine with the body and blood of Christ, although the nature of that connection was undefined.⁹ During the era of the great church councils, from the fourth to the eighth centuries, the elements were described as being the body and blood of Christ. They are referred to as "figures" or "symbols," but it is essential to remember that writers of this era did not understand these terms in the modern sense of representation or symbol. For writers of this era, a symbol actually was that which it was meant to convey. This understanding can be described as symbolic realism. During this era, attempts were made to explain the mystery of the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist. Some writers laid emphasis on the spiritual character of the presence while others focussed on known physical processes.¹⁰

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and Ambrose of Milan (circa 339-397) made significant contributions to Western theology during this era. Borrowing from Plato, Augustine placed great emphasis on the relationship between a sign (*signum*) and the thing (*res*) that it signifies. He held the ancient understanding that a symbol is not merely a presentation but also a participant in the reality to which it points. For Augustine, the *signum* (or *sacramentum*) is the outward, visible sign while the *res* is the invisible reality that it represents. In a letter to Boniface, a fellow bishop, written in 408, Augustine states, "For if sacraments had not some points of real

⁸ Darwell Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, vol. 1 (New York: Longmans, Green, 1909), 474.

⁹ Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, vol.1, 54.

¹⁰ Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 89.

resemblance to the things of which they are the sacraments, they would not be sacraments at all. In most cases, moreover, they do in virtue of this likeness bear the names of the realities which they resemble.”¹¹ In the context of the Eucharist, bread and wine are the outward, visible signs; the invisible reality is Christ.

Ambrose represents an alternative way of discussing the relationship between the Eucharistic elements and the presence of Christ. He was the first in the Western Church to employ the vocabulary of change when speaking about the Eucharist. Like Augustine, he uses the terms *sacramentum* and *signum*, but he maintains that at consecration a change occurs in the natures of the elements. Ambrose observes, “The Lord Jesus Himself proclaims: ‘This is My Body.’ Before the blessing of the heavenly words another nature is spoken of, after the consecration the Body is signified. He Himself speaks of His Blood. Before the consecration it has another name, after it is called Blood.”¹² In his history of the evolution of the celebration of the Eucharist, William Crockett stresses that during this era the views of Augustine and Ambrose were not in competition with each other. They simply represented two different ways of interpreting the relationship between the elements and the reality that they signify.¹³ In the Middle Ages, Ambrose’s conversionist views eclipsed Augustine’s symbolic idea.

In the medieval era, cultural and linguistic shifts occurred which resulted in controversies surrounding the Eucharist. The unity between symbol and reality, so prevalent in the ancient

¹¹ Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of Saint Augustine for the Twenty-First Century*, trans. and notes Roland Teske, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park NY: New City Press, 2001), 431.

¹² Ambrose of Milan, *On the Sacraments and On the Mysteries*, trans. T. Thompson, ed. and notes J. H. Showley (London: SPCK, 1950), 86-7.

¹³ Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 98. My comments on the shifting understanding of “symbol” are drawn from his work.

world, began to dissolve. A symbol was no longer seen as a means of participating in the reality that it signifies, but instead it became a sign or pointer quite separate from that reality. This shift in thought created conflict between symbolical and realist language. With the dissolution of the unity between symbol and reality, symbolical and realist language could no longer be used simultaneously. Another shift occurred during this era which represented a fundamental change in liturgical sensibility. The Eucharist was no longer considered to be a community celebration, as it had been in the early Christian era, but instead it became a ritual drama. The priest at the altar enacted this drama while the congregation became spectators. Similarly, the elements of bread and wine were no longer viewed as symbols (in the earlier sense) of the risen Christ but as sacred objects on the altar.

Beginning in the ninth century, efforts were made to define various aspects of the Eucharist. The Eucharistic elements came to be viewed in isolation from the liturgical action. This development coincides with the birth of extra-liturgical Eucharistic devotions.¹⁴ Paschasius Radbertus (d. 865), a monk at the Abbey of Corbey, composed a treatise on the Eucharist for the instruction of the some of the younger monks. This treatise is considered to be the first consistent theology of the Eucharistic species. Paschasius maintained that Christ is present in spiritual form in the elements and that the elements are changed during consecration. He stated that they are wholly and substantially converted into the body and blood of Christ, and that after consecration they no longer exist as bread and wine.¹⁵ His colleague Ratramnus (fl. 9th century), who was also a monk at Corbey, agreed that Christ is spiritually present in the bread and wine

¹⁴ For a fuller treatment of this subject see Nathan Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1982).

¹⁵ Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, vol. 1, 217. Cf: Beda Paulus, ed., Paschasius Radbertus, "De Corpore et Sanguine Domini" in *Corpus Christianorum, continuato mediaevalis* 16; (Turnholt: Brepols, 1969).

but denied any actual change in the elements themselves. Ratramnus made a clear distinction between the body of Christ in the sacrament and the Lord's actual flesh.¹⁶ Ratramnus's work was lost for some time but was rediscovered in the sixteenth century by Reformers who pointed to it as evidence of a catholic tradition of the Eucharist that predated the doctrine of transubstantiation.¹⁷ The positions of Paschasius and Ratramnus were not mutually exclusive and the two monks appear to have accepted their differences without rancour. Later generations of thinkers would see a controversy in these differing positions, however.¹⁸

From the ninth century onward, the realist position represented by Radbertus gained the ascendancy and the idea of a physical miracle occurring at consecration became increasingly popular.¹⁹ In the eleventh century, the conflict between realism and symbolism was renewed. Berengar of Tours (fl. 11th century) agreed with Ratramnus's views. He was opposed by Lanfranc (1005-1089), who later became Archbishop of Canterbury. As a result, Berengar was summoned to appear before a series of councils at which he was forced to assent to declarations affirming the realist position.²⁰ In 1059, he appeared before a council held at Rome. He was forced to burn his own writings and sign a document stating that the consecrated elements were

¹⁶ Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, vol. 1, 217. Cf. J. P. Migne, ed., Ratramnus, "De Corpore et Sanguine Domini" in *Patrologia Latina*, cols. 125-170 (Ridgewood NJ: Gregg Press, [1965]).

¹⁷ Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 109.

¹⁸ For a fuller treatment of this subject, see Gary Macy, *The Banquet's Wisdom: A Short History of the Theologies of the Lord's Supper* (New York/Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), 70-74.

¹⁹ Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 109.

²⁰ Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, vol. 1, 246.

in reality the body and blood of Christ.²¹ This document represented approval at the highest level of the notion of the physical presence of Christ in the Eucharist.²²

In the eleventh century, a revival of learning occurred in Western Europe which was to have a profound effect on Eucharistic theology. New importance was given to the study of logic as presented by Aristotle. The writings of Aristotle had been translated into Latin by Boethius in the late fifth century but did not excite scholars until this later date. Aristotle's thought was employed in an attempt to systematise knowledge and provide new ways of organising and understanding the world. Eventually, Eucharistic theology came to be scrutinised according to the principles of logic known as "scholasticism," which was based on Aristotle's teaching.²³ Of particular importance to Western Eucharistic theology are his categories of substance and accidents. The term "substance" refers to the inner reality of a thing, not its material qualities.²⁴ The term "accidents" designates the outward empirical qualities of an object.²⁵

²¹ Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, vol. 1, 247.

²² In this oath, Berengar was forced to affirm that "the bread and the wine which are placed on the altar are, after the consecration, not only a sacrament but the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. And they are sensibly, not only in a sacrament, but in truth, handled and broken in the hands of the priest, and crushed by the teeth of the faithful." In Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, vol 1, 247. Cf. A.F. and F.T. Vischer, ed., Berengar, "De Sacrae Cena adversus Lanfrancum," in *Collectio* (Berlin: Mansi, 1834); J. P. Migne ed., Lanfranc, "De Corpore et Sanguine Domini" in *Patrologia Latina* cols. 409-11 (Ridgewood NJ: Gregg Press, [1965]). See also Gary Macy, *Treasures from the Storeroom: Medieval Religion and the Eucharist* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1999); Gary Macy, *The Banquet's Wisdom: A Short History of the Theologies of the Lord's Supper* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

²³ Jill N. Claster, *The Medieval Experience: 300-1400* (New York: New York University Press, 1982), 250.

²⁴ Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 119.

²⁵ Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 120.

At the Fourth Lateran Council, held in 1215, the idea of transubstantiation first made its way into official church teaching.²⁶ The creed produced by the council was drafted in response to the heresy of the Cathars, an austere group of Christians who considered matter to be evil and denied the value of the church's sacramental system.²⁷ The council's statement on the Eucharist affirmed the presence of Christ's body and blood in the elements and included the word "transubstantiated," but it did not provide an explicit statement of how this change occurs. Moreover, it did not comment on the nature of the presence in the Eucharist.²⁸

Aquinas elaborated and clarified this earlier teaching and formulated the classic definition of transubstantiation, but he did not formulate the doctrine as such. He is believed to have written the hymns, readings and antiphons of the office of the feast of Corpus Christi, which began in the mid-thirteenth century, but the authorship of these texts has been the subject of some debate.²⁹ He is also the author of several Eucharistic hymns.

The doctrine of transubstantiation is an attempt to respond to two questions. The first of these questions is: what is the reality that is present on the altar after the consecration of the

²⁶ <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.asp> Accessed 1 August 2013. The text concerning transubstantiation is found in Canon 1. The English translation reads: "In which [i.e., the one Universal Church] there is the same priest and sacrifice, Jesus Christ, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine; the bread being changed (*transsubstantiatio*) by divine power into the body, and the wine into the blood, so that to realize the mystery of unity we may receive of Him what He has received of us."

²⁷ Owen Cummings, *Eucharistic Doctors: A Theological History* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 134.

²⁸ Fourth Lateran Council, "Constitutions, 1. On the Catholic Faith,": in Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (London: Sheed and Ward/Georgetown DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 230. The English translation reads: "There is indeed one universal church of the faithful, outside of which nobody at all is saved, in which Jesus Christ is both priest and sacrifice. His body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine, the bread and wine having been changed in substance by God's power, into his body and blood, so that in order to achieve this ministry of unity we receive from God what he received from us."

²⁹ Cummings, *Eucharistic Doctors*, 127.

elements? The answer is: the substance of Christ himself. The second question is: how does this reality come about? The answer is: through a change (transubstantiation) of the elements, so that their *substantia* is no longer the substance of bread and wine but the substance of Christ himself. The material and chemical properties (the above-mentioned accidents) of bread and wine do not change.³⁰ Crockett states that Aquinas and the other scholastic theologians understood this change to occur at the metaphysical level, not the empirical level.³¹ These two levels were often confused both in popular piety and in theological discussion. In his explanation of the doctrine, Aquinas was careful to exclude the idea of a physical presence of Christ in the elements.³² Not all medieval theologians were so scrupulous, however, and misunderstandings arose. In their attacks on transubstantiation, the sixteenth-century Reformers confused the metaphysical and empirical levels of the doctrine. Their statements reflected a longstanding confusion about the matter in the medieval church.³³

In the early Middle Ages, a gradual separation developed between the act of consecration and the act of communion.³⁴ Communion became less frequent. As a result, later medieval theologians reflected on the meaning of the Eucharist within the context of non-communicating masses, extra-liturgical events such as Benediction and other acts of popular piety dissociated from the earlier, historic practice of frequent communion.³⁵ The goal of the Eucharist became

³⁰ Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 119.

³¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Questions on God* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 150.

³² Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 119.

³³ Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 120.

³⁴ William R. Crockett, "Holy Communion," in *The Study of Anglicanism*, revised edition, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty and Jonathan Knight (London: SPCK/Fortress Press, 1998), 312.

³⁵ For a fuller treatment of extra-liturgical Eucharistic devotions in the late medieval era, see Nathan Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1982).

the production of the real presence rather than the communion of the people. The result of this shift in emphasis was a Eucharistic piety which focussed on the adoration of the host and downplayed the reception of communion. Medieval theology became preoccupied with the question of the manner of Christ's presence in the elements.³⁶

Eucharistic Doctrine in Elizabethan Anglicanism

Reformation in England took a very different shape from that of continental Europe. England was not part of the first wave of reform that swept Germany and Switzerland in the early sixteenth century. Indeed, the pope conferred the title "Defender of the Faith" on King Henry VIII in 1521 for his book written in defence of the sacraments against Martin Luther. Henry's desire for a male heir prompted him to seek an annulment from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, on the grounds that they ought not to have been granted a papal dispensation to marry in the first place given that she was his brother Arthur's widow. Pope Clement VII's refusal to grant this annulment eventually led Henry to remove England from the spiritual jurisdiction of Rome.

The severing of ties between England and Rome in 1534 did not result in a drastic change in English Church life. Change appeared only after the death of Henry VIII in 1547, and when it did arrive it took the form of liturgy rather than doctrine. The English Reformation was not shaped by any one great Reformer or common confessional agreement. There was no English equivalent of Martin Luther or John Calvin to put his stamp on the movement. Instead, a broad spectrum of doctrinal opinion developed which represented a *via media*³⁷ between Rome and the

³⁶ Crockett, "Holy Communion," 312.

³⁷ P. E. More and F. L. Cross, *Anglicanism: The Thought and Practice of the Church of England illustrated from the Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (London: SPCK, 1957), xxii. More suggests that the *via media* may have begun as a two-pronged protest: on the one hand it refuted Rome's political claims over England while on the other it rejected the theories of state put forward by the Swiss reformers.

Reformed churches of continental Europe. This *via media* would become characteristic of Anglicanism.

Edward VI (1537-1553), the only child of Henry VIII and his third wife Jane Seymour, became King of England following the death of his father. Since Edward was only a boy, England was governed by a Regency Council which consisted of advisors who were sympathetic to the cause of religious reform. Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, was one such individual. In 1549, the first edition of the *Book of Common Prayer* was published, and Cranmer was its principal author. The prayer book would become the Church of England's main source of doctrine: the liturgy (especially the words of administration), the Articles of Religion and eventually the catechism would provide the parameters that shape Anglican Eucharistic theology. Bryan D. Spinks stresses the importance of Cranmer's prayer book when he states, "The history of Anglicanism until the last decades of the twentieth century is a history of extremely varied theologies of the Eucharist, all kept together and affirmed, or marginalised and ignored, or totally contradicted by a strange adherence to the Cranmerian text."³⁸

Cranmer did not write extensively on the sacraments. His theology must therefore be inferred from his liturgical texts. Cranmer's initial theology of Eucharistic presence is found in the Eucharistic prayer of the 1549 service of Holy Communion. At the moment of epiclesis, the priest asks God "to bless and sanctify these thy gifts, and creatures of bread and wine, that they may be unto us the body and blood of thy most dearly beloved son Jesus Christ."³⁹ This wording suggests a close association between the elements and the presence of Christ. In addition, the words "bless" and "sanctify" are marked with little crosses in the text to indicate that the priest is

³⁸ Bryan D. Spinks, "The Anglican Tradition: From Thomas Cranmer to the Tractarian Disputes," in *Do This in Remembrance of Me: The Eucharist from the Early Church to the Present Day* (London: SCM Press, 2013), 244.

³⁹ *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., [1952]), 222.

supposed to make the sign of the cross over the elements. This action implies a connection between Christ and the bread and wine. It has parallels with the Eucharistic prayer of the Sarum Rite, the form of Christian worship used in England from the eleventh century until the Reformation. At the same point during the mass when the priest asks God to receive and bless the gifts of bread and wine, the Sarum text is marked with the same little crosses.⁴⁰ The words of administration of the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* also indicate that Christ is associated with the elements. During the distribution of the bread and wine, the priest must say to each recipient “the body [or blood] of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee, preserve thy body and blood unto everlasting life.”⁴¹

In 1552, the prayer book was revised to reflect a slant toward the position of the continental Reformers. The insertion of the Black Rubric was significant for Eucharistic doctrine. This rubric, inserted by royal authority, denied “any real and essential presence” of Christ in the elements.⁴² The words of the service of Holy Communion suggest a different understanding than that of the 1549 prayer book. The little crosses were removed from the prayer of consecration. During the administration of the bread, the priest is instructed to say to the recipient “take and eat this, in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving.” Similarly, during the administration of the cup, he says “drink this in remembrance that Christ’s blood was shed for thee, and be thankful.”⁴³ The fact that the faithful are supposed to feed on Christ in their hearts indicates a receptionist position.

⁴⁰ <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Sarum/English.htm>. Accessed 6 April 2014. The link contains an English translation of the Sarum rite.

⁴¹ *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI*, 225.

⁴² *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI*, 393.

⁴³ *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI*, 389.

These actions indicated a shift away from the late medieval notion of the Eucharist as a spectacle centred on the elements to one more focussed on the worthy reception of the sacrament.

Marion J. Hatchett claims that Cranmer sought to recover a Eucharistic piety centred on the receiving of the sacrament in contrast to that of the late medieval era, which focussed on the elevation of the elements during the institution narrative.⁴⁴ The 1549 prayer book was a compromise which accommodated a variety of opinions within the Church of England without fully endorsing any of them. Colin Buchanan maintains that these liturgical revisions do not represent a change in Cranmer's Eucharistic theology but instead constitute a carefully conceived plan to gradually wean the country away from the Catholicism of Henry VIII's reign.⁴⁵ Diarmaid MacCulloch agrees that the goal of this "liturgical surgery" was to highlight the moment of reception as the only point at which the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ.⁴⁶

Cranmer's understanding of Eucharistic presence underwent a series of changes. C. W. Dugmore states that Cranmer originally accepted the erroneous understanding of a physical presence in transubstantiation but by 1546 had come to believe in a real, spiritual presence of Christ in the elements.⁴⁷ Dugmore maintains that he eventually adopted the position of Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531), who denied any association between Christ's presence and the elements.⁴⁸ Spinks states that most scholars are of the opinion that Cranmer's Eucharistic theology underwent a transition from the Roman view through the Lutheran view

⁴⁴ Marion J. Hatchett, "Prayer Books," in *The Study of Anglicanism*, revised edition, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty and Jonathan Knight (London: SPCK/Fortress Press, 1998), 133.

⁴⁵ Colin Buchanan, *What did Cranmer Think He was Doing?* (Bramcote, UK: Grove Books, 1976), 9.

⁴⁶ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), 507.

⁴⁷ C. W. Dugmore, *The Mass and the English Reformers* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1958), 183.

⁴⁸ Dugmore, *The Mass and the English Reformers*, 184.

before finally settling on a position akin to Reformed doctrine, although which Reformed doctrine it represented is a matter of debate.⁴⁹ Ultimately, Cranmer was burned at the stake in 1556 for his rejection of transubstantiation.

Cranmer's fellow martyr Hugh Latimer maintained that the presence of Christ in the Eucharist was spiritual and not physical. During a disputation at Oxford, Latimer was asked to explain the reference to eating the flesh of the Son of Man in John 6. He replied "I answer, (as Augustine understandeth) that Christ meant of the spiritual eating of his flesh ... of his true flesh, spiritually to be eaten in the supper, by faith, and not corporally."⁵⁰ Latimer goes on to state "The substance of blood is drunk; but not in one manner."⁵¹ Brian Douglas interprets this statement as a distinction between corporal and sacramental drinking.⁵²

The third martyr of the trio, Nicholas Ridley, echoes Latimer's rejection of a physical presence in the elements: "I acknowledge gladly the true body of Christ to be in the Lord's Supper in such sort as the Church of Christ, ... by grace and spiritually, ... but not by corporal presence of the body of His flesh."⁵³ He also acknowledges the efficacy of the consecration. Referring to the elements, he says "by the word of God the thing hath a being that it had not before."⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Spinks, "The Anglican Tradition: From Thomas Cranmer to the Tractarian Disputes." 214.

⁵⁰ Hugh Latimer, *Sermons and Remains of Hugh Latimer*, ed. G. E. Corrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1845), 266.

⁵¹ Latimer, *Sermons and Remains*, 267.

⁵² Brian Douglas, *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology*, vol. 1, (Leiden/Boston: Brill Publishing, 2012), 102.

⁵³ Nicholas Ridley, *Works*, ed. H. Christmas (Cambridge: The Parker Society, 1841), 235-236.

⁵⁴ Nicholas Ridley, "Disputation at Cambridge," cited in Darwell Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1909), vol 2., 185.

The 1552 *Book of Common Prayer* was in use for less than a year when King Edward VI died and Mary I ascended the throne. A staunch Catholic, Mary suppressed the prayer book and restored the Sarum rite. Along with Cranmer, Bishop Hugh Latimer and Bishop Nicholas Ridley were executed for their Eucharistic theology while other Reformers fled to continental Europe.

Mary's death in 1558 and the accession of her half-sister Elizabeth I marked the beginning of a new era in the English Church. A distinctively Anglican tradition gradually emerged during Elizabeth's reign. In January 1559, Elizabeth's first Parliament met to pass the *Act of Supremacy* and the *Act of Uniformity*. These two legal instruments are collectively known as the "Elizabethan Settlement." The *Act of Supremacy* abolished jurisdiction of any "foreign prince, person, prelate state or potentate, spiritual or temporal" over England and imposed an oath upon all ecclesiastical and lay officials requiring them to acknowledge Elizabeth as supreme governor of both church and state.⁵⁵ The *Act of Uniformity* responded to the country's need for strength through unity: it restored the 1552 prayer book with some revision. Notable among these revisions was the deletion of the Black Rubric. Severe penalties were applied to clergy who did not follow the revised prayer book.⁵⁶ This legislation enabled theologians of the era to put forward their positions without fear of reprisal.

On the question of Eucharistic presence, the 1559 prayer book combines the view of the 1549 prayer book with that of 1552. During the administration of the bread, the priest is instructed to say "the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life; and take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, feed on him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving."⁵⁷ A similar statement is made during the

⁵⁵ J. R. H. Moorman, *A History of the Church in England*, 3rd ed. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1972), 200.

⁵⁶ Moorman, *A History of the Church in England*, 3rd ed., 201.

⁵⁷ *The Prayer Book of Queen Elizabeth (1559)* (Edinburgh: John Grant, [1911]), 103.

administration of the cup of wine. These words of administration represent a theological synthesis: they contain the notion of a close relationship between Christ and the elements as well as the idea of receptionism.

Following the accession of Elizabeth I, the exiled Reformers returned to England. Some were quickly appointed to positions of authority within the Church. One of those was John Jewel (1522-1571), a theologian who had acted as notary to Cranmer and Ridley at their trial in 1554. He is considered one of the best representatives of the Eucharistic thought of the early Elizabethan era.⁵⁸ Jewel accepts that Christ is present in the Eucharist and that the bread and wine undergo change; however, he denies the doctrine of transubstantiation, which he considered to be superstitious and heretical.⁵⁹ Jewel insists that Christ offers himself in the sacrament: “Christ doth truly and presently give his own self in his Sacraments: in baptism, that we may put him on, and in his supper, that we may eat him by faith and spirit, and may have everlasting life by his cross and blood.”⁶⁰ Although he believes in Christ’s presence in the Eucharist, Jewel maintains this presence is a mystery.⁶¹

Jewel’s younger contemporary, Richard Hooker (1554-1600), developed a distinctively Anglican method in theology. His work, *Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*⁶², was intended to defend the English Reformation against domination by the radical Protestantism of continental Europe. Ultimately, this work served to make the Church of England aware of itself as an entity

⁵⁸ Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 173.

⁵⁹ John E. Booty, *John Jewel as Apologist of the Church of England* (London: SPCK, 1963), 167.

⁶⁰ John Jewel, *An Apology of the Church of England*, ed. John E. Booty (Ithaca, NY: Published for the Folger Shakespeare Library by Cornell University Press, 1963), 34.

⁶¹ Booty, *John Jewel*, 170.

⁶² Richard Hooker, *Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Binghampton NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, [1993]).

independent of Rome and Geneva and with a positive doctrine and discipline of its own.⁶³

Hooker's Eucharistic doctrine also bears a singularly Anglican stamp. William R. Crockett has described it as a doctrine of the real partaking of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist.⁶⁴

Hooker affirms a belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist but insists that this presence is found in the hearts of faithful believers and not in the elements of bread and wine.

He maintains that "the real presence of Christ's most blessed body and blood is not ... to be sought for in the sacrament, but in the worthy receiver of the sacrament."⁶⁵ The elements are merely vehicles which convey Christ's presence to worthy receivers. They are "causes instrumental upon the receipt whereof the participation of his body and blood ensueth."⁶⁶

Hooker does not comment on the relationship between the presence and the elements; he is content simply to know that they are the body and blood of Christ.⁶⁷ It is important to remember that Receptionism admits the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but it relates that presence primarily to the worthy receiver rather than to the elements of bread and wine.⁶⁸ The focus of Hooker's sacramental thought is therefore not the real presence itself but rather the grace conveyed by the sacramental signs of bread and wine.

The poems of George Herbert (1593-1633) express a belief in the connection between the Eucharistic elements and Christ's body and blood. In a poem entitled "The Holy Communion," Herbert states that Christ is present not in luxury items such as gold but in simple bread and

⁶³ More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, xix.

⁶⁴ Crockett, "Holy Communion," 309.

⁶⁵ *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, vol. 5, ed. W. Speed Hill (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977-1998), 334.

⁶⁶ *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, vol. 5, 334.

⁶⁷ *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, vol. 5, 340.

⁶⁸ Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 190.

wine.⁶⁹ Herbert also claims that the Eucharistic elements convey grace.⁷⁰ Herbert was a priest as well as a poet, and his views are evidence that a diversity of opinion on the subject of Eucharistic presence existed during this era.

The Thirty-Nine Articles and the Catechism

The Articles of Religion, also known as the Thirty-Nine Articles, are a statement of the Church of England's theological principles. Begun by Thomas Cranmer in the 1530s, they underwent a series of changes before being finalised in 1571. Cranmer and his colleagues had several goals in drawing up the Articles. They wanted to ensure that the Church of England taught doctrine in accordance with apostolic tradition; they sought to ensure that the clergy were sound in their teaching and did not expose the laity to either radical Protestant or Roman teaching; and they wanted to achieve unity within the Church.⁷¹ Although the production of the Articles was initiated by Cranmer, they are largely the work of his disciple Archbishop Matthew Parker.

Article XXVIII contains a declaration concerning the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It states that transubstantiation “cannot be proved by holy Writ; but it is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to man superstitions.”⁷² After condemning this doctrine, it goes on to state that “the Body and Blood of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean [sic] whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is

⁶⁹ George Herbert, *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. T. Cook (Ware, UK: Wordworth Poetry Library, 1994), 168.

⁷⁰ George Herbert, *The Works of George Herbert*, 167-168.

⁷¹ Peter Toon, “The Articles and Homilies,” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, revised edition, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight (London: SPCK/Fortress Press, 1998), 146.

⁷² *The Book of Common Prayer* (Toronto: Geoffrey Cumberledge, Oxford University Press, 1918), 670.

Faith.”⁷³ Oliver O’Donovan sees a difference between Cranmer’s Article “Of the Lord’s Supper,” which denied a corporal presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the later Elizabethan Article XXVIII. He claims that these differences provided alternative paths for Anglican Eucharistic thought to follow for over three centuries.⁷⁴ O’Donovan also states that the English Reformers took a conservative approach to the scholastic doctrine of the sacraments and altered it only when they felt it necessary to do so. He maintains they created incoherencies in their sacramental theology by trying to preserve scholastic teaching but at the same time introducing “wrecking amendments.”⁷⁵ O’Donovan sees in the Reformers’ views a certain discomfort between objectivity and subjectivity: they attempt to reconcile the objectivity of sacramental grace with the subjectivity of the role of faith.⁷⁶ This discomfort may explain their movement away from sacramental realism.

The Church catechism first appeared in the 1549 prayer book. It takes the form of questions and answers, a method of instruction which was common in Judaism.⁷⁷ In 1604, the section concerning the sacraments was added. In the questions concerning the elements, the catechism draws on St. Augustine’s categories of sign and thing signified. It also includes a question on the benefits derived from partaking of the Eucharist. “*Question*: What are the benefits whereof we are partakers thereby? *Answer*: The strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the Body and Blood of Christ, as our bodies are by the Bread and Wine.”⁷⁸ As we shall

⁷³ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 670.

⁷⁴ Oliver O’Donovan, *On the Thirty-Nine Articles: A Conversation with Tudor Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2011), 124.

⁷⁵ O’Donovan, *On the Thirty-Nine Articles*, 125.

⁷⁶ O’Donovan, *On the Thirty-Nine Articles*, 131.

⁷⁷ James Hartin, “Catechisms,” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, revised edition, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight (London: SPCK/Fortress Press, 1998), 167.

⁷⁸ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 328.

see later in this thesis, Robert Wilberforce considered this threefold distinction presented in the catechism to be significant.

Seventeenth-Century Anglican Eucharistic Thought

Although Anglicanism does not bear the imprint of any one magisterial figure, it is nevertheless true that Hooker established the direction for Anglican Eucharistic theology in the century that followed. Like Hooker, seventeenth-century Anglican theologians insisted on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist but left the manner of that presence undefined. Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626) condemned transubstantiation and added that the Church of England saw no more need to determine the method of the real presence than it did to explain how Christ's blood washes us in our baptism.⁷⁹ He views the presence of Christ as union between the visible sacrament and the invisible reality it conveys.⁸⁰ Similarly, Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667) considered it unnecessary to inquire into how Christ is present in the Eucharist. Kenneth Stevenson states that Taylor, like other theologians of his era, felt it necessary to make his position on the Eucharist as clear as possible in order to avoid charges of "popery."⁸¹ Taylor insists that there is no change in the substance of the bread and the wine but maintains that they nevertheless communicate Christ's body and blood to recipients.⁸² Like other Anglican thinkers, Taylor mistakenly assumes that transubstantiation implies a physical presence in the Eucharistic elements. As we shall see in Chapter Six, Taylor also produced devotional works that were much valued by Anglican Evangelicals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

⁷⁹ More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, 464.

⁸⁰ Lancelot Andrewes, *Works*, vol. 8, ed. J. Wilson and J. Bliss (Oxford: Parker, 1841-1854), 265.

⁸¹ Kenneth Stevenson, *Covenant of Grace Renewed: A Vision of the Eucharist in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1994), 115.

⁸² Jeremy Taylor, *The Real Presence and Spiritual of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament proved against the Doctrine of Transubstantiation*, vol. 2, (London: Bohn, [1867]), 704.

Daniel Brevint (1616-1695) is best known for his work *The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice*⁸³, which acquired a certain popularity during his lifetime and exerted a strong influence on John and Charles Wesley's Eucharistic theology, as we shall see. On the subject of Eucharistic presence, he states that the consecrated elements of bread and wine are more than simply empty figures. He associates the bread and wine with the presence of Christ but, like other Anglican thinkers, declines to speculate on the manner of that presence. The bread and the wine remain in their original form, but after consecration they acquire a "character" which is conveyed to recipients of the Eucharist.⁸⁴

Seventeenth-century Anglican writers were also known as the Caroline Divines, so called because they were the contemporaries of either of England's two kings named Charles, Charles I (reigned 1625-1649) and Charles II (reigned 1660-1685).⁸⁵ The Caroline Divines borrowed from Augustine and the catechism by making a distinction between the *res* of the sacrament and the *sacramentum*. The *res* refers to the reality or inward and spiritual grace conveyed by the sacrament, while the *sacramentum* refers to the outward and visible sign which communicates grace to faithful recipients. The nature of a sacrament consists of two parts: one is visible and earthly while the other is invisible and heavenly.⁸⁶ At the same time, the Caroline Divines maintain that a sacramental union exists between the elements and the reality signified by them.

⁸³ Daniel Brevint, *The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice: by way of Discourse, Meditation, and Prayer and Prayer upon the Nature, Parts and Blessings of the Holy Communion; Missale Romanum, or Depth and Mystery of the Roman Mass; laid open and explained, for the use of both Reformed and Un-reformed Christians* (Oxford: J. Vincent, [1847]).

⁸⁴ H. R. McAdoo and Kenneth W. Stevenson, *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Anglican Tradition* (Norwich UK: Canterbury Press, 1995), 83.

⁸⁵ See John Booty, "Standard Divines," in *The Study of Anglicanism*, revised edition, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty and Jonathan Knight (London: SPCK/Fortress Press, 1998).

⁸⁶ Crockett, "Holy Communion," 311.

This union does not eliminate the distinction between the *res* and the *sacramentum*, however. The Caroline Divines maintain that although the *res* and the *sacramentum* are joined, only faithful recipients receive the *res* as well as the outward sign. The outward signs enter into the body while the inward grace of the sacrament is received only by faith.⁸⁷

Crockett notes that for Anglican theologians from Cranmer's time onward the underlying goal of the Eucharist is not the production of the real presence but the nourishment of the Christian faithful.⁸⁸ Seventeenth-century Anglican thinkers shared Hooker's view that the real presence is a presupposition rather than the focus of their thought. Christ's presence in the Eucharist is not that of an object on the altar but is instead spiritual food and drink intended to nourish the faithful. They viewed the manner of that presence as sacramental and as an event in the order of grace: Christ is not physically present but is there to be received by those who possess a living faith. They rejected transubstantiation on the grounds that it was a naturalistic explanation of the Eucharistic presence which implied a local presence of Christ in the order of nature. The elements of bread and wine communicate the presence of Christ to the faithful receiver but do so by grace, not in a mechanical manner.⁸⁹

P. E. More and F. L. Cross, twentieth-century essayists on seventeenth-century Anglicanism, describe the writings of the Caroline Divines as "the Chalcedon of Eucharistic theology."⁹⁰ They employ this allusion to the fourth ecumenical council to underscore the point that these writers attempted to steer a middle course between the position of Rome on the one hand and radical Protestantism on the other. Just as attendees at the Council of Chalcedon in 451

⁸⁷ Crockett, "Holy Communion," 311.

⁸⁸ Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 196.

⁸⁹ Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 197.

⁹⁰ More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, xxxvii.

attempted to reconcile the Christological views of the Eastern church fathers, the Caroline Divines sought to find common ground between Roman sympathisers and continental Protestantism. More and Cross maintain that their adherence to the *via media* was motivated neither by a spirit of compromise nor a hesitation to commit themselves to a particular position, but rather by a determination to maintain a balance which was threatened by an authority rooted in the infallibility of either tradition or Scripture.⁹¹

Conflict with the Puritans

In 1637, Charles I attempted to extend Anglican forms of liturgy to Scotland by introducing a prayer book which resembled the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*. The Eucharistic theology expressed in the Scottish prayer book is similar to that of the 1549 prayer book. The bread and wine are blessed by the power of the Holy Spirit, thereby implying that Christ's body and blood are present in them.⁹² This new prayer book was not well received by the Scottish people and it was never put into use. Charles I was compelled to ask Parliament for money to suppress the rebellions that broke out in response to the 1637 prayer book, which led to the growing conflict between the king and the elected officials. This prayer book therefore played an indirect role in sparking the civil war in England. Gordon Donaldson states that the compilers of the Scottish prayer book attempted to incorporate existing Scottish usages into the new text. Charles I, however, was concerned about growing Puritan sensibilities in England and feared that too many concessions to Scottish practices would embolden his political opponents in England.⁹³

⁹¹ More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, xxxii.

⁹² Gordon Donaldson, *The Making of the Scottish Prayer Book of 1637* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1954), 198-199.

⁹³ Donaldson, *The Making of the Scottish Prayer Book of 1637*, 60.

William Laud (1573-1645), Archbishop of Canterbury, shares the view of earlier Anglican thinkers that the consecrated elements contain a spiritual presence of Christ but he rejects transubstantiation, which he mistakenly believes to imply a physical presence.⁹⁴ Douglas states that Laud objects to transubstantiation primarily because it attempts to define the manner of Eucharistic presence too closely.⁹⁵ Laud was a protégé of Richard Neile (1562-1640), who served as Bishop of Durham and several other dioceses as well as Archbishop of York from 1631 until his death. Laud and Neile were members of the Durham House Group, a gathering of clergy whose theology was anti-Calvinist.⁹⁶

By 1640, the Puritans had gained the ascendancy in Parliament and were able to impose their own agenda. A civil war broke out in England which was to create deep divisions within the country and cause considerable bloodshed. William Laud was executed on the Puritans' orders in 1645, and James's son and successor, King Charles I, followed the archbishop to the scaffold in 1649. Following the execution of the king, a Puritan Commonwealth was established with Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) as Lord Protector. The *Book of Common Prayer* was outlawed during this period. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 following the enforced exile of Cromwell's son and heir, Richard, the prayer book was returned to use. In 1662, it underwent another revision. One of the notable changes in this text was the reinsertion of the Black Rubric, albeit in a modified form. Where the 1552 version denied any "real and essential presence,"⁹⁷ the new revision denied "any Corporal Presence of Christ's natural Flesh

⁹⁴ William Laud, *The Works of Archbishop William Laud*, vol. 2, ed. W. Scott and J. Bliss, (Oxford: Parker Society, 1847-1860), 364-365.

⁹⁵ Douglas, *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology*, vol. 1, 184.

⁹⁶ For a fuller treatment of this subject, see Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

⁹⁷ *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI*, 393.

and Blood.”⁹⁸ The revised phrase clearly indicates rejection of the notion of any physical presence, which the Puritans particularly disliked. This revised rubric might be understood as consistent with a correct understanding of transubstantiation, although at the time it was conceived as a rejection of this doctrine.

More and Cross state that the 1662 prayer book represents the triumph of the cause for which both Charles I and Archbishop Laud died.⁹⁹ It firmly secured the Anglican position against Puritanism. All of the elements to which the Puritans had objected, e.g. kneeling at Communion, the use of vestments, etc., were retained in this book and were enforced by Parliament. This enforcement required clergy to adopt the new services, to submit to episcopal ordination and to admit that their former conduct had been irregular.¹⁰⁰ The Puritan influence had finally been eliminated from Anglican worship.

Post-Restoration Eucharistic Thought

The Glorious Revolution of 1688, a bloodless coup d'état in which King James II was forced from the throne and sent into exile, saw the accession of William of Orange and Mary II as joint sovereigns. This revolution created another conflict within the Church, as nine bishops

⁹⁸ The text of the 1662 version reads: “Whereas it is ordained in this Office for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, that the Communicants should receive the same kneeling; (which order is well meant, for a signification of our humble and grateful acknowledgment of the benefits of Christ therein given to all worthy Receivers, and for the avoiding of such profanation and disorder in the holy Communion, as might otherwise ensue;) yet, lest the same kneeling should by any persons, either out of ignorance and infirmity, or out of malice and obstinacy, be misconstrued and depraved: It is hereby declared, That thereby no adoration is intended, or ought to be done, either unto the Sacramental Bread or Wine there bodily received, or unto any Corporal Presence of Christ's natural Flesh and Blood. For the Sacramental Bread and Wine remain still in their very natural substances, and therefore may not be adored; (for that were Idolatry, to be abhorred of all faithful Christians;) and the natural Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ are in Heaven, and not here; it being against the truth of Christ's natural Body to be at one time in more places than one.” *The Book of Common Prayer*, 321.

⁹⁹ More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, lii.

¹⁰⁰ More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, lii.

and approximately four hundred clergy refused to swear the oath of allegiance to the new monarchs.¹⁰¹ This group became known as the Non-Jurors.

C. W. Dugmore states there is little difference between the Eucharistic doctrine of the Non-Jurors and that of their counterparts in the established church.¹⁰² He notes, however, that the Non-Jurors in general celebrated the Eucharist more frequently than did mainstream Anglican clergy.¹⁰³ John Johnson (1662-1725), who remained a priest in the established church, insisted that Christ is present in the elements through God's gift of the Holy Spirit upon them, and not solely as the result of the faith of the receiver.¹⁰⁴

One mainstream Anglican thinker of the eighteenth century, Benjamin Hoadly (1676-1761), who also opposed the Non-Jurors, would later be targeted by Robert Wilberforce for his views on church governance.¹⁰⁵ Hoadly denied any connection between the Eucharistic elements and the presence of Christ, preferring instead to view Christ as present in the assembly of the faithful gathered to worship.¹⁰⁶ Douglas sees Hoadly's work as a response to the perceived exaggerated emphasis of contemporary High Church¹⁰⁷ devotional manuals on the

¹⁰¹ More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, lii.

¹⁰² C. W. Dugmore, *Eucharistic Doctrine in England from Hooker to Waterland* (London: SPCK, 1942), 140.

¹⁰³ Dugmore, *Eucharistic Doctrine*, 150.

¹⁰⁴ Dugmore, *Eucharistic Doctrine*, 143.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *A Sketch of the History of Erastianism; together with Two Sermons on the Reality of Church Ordinances, and on the Principle of Church Authority* (London: John Murray, 1851). For a fuller treatment of Hoadly's involvement in matters of church government, see Andrew Starkie, *The Church of England and the Bangorian Controversy, 1716-1721* (Martlesham UK: Boydell Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁶ Benjamin Hoadly, *A Plain Account of the Nature and End of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper 1735* (Whitefish Montana: [2003]), 58.

¹⁰⁷ The distinctions of "high" and "low" used to designate parties within the Church of England indicate that the emphasis that they place on the sacraments as well as the level of importance they assign to the divine basis of authority in church and state and to the rights of monarchy and episcopacy. The term "High Church" appears to have been first coined in the 1650s but did not enter common usage for another forty or fifty years. In contrast to

need for preparation before communion.¹⁰⁸ This emphasis on preparation suggests that the High Church party, including Wilberforce, placed considerable importance on the act of receiving the consecrated bread and wine.

Likely Hoadly, Daniel Waterland (1683-1740) remained within the established church but he did not share Hoadly's views on Eucharistic presence. In his work on the Eucharist, Waterland states that the elements of bread and wine are blessed during consecration, with the result that they are "at the same time, to worthy receivers, made the means of their spiritual union with Christ himself."¹⁰⁹ He expresses the opinion that Christ's presence in the Eucharist does not depend on the faith of the recipient, but is distinct from it, although faith is the means by which the gift conveyed in the Eucharist is recognised and received.

The Wesleys

John Wesley (1703-1791) and his brother Charles (1707-1788) began an evangelical revival that spanned the latter half of the eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth. This movement was as much a Eucharistic revival as it was an evangelical one. The brothers

the High Church party was the Low Church group, which downplayed the importance of the episcopate, priesthood and sacraments. The term "Low Church," which dates from the early eighteenth century, was originally applied to the Latitudinarian (liberal) group but eventually fell out of use. When it was revived in the mid-nineteenth century, it was applied to the Evangelicals while Latitudinarians came to be known as the "Broad Church" group.

Members of the High Church party in the Church of England generally adhered to the doctrine of apostolic succession as evidence of the Church's catholicity. They considered the Church of England to be a branch of the universal church catholic, which did not include the reformed churches that had abandoned Episcopal structures. They believed in the supremacy of scripture and also looked to the creeds, the prayer book and the catechism for authority. They valued the writings of the early Church Fathers and cultivated a practical spirituality based on good works. Significantly, they laid emphasis on the importance of Anglicanism's two principal sacraments, baptism and Eucharist. See Peter Benedict Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship 1760-1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 27.

¹⁰⁸ Douglas, *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology*, vol. 1, 345.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel Waterland, *A Review of the Doctrine of the Eucharist: With Four Charges to the Clergy of Middlesex connected with the Same Subject* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1896]), 99.

saw a unity between a sacramental and an evangelical vision of Christianity.¹¹⁰ Samuel Wesley, the father of John and Charles, was a High Church cleric who shared the religious sympathies of the Non-Jurors, although he was not one himself. The boys were therefore brought up with the High Church principle of emphasis on the Eucharist. During their time at the University of Oxford, the Wesleys came to be known as Precisionists or Methodists because of their methodical celebration of the Eucharist at frequent and regular intervals.¹¹¹

The Wesleys expressed their Eucharistic doctrine within the framework of popular devotion. They wrote 166 Eucharistic hymns combining rich sacramentalism and joyful evangelical experience. The preface to Charles Wesley's *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*¹¹² is an abridged version of Daniel Brevint's *The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice*. The inclusion of Brevint's work as a preface to this collection of hymns can be interpreted as Wesley's endorsement of the views of this earlier Anglican thinker. The Wesley brothers misunderstood transubstantiation to imply a physical presence of Christ in the Eucharist and they therefore rejected, but they nevertheless affirmed a real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.¹¹³ They declined to speculate on how the bread and the wine became channels of spiritual grace but they insisted that the elements are the instruments by which grace is conveyed.¹¹⁴ Crockett states that

¹¹⁰ Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 199.

¹¹¹ J. E. Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrine of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (London: Epworth Press, [1954]), 215.

¹¹² Daniel B. Stevick, *The Altar's Fire: Charles Wesley's 'Hymns on the Lord's Supper, 1745' Introduction and Comment* (Peterborough UK: Epworth, 2004). For a fuller treatment of Methodist beliefs, see Ted. A. Campbell, *Wesleyan Beliefs: Formal and Popular Expressions of the Core Beliefs of Wesleyan Communities* (Nashville TN: Kingswood Books, 2010).

¹¹³ Rattenbury, *Evangelical Doctrine*, 217.

¹¹⁴ Rattenbury, *Evangelical Doctrine*, 218.

the Wesleys' hymns reflect the seventeenth-century Anglican doctrine of the Eucharist as seen through the lens of their evangelical experience.¹¹⁵

The Evangelical Party in the Established Church

The first three decades of the nineteenth century are referred to as the Evangelical “golden age.”¹¹⁶ As we saw in the Introduction, William Wilberforce, Robert's father, was a leading figure in the Evangelical movement and was the driving force behind the Clapham Sect. The rise of the Oxford Movement in the 1830s put Anglican Evangelicals on the defensive. It did not seem to have a negative effect on Robert Wilberforce, however, who came to espouse its principles. They later allied themselves with Evangelicals of other denominations in opposition to the High Church party.

The Wesleyan revival was not the only evangelical movement of its time. Following the death of John Wesley, Methodism separated from the Church of England. Charles Wesley belonged to another strand of Evangelicalism that remained within the established church. The Evangelical movement's English origins can be traced to a group of clergy who, between 1730 and 1760, underwent a religious awakening. This group did not look to Wesley for leadership.¹¹⁷

The Wesleys promoted the idea of frequent communion but they did not isolate the Eucharist from other means of grace. They considered it to be the centre of Christian life and practice: it must be surrounded by acts of prayer and devotion such as reading the Scriptures, fasting, the preaching service and Christian fellowship.¹¹⁸ Their hymns suggest the spiritual but undefined presence of Christ in the elements. Crockett states that a number of verses in the

¹¹⁵ Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 206.

¹¹⁶ David Butler, *Methodists and Papists: John Wesley and the Catholic Church in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995) 34.

¹¹⁷ Butler, *Methodists and Papists*, 33.

¹¹⁸ Owen Cummings, *Eucharistic Doctors: A Theological History* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 222.

Wesleys' hymns focus on the character of the sacraments as signs and instruments that convey what they signify.¹¹⁹

The Hackney Phalanx

During the final decades of the eighteenth century and the first part of the nineteenth, the high church party was represented by a group known as the Hackney Phalanx, so called because many of its members were associated with the parish of Hackney in London. The Phalanx consisted of a tightly-knit group of friends, many of whom were related by blood or marriage.¹²⁰ They were predominantly middle-class and Tory in their political leanings. The members shared a common religious and political outlook and tended to be conservative and reticent in theological matters.¹²¹

The members of the Hackney Phalanx largely shared the Eucharistic doctrine of their High Church predecessors. William Van Mildert (1765-1836), the last Prince-Bishop of Durham, optimistically noted a point of convergence between the Church of England and the Reformed churches of the continent of the subject of the real presence. He observed that both parties deny a corporal presence but accept a sacramental presence in the elements and implied that this agreement might lead to the sharing of communion.¹²² The Hackney Phalanx was well-represented in the Church of England hierarchy. At least eight men who became bishops in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were associated with the group.¹²³ The Phalanx's theological focus was on Laud and the other seventeenth-century divines and they put more

¹¹⁹ Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 209.

¹²⁰ Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *High Churchmanship in the Church of England: From the Sixteenth Century to the Late Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 104.

¹²¹ Hylson-Smith, *High Churchmanship in the Church of England*, 108.

¹²² E. A. Varley, *The Last of the Prince-Bishops: William Van Mildert and the High Church Movement of the Early Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 50.

¹²³ Hylson-Smith, *High Churchmanship in the Church of England*, 108.

emphasis on the incarnation than on atonement. Like their forerunners, they did not seek to determine the manner of Christ's presence in the Eucharist and affirmed that it was not produced by transubstantiation.

Analysis

This overview of the Anglican tradition of Eucharistic theology reveals that multiple strands of thought were held in tension in the centuries preceding Robert Isaac Wilberforce. Generations of Anglican thinkers had rejected the idea of physicality in the elements of bread and wine and had stressed the importance of preparation before receiving communion. This concern for the worthy reception of the sacrament coincided with the shift away from the idea of the Eucharist as a spectacle performed by the priest at the altar. The increased emphasis on the spiritual state of the recipient was a logical outcome of the focus on the reception of bread and wine. At the same time, some Anglicans maintained that Christ's presence was somehow associated with the Eucharistic elements. Anglican Eucharistic theologians attempted to trace their own *via media* between these seemingly divergent strands.

As we have seen in this chapter, Anglicanism has had a long tradition of thinkers who have misunderstood the doctrine of transubstantiation as implying a physical presence in the Eucharistic elements. Some of those thinkers have nevertheless insisted on a close association between the bread and wine and the body and blood of Christ. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, an overly minimalist understanding of the sacramental signs emerged in Evangelical circles. In the mid-nineteenth century, Robert Wilberforce would attempt to counter this purely figurative understanding of the sacraments with evidence from the early history of the Christian era to bolster his claim of sacramental efficacy. At the same time, he also attempted to counter an over-emphasis on the Receptionist approach, which ignored Christ's presence in the

bread and the wine as well as other aspects of the liturgical action. In so doing, he managed to reconcile, perhaps unwittingly, the various strands of thought on Eucharistic presence into one cohesive idea that would later find echoes in the ecumenical movement of the twentieth century. In the next chapter we shall examine the nineteenth-century world of Robert Isaac Wilberforce.

Chapter Two

THE CONTEXT OF WILBERFORCE'S EUCHARISTIC THEOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the profound changes that took place in both Britain and continental Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century. Robert Isaac Wilberforce's life ran parallel to these developments and his choice of topics for theological reflection was influenced by them. His decision to focus on sacramental realism was a reaction to the mid-nineteenth century attempts to downplay the efficacy of the sacraments. Wilberforce had first become aware of this low emphasis on the sacraments as a result of his exposure to German theologians during a language immersion course in Germany in the early 1830s. David Newsome says one of Wilberforce's goals in making this trip was learn from that country's leading theologians.¹ The Gorham case, which is outlined in this chapter, was the nineteenth-century Church of England's best example of the denial of sacramental efficacy. Wilberforce

¹ David Newsome, *The Parting of Friends: The Wilberforces and Henry Manning* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), 137.

produced his trilogy of major works in the years leading up to and immediately following the delivery of the final judgement in the Gorham case.

Wilberforce's attempt to present sacramental realism as a teaching of the early church and therefore a notion consistent with Anglicanism was not well received. This negative reception was no doubt greatly influenced by the contemporary political situation. As we shall see, the aftershocks of the revolution in France and the Napoleonic Wars filled the British with a fear of possible invasion. The economic changes brought about in Britain by the industrial revolution created considerable social upheaval as well as a sense of insecurity. The tensions between church and state in Britain were a reflection of the political turmoil in continental Europe during this era. In this climate of instability, the British did not look favourably upon any threat to the status quo. Wilberforce's suggestion that sacramental realism had an important place in Anglican Eucharistic theology was considered suspect by many in the Church of England who thought it to be redolent of Roman Catholicism. The knee-jerk anti-Catholicism that pervaded Britain in the early to mid-nineteenth century would not tolerate the expression of theological opinions perceived to be influenced by Romanism.

Political and Social Changes

In the early nineteenth century, a series of changes in Britain's political situation further contributed to the popular sense of unease. As a result of legislation passed by Parliament in 1801, political union between Britain and Ireland was solidified. Ireland had been ruled by the English monarchy since the Middle Ages, but as a result of this act of union the Parliament at Westminster became directly responsible for Irish affairs. One consequence of political union was the sudden addition of a sizeable population whose religious affiliation was different than that of the population to which it was joined. In 1831, Ireland's population was seven million, of

whom approximately five-and-a-half million were Roman Catholic.² In the same year, the combined population of England and Wales totalled just over fourteen million. The British government found itself compelled to confront the difficulties posed by the inclusion of this large Roman Catholic population into a country in which Anglicanism was the predominant religious confession. The famine of the 1840s would considerably reduce the size of the population: many of those who did not succumb to disease chose to emigrate. In the 1820s, however, the problem of how to respond to a large and restive Roman Catholic population remained a vexing one.

The situation reached a critical point in 1828, when Irish activist Daniel O'Connell won a seat in the parliamentary election but could not take his seat in the House of Commons because he was a Roman Catholic. The prime minister of the day, Arthur Wellesley, first Duke of Wellington and nemesis of Napoleon Bonaparte, reluctantly agreed to emancipation for Roman Catholics. He did so because he feared that civil war would break out in Ireland if he did not concede to Roman Catholic demands. The above-mentioned fear of social unrest created by the chaos of the French Revolution may have contributed to this decision. In 1828, the *Test Act* and the *Corporation Act* were repealed and the following year the vote was extended to Roman Catholic men. The *Reform Act* of 1832 introduced wide-ranging changes to Britain's electoral system. The passing of this legislation meant that the next election would result in a new sort of parliament chosen by a new electorate. Previously, non-Anglicans had not been permitted to vote or hold public office. Given that the Church of England was and is the established church in Britain, the British Parliament was and is responsible for many decisions about its governance. One consequence of this reforming legislation was that Roman Catholic Members of Parliament

² Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 9.

would be making decisions pertaining to the Church of England. This odd situation of non-Anglicans having decision-making power over the established church persists to this day.

Wellington was not the only politician who was unenthusiastic about Roman Catholic emancipation. King George IV (reigned 1820-1830) and much of the political establishment were also not in favour of it. The staunchly Protestant Robert Peel, who was Leader of the House of Commons at the time and would later serve as Prime Minister, earned the nickname “Orange Peel” for his outspoken opposition to the bill.³ This hostility toward emancipation among the ruling class was echoed in the larger population. Most English, Welsh and Scots were opposed to it or at best indifferent toward it. Given the level of popular opposition to the bill, later historians have questioned whether a more representative parliament that had heeded its constituents’ wishes could have passed the bill.⁴

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, not all higher clergy in the Church of England were hostile toward the bill. While some, such as William Van Mildert, the last prince-bishop of Durham, were staunchly opposed to it, others recognised that Roman Catholic emancipation was necessary. John Bird Sumner, the Bishop of Chester and a distant cousin of Robert Wilberforce, was moderate on the issue and acknowledged the need for the legislation. Sumner would later serve as Archbishop of Canterbury. The elderly Bishop Bathurst of Norwich was the only cleric on the ecclesiastical bench of the House of Lords who wholeheartedly supported emancipation. It was not only the lords spiritual who understood the need for reform. In the same year that Roman Catholic emancipation was passed into law, Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby

³ James Derek Holmes, *More Roman than Rome: English Catholics in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Burns and Oates, 1973), 37. The word “Orange” has commonly been used in reference to British Protestants. It is an allusion to the Protestant Prince William of Orange, who overthrew his father-in-law the Roman Catholic King James II in 1688 in the above-mentioned bloodless coup d’état known as the “Glorious Revolution.”

⁴ Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 7.

School, urged the English to support the demands of the Irish Roman Catholic population on the grounds of natural justice.

Industrial Revolution

At the same time that momentum was building in Britain toward political reform, economic developments led to changes in the social fabric. The roots of these developments are to be found in the latter half of the eighteenth century. In the 1780s, for the first time in human history, the productive power of human societies was unleashed and their capacity for the multiplication of goods and services appeared to be limitless. Production was no longer impeded by such barriers as defective science and technology. This process of industrial revolution had been gathering speed since the 1760s but it was not until the 1780s that the economy was transformed by it.

The industrial revolution transformed England from an agrarian society, which was predominantly rural, to an urbanised society focused on factories. The movement of workers from the countryside to the cities created many social problems, particularly poverty. Many ended up living a meagre existence in squalid slums. Towns and industrial areas grew rapidly and without planning or supervision. Most basic services of city life could not keep pace with the growth in population: water supply, proper sanitation and housing were all inadequate. Contagious diseases, especially cholera, flourished in such unhealthy conditions. In addition, the new technology introduced by the industrial revolution, such as the steam engine, would change the way in which people lived and worked. People were both frightened and exhilarated by the progress of technology and the way in which it would transform their lives.

The Church of England initially experienced some difficulty in responding to the challenges of these social changes. Its rigid structure of parochial administration proved

problematic in its approach to the newly urbanised population. Bishops were criticised for their lack of social conscience because of their seeming timidity in approaching social reform. In contrast, Roman Catholic clergy were better positioned to address the new social situation. Until the establishment of a hierarchy in 1850, its officials reported directly to Rome. The absence of a bureaucratic structure enabled it to respond to the needs of the people with greater ease than the Church of England.

The social changes brought about by the industrial revolution were similar across Europe but the reactions by the affected populations were not. While the social upheaval caused by this economic transformation at times prompted workers on the continent to react violently, the level of unrest in England was much lower. The English working classes did not express their dissatisfaction with the status quo with the same violence as did their continental counterparts. One explanation for this relative calm may lie in the nature of the relationships among the various social classes in England. The sharp distinctions between aristocracy, bourgeoisie and proletariat that existed on the continent were absent in England, where the connections between the three groups were closer.⁵

Anglicanism in Britain in the Nineteenth Century

In the late Georgian era,⁶ the Church of England demonstrated a need for reform. Nepotism, non-resident clergy and disparity in clergy income were the major difficulties facing

⁵ Desmond Bowen, *The Idea of the Victorian Church: A Study of the Church of England, 1833-1889* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1968), 251.

⁶ The term “Georgian era” applies to the reigns of those monarchs who belonged to the House of Hanover, which succeeded the House of Stuart upon the death of Queen Anne in 1714. They were: George I (1714-1727), George II (1727-1760), George III (1760-1820), George IV (1820-1830, regent from 1811) and William IV (1830-1837). Although Queen Victoria (1837-1901) was technically a member of the House of Hanover because her father was the elder brother of William IV, she and her descendants are not normally included among them. The electorate of Hanover, which had been part of the Holy Roman Empire and was held simultaneously by the British Hanoverian

the church during this time. Some clergy held several positions even though they could not possibly fulfill the responsibilities attached to them. One such individual was Richard Watson, who served as Bishop of Llandaff from 1782-1816 and held sixteen positions during that time.⁷ Since a priest could only be present in one parish at any given time, Watson would often pay a nominal sum to a curate who would serve as deputy for the non-resident incumbent. Curates no doubt welcomed this meagre supplement to their low salaries. In the 1820s, the average salary of a curate was £86 per annum. In contrast, during the same era the Bishop of Durham received £19,000 per annum.⁸ This wide difference in income was a direct result of the inattention to the church's financial and administrative structure since the time of the Reformation.

For the Church of England, the *Reform Act* of 1832 was a sign that its own internal reform was long overdue. The church had been without a governing body since the suppression of convocation in 1717. The need for reform within the church was analogous to the need for parliamentary reform. Just as parliamentary representation no longer bore any relation to the pattern of population distribution, neither did the geographic divisions of the dioceses. Not surprisingly, opponents of the concept of an established church were very vocal during the height of the furor over the proposed reforming legislation. The question of internal reform became a weapon which all critics of the Church of England could use against the established church. Conversely, Church of England clergy viewed internal reform as necessary in order to ensure that the established church retain its status during this era of change.

monarchs, did not pass to Queen Victoria after the death of William IV because women were barred from that title as long as a male member of the family was still living.

⁷ Soloway, *Prelates and Peoples*, 3.

⁸ Olive J. Brose, *Church and Parliament: The Reshaping of the Church of England (1828-1860)* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1959), 7.

By the time of the reforming legislation of the late 1820s and early 1830s, it was widely believed in the High Church party that the eighteenth-century Church of England had suffered from its Erastian relationship with the state. As noted above, it is necessary to remember that adherents of the Oxford Movement, which will be discussed below, sometimes sought to portray the eighteenth-century church in an unfavourable light in order to highlight their own importance. They tended to refer to their immediate High Church predecessors, the Hackney Phalanx, with the derisive term of “high and dry.” A certain fear of emotional excess in devotion was to be found in High Church circles in the early nineteenth century. This fear was an extension of the eighteenth-century dislike of enthusiasm, which in the context of the time could be described as “a dangerous abuse of spiritual influences.”⁹ In the eighteenth century, the label “enthusiast” was a term of opprobrium. It was often applied to followers of Methodism.¹⁰ This wariness of emotional excess in worship may have been a by-product of the French Revolution: in the wake of events in France, any appeal to subjective spiritual feelings, such as that promoted by the Evangelicals, was regarded with suspicion.¹¹

While those involved in the Oxford Movement may have misrepresented the High Church party of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to some extent, it cannot be denied that the church of this era could best be described as subdued in tone. The term “Latitudinarian” is often applied to the eighteenth-century Church of England. It describes a church that favoured latitude of opinion in religious matters and an end to religious controversy. However lacklustre it may have appeared, this low-key church was no doubt a welcome contrast from that of the

⁹ See Peter Benedict Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship 1760-1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 196.

¹⁰ For a fuller treatment of enthusiasm and Methodism, see W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of ‘Love Divine’: John Wesley’s Response to Antinomianism and Enthusiasm* (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books, 1989).

¹¹ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 196.

seventeenth-century church. The bloodshed of the English Civil War of the 1640s no doubt lingered in the historical memory of eighteenth-century Anglicans. A calm, subdued church may have been a necessary antidote to the turmoil of the previous century.

The established church of this era was not entirely lacking in fervour, however. As we saw in Chapter One, John Wesley and Charles Wesley began an evangelical revival that spanned the latter half of the eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth. The Wesley brothers' Methodism triggered the rise of other Evangelical movements.¹² Anglican Evangelicals emphasised the Calvinist notions of conversion, gospel preaching and the supremacy of Scripture as a reaction to rationalism, the prevailing current of thought during this era. They placed considerable emphasis on Augustinian elements in theology and reasserted the doctrine of justification by faith. Evangelical religious expression appealed to experience rather than to the intellect. William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect represented the political voice of Anglican Evangelicalism.

The Oxford Movement

By the 1830s, the Evangelical Movement had begun to wane. In an era in which the power of the established church was perceived to be under threat, a reinforcement of the reality of church and church authority was deemed to be necessary. Robert Wilberforce considered the Evangelical emphasis on conversion and personal experience to be excessively subjective. Such subjectivity would not serve as an adequate defence of the church in this era of turmoil.¹³

¹² For a fuller treatment of this subject see Ted Campbell, *Wesleyan Beliefs: Formal and Popular Expressions of the core beliefs of Wesleyan Communities* (Nashville TN: Kingswood Books, 2010).

¹³ Paul Lawrence Cioffi, "The Mediatorial Principle of the Incarnation Analogously Extended to the Church and Sacraments in the writings of Robert Isaac Wilberforce (1802-1857)," Ph.D. diss. (Catholic University of America, 1973), 90.

In the 1830s, a revival took place within the Church of England which prompted a renewal of its sacramental life. This revival, known as the Oxford Movement, breathed new life into the High Church party and provided a response to the challenges that the established church faced in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Among the most important contributions of the Oxford Movement was its sacramental interpretation of Christianity.¹⁴ A heightened emphasis was placed on the sacramental life and on the Eucharist as the focus of worship.

It was a development on the ecclesiastical front that marked the beginning of the Oxford Movement. In defiance of Church opinion, the government of the day chose to suppress and amalgamate certain bishoprics in the Church of Ireland. Like the Church of England, the Irish Church was an established church, although the vast majority of the Irish population was Roman Catholic. Under the circumstances, the proposed changes were quite sensible, but Oxford clerics found them intolerable.¹⁵ In the view of many Anglican clergy, this incident constituted unacceptable state interference in church matters.

The legislation introduced in the late 1820s and early 1830s indicated that the character of both church and state were in the process of change. It forced English clergy to examine the nature and identity of Anglicanism. They were obliged to reflect on the Church of England's position in relation to Protestantism on the one hand and Roman Catholicism on the other. They also had to consider how Anglican theology and practice would reflect and continue the heritage of both Scripture as well as the creeds and the theological and liturgical tradition of the early Church.¹⁶

¹⁴ William R. Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1989), 215.

¹⁵ Crockett, *Eucharist*, 3.

¹⁶ Crockett, *Eucharist*, 4.

On 14 July 1833, John Keble addressed these matters in his Assize Sermon, entitled *National Apostasy*, delivered at the University of Oxford. It was a strong expression of the widely-held belief among Church of England clergy that the government was interfering in Church matters and attempting to alter relations between church and state.¹⁷ Keble drew the title of his sermon from his conviction that the British people wished to free themselves from religious restraints. He believed that they displayed an indifference concerning religious matters which manifested itself in various ways, including a growth in disrespect toward bishops.¹⁸ Keble and his colleagues were also no doubt concerned about the effect that the reforming legislation would have on the University of Oxford. For centuries the university had admitted only members of the established church as students, and the fellows of its colleges were exclusively Anglican clergy.

On 9 September of that year, the first of a series of publications known as the *Tracts for the Times* was published. John Henry Newman was the author of this first tract and the real leader of the Oxford Movement until 1845. Over the next twelve years, Newman and three of his fellow clergy would produce ninety tracts. The other authors were Edward Bouverie Pusey, Richard Hurrell Froude and John Keble. The quartet soon became known as the “Tractarians.” Although this term originally applied only to the four principal authors, it quickly became used to describe any clergy involved in the Oxford Movement. Tracts had been a traditional Evangelical publication for fifty years, but by the 1830s they had become emotional appeals best suited to the uneducated people to whom they were addressed. They were viewed with disdain

¹⁷ R. W. Church, *The Oxford Movement: Twelve Years 1833-1845* (Hamden, CN.: Archon Books, 1966), 92.

¹⁸ Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *High Churchmanship in the Church of England from the Sixteenth Century to the Late Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark), 149.

and even ridicule in more literate circles, however.¹⁹ These new tracts were clear, concise, stern appeals to conscience and reason. They were challenging and were intended to startle or even offend the reader. Their appeal has been described as “not a popular one to the many, but a demanding one to the few, to the teachers rather than the taught.”²⁰ The *Tracts* placed considerable emphasis on the importance of the sacraments and services of the Church and downplayed the significance of preaching.

Together, the Oxford Movement and the Ritualist Movement, which will be discussed below, extended from 1833 into the 1880s. From 1851 onwards, Pusey became the reluctant leader of the movement and was considered as such until his death in 1882. Pusey had little enthusiasm for Ritualism. He was viewed as the leader of the second wave of the Oxford Movement largely because he was the only major figure to survive well beyond the first wave. Robert Wilberforce had become a Roman Catholic in 1854 and died in 1857; Keble died in 1866. Although Pusey had little use for ritual, he did show his support for priests who were prosecuted under the *Public Worship Regulation Act* of 1874. The purpose of this legislation was to curb the spread of Ritualism within the Church of England. It was promoted by the Church Association, a group of Anglican Evangelicals.²¹

Ritualism is best described as the movement to introduce a range of Roman Catholic liturgical practices into the Church of England. The term “Anglo-Catholic,” which is often applied to the first wave of the Oxford Movement, is more properly used in reference to Ritualism. There was a certain inevitability to the growth in preoccupation with liturgy. The

¹⁹ Hylson-Smith, *High Churchmanship*, 153.

²⁰ Hylson-Smith, *High Churchmanship*, 153.

²¹ For a fuller treatment of this subject, see Desmond Bowen, *The Idea of the Victorian Church: A Study of the Church of England 1833-1889*, (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1968).

first wave of the Oxford Movement had been primarily concerned with theological and ecclesiological issues. Liturgical changes were not a matter of great importance. The emphasis on the catholic identity of the Church of England begged the question: if the church is truly catholic, why does it not visibly express this fact in worship? Ritualism simply gave liturgical expression to the theological conviction that the Church of England had maintained a fundamentally catholic character following the Reformation.²²

Some of the liturgical practices introduced during the Ritualist movement include: the use of vestments,²³ use of incense, making the sign of the cross, use of bells and the elevation of the host, use of liturgical processions and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. One of the central ideas underpinning Ritualism is that it is an expression of the belief that the Eucharist is the most important act of the church. All this ceremony serves to emphasise the central place of the Eucharist in Christian life.

The rise of Ritualism may have prevented the further exodus of Tractarians to the Roman Catholic Church. The adoption of Catholic liturgical practices may have been in part an attempt to stop the number of conversions to Rome. Some Tractarians equated catholicity with the imitation of all things Roman and ultimately decided to leave the Church of England in order to find it. In addition to Newman, Manning and Wilberforce, other Tractarians eventually chose

²² While this second generation of Tractarians worked in poor areas and attempted to help working-class people, Ritualist congregations generally tended to be upper middle class. For a fuller treatment of Ritualism, see Nigel Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain 1830-1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Nigel Yates, *The Anglican Revival in Victorian Portsmouth* (Portsmouth UK: Grosvenor Press for Portsmouth City Council, 1983); Dominic Janes, *Victorian Reformation: The Fight over Idolatry in the Church of England 1840-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²³ The liturgical attire of eighteenth-century Anglican clergy was simple and unvarying, usually consisting of a preaching scarf. In contrast, Ritualist priests chose to wear richly-embroidered vestments such as the chasuble and stole, whose colours reflected the changing liturgical cycle.

Rome as their spiritual home. W. G. Ward, Frederick Faber and Frederick Oakeley, the trio who constituted the Romanising element within the Oxford Movement, had all become Roman Catholics by the 1850s. The reintroduction of these liturgical practices may have appeased some Tractarians who were eager to imitate Rome but they did not appeal to everyone. Ritualist priests were accused of conducting a liturgy incompatible with Anglican formularies. In the 1870s, a series of trials involving cases of Ritualism began and would extend into the next decade. In addition, xenophobia was a factor in the dislike of Ritualism. Some considered Catholic liturgical practices to be “unEnglish” and associated with cultural identities that many English people had historically viewed with suspicion, namely the French, Irish and Spanish.

The Oxford Movement had some parallels in continental Europe, notably in German Lutheranism. Until the eighteenth century, Lutheranism retained the dogma, constitution and worship of the Roman Catholic Church.²⁴ The creeds, doctrine of apostolic succession, private confession and absolution, vestments, incense, the sign of the cross, and the Catholic character of Lutheran teaching were all retained. Medieval churches were preserved. In the eighteenth century, the rationalism of the Enlightenment became supreme in Lutheran theology, worship and spiritual life. Pre-Reformation worship died out, or as in Prussia, was suppressed. In the early nineteenth century, a reaction against this Protestant trend occurred. It did not change the whole church but, like the Oxford Movement, it did achieve some successes.

These were the prevailing currents of thought during the time when Robert Wilberforce formulated his sacramental theology. Although Wilberforce was not in the forefront of the Oxford Movement, his work largely reflects the positions of those who were. Given his strong Evangelical background, it might be expected that Wilberforce’s sacramental theology would

²⁴Friedrich Heiler, “The Catholic Movement in German Lutheranism” in *Northern Catholicism: Centenary Studies in the Oxford and parallel Movements*, ed. N.P. Williams and Charles Harris (London: SPCK, 1933), 481.

reflect that of the Evangelical (or Low Church) party. His adherence to the High Church view may possibly be attributed to the influence of his tutor at Oxford, John Keble. Keble was known to be a member of the High Church party, a fact which caused some consternation among the immediate members of the Wilberforce family, notably Robert's mother as well as his sister Elizabeth.²⁵ Keble and Wilberforce became good friends in 1823 when the latter spent a reading break at the former's parsonage in Southrop. Newsome notes that Keble was the first real member of the High Church party whom Wilberforce had met in person.²⁶

Cambridge Camden Society

Another notable parallel movement within England was the revival of interest in church architecture and church restoration. The Oxford Movement and the Cambridge Camden Society²⁷ can be said to be parallel in that both pursued the same goal, namely the renewal of the catholic tradition within Anglicanism. Each group approached the issue from different angles, however. While the Oxford Movement insisted that theology must come first in order to lay the groundwork for further change, the Cambridge group believed that correct architecture would produce correct theology and worship. The Cambridge Camden Society seems to have operated on the principle that people would worship according to the architectural surroundings in which they found themselves. It was within this context of renewed emphasis on the catholic tradition in Anglicanism that Robert Wilberforce developed his theology.

²⁵ Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 71-72.

²⁶ Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 73.

²⁷ For a fuller treatment of the Cambridge Camden Society, see Christopher Webster and John Elliott ed., "*A Church as it Should Be*": *The Cambridge Camden Society and Its Influence* (Donnington UK: Shaun Tyas, 2000); Dale Adelman, *The Contribution of Cambridge Ecclesiologists to the Revival of Anglican Choral Worship, 1839-62*, (Aldershot UK: Ashgate, 1997); James F. White, *The Cambridge Movement: The Ecclesiologists and the Gothic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962). J. S. Curl, *Victorian Churches* (London: English Heritage, 1995).

Augustus Pugin (1812-1852), the architect of the clocktower at Westminster known as Big Ben, thought Gothic architecture to be the only suitable style for Roman Catholic churches. A similar school of thought existed within the Church of England. In 1839, the Cambridge Camden Society was founded by a group of individuals who sought to promote Gothic architecture. Officially, the Society did not take sides in the theological controversies of the time. Unofficially, however, individual members of the Society were very much in sympathy with the goals of the Oxford Movement. John Mason Neale (1818-1866), noted writer of hymns and enemy of pews, was a prominent member of the group. Both the Oxford Movement and the Cambridge Camden Society, which later became known as the Ecclesiological Society,²⁸ sought to promote holiness in life and a revival of the catholic tradition within Anglicanism, which included increased emphasis on the importance of the Eucharist.

If the Eucharist is to be at the very centre of Anglican worship, church architecture must give prominence to the altar. Newman's church at Littlemore, which was consecrated in 1836, is considered to be the first Tractarian church in that it reflects the central position of the Eucharist. Unlike eighteenth-century Anglican churches, the Littlemore church had no high pews or voluminous three-decker pulpit hiding the altar from the congregation. If emphasis is to be placed on the Eucharist, the altar must occupy a prominent position as it did in Newman's church. This church was built in a Gothic style, although it lacked a chancel, rood-screen and other ornaments which the Cambridge group would consider to be correct elements in a church. Nevertheless, they praised it highly as a temple of the Most High and not simply a "sermon

²⁸ In the context of the nineteenth century, the term "ecclesiology" referred to the study of the physical structure and design of a church and was unrelated to the twentieth-century understanding of the word as the study of the doctrine of the Church.

house.”²⁹ For the Tractarians, a church was a place in which to celebrate the Eucharist and not merely a venue in which sermons were to be preached.

Modern Anglicans may have difficulty understanding that the prominence given to the altar in Newman’s church was notable to his contemporaries and that it was perceived as a challenge to other parties within the Church of England. The position of the altar reflected a theology that was very different from that of the Anglicanism of the previous century. Newman discussed the prominence of the altar in sermons he delivered around the time of the consecration of the Littlemore church. He reflected the views of other Tractarians when he said that the altar was the holiest part of the church because it is the place where Christ becomes present through the consecration of the elements. He advocated a deep reverence for the altar because of its particular sanctity.³⁰

Factional Disagreements within the Church of England

In the mid-nineteenth century, a series of controversies over the sacraments erupted, revealing a deep split between the High Church and Low Church parties within the Church of England. The most significant of these was the Gorham case, which went to trial in 1847 and received judgement in 1850.³¹ Bishop Philpotts of Exeter, a Tractarian, refused to install an Evangelical priest called George Gorham, who denied the notion of baptismal regeneration. The Court of Arches upheld the decision of Bishop Philpotts, and Gorham appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, which overturned the verdict. The decision was a blow to the High Church party and raised concerns among many about the Church of England’s perceived

²⁹ Alf Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1965), 269.

³⁰ Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 270.

³¹ For a fuller treatment of this subject, see Thomas Binney, *The Great Gorham Case: A History in Five Books, Including Expositions of the Rival Baptismal Theories* (London: Partridge, 1850).

Erastian relationship to the state. Fearing that the established church was too controlled by the government, a number of Tractarians chose to become Roman Catholics. Henry Manning and Henry Wilberforce, Robert's youngest brother, were among those who joined the Church of Rome in 1851.

A number of the Tractarians who became Roman Catholics had been raised in Evangelical households. They included Newman, Manning and the Wilberforce brothers. Conversely, those from High Church backgrounds, such as Pusey and Keble, remained lifelong Anglicans. This trend prompted a later observer to note wryly that "those leaders of the Oxford Movement who came out of High Church homes always showed a greater power of resistance to Roman temptations."³²

The Gorham case highlighted the fact that Tractarians and Evangelicals were operating with different christologies. The Tractarians adhered to an incarnational christology, which emphasised Christ as sympathiser, the one who shared our human nature and therefore also our sorrow and pain. Tractarian theology reflected this emphasis on the Incarnation: the insistence on the frequent reception of the Eucharist was rooted in the idea, expressed by Robert Wilberforce, that sacraments are extensions of the Incarnation. In contrast, Evangelicals adhered to an atonement christology, which emphasised Christ the saviour and pardoner of our sins. They stressed the need for repentance and conversion on the part of believers before they received the Eucharist. Although these two christologies should not necessarily be in opposition to each other, in the mid-nineteenth century they were a subject of contention. Both Tractarians and Evangelicals held firmly to their respective positions and at times there seemed to be no middle ground. Another point of difference is sources of doctrine. For the Evangelicals, the

³² Yngve Brilioth, *The Anglican Revival: Studies in the Oxford Movement* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1925), 44.

Thirty-Nine Articles were the final court of appeal. In contrast, the Tractarians considered the liturgy to be the primary text on doctrine. This difference of opinion caused one contemporary observer to note that there were “now two extremes in the Church: the one extreme would receive the Articles without the Prayer Book; the other, the Prayer Book without the Articles.”³³

Robert Wilberforce’s works on Baptism, the Incarnation and the Eucharist were a response to a need for a systematised expression of the theology of the Oxford Movement. According to David Newsome, both Henry Manning and W. E. Gladstone had asked for such an expression and Robert Wilberforce accepted the challenge.³⁴ Wilberforce was not involved in the Oxford Movement during its heyday, and in fact was not at Oxford at all during this time. His task was to sum up and systematise the Movement’s thought after the first wave had passed. At the same time, he was also addressing matters of immediate concern. Wilberforce produced his trilogy on Baptism, the Incarnation and the Eucharist during and soon after the trial and final judgement in the Gorham case. His goal was to promote the notion of sacramental realism at a time when it was being questioned in one of the highest courts in Britain.

Newsome suggests that Wilberforce was asked to undertake this systematic expression of the theology of the Oxford Movement because his knowledge base was greater than that of his contemporaries. Referring to Manning and Gladstone’s desire for this expression, Newsome states:

Robert [Wilberforce] accepted this challenge, in a spirit of great humility, although manifestly he was peculiarly qualified to make the attempt. Only Pusey could command a greater linguistic apparatus. Robert had gained a working knowledge of Hebrew and had become a very competent German scholar, being familiar with works which the mass of his informed contemporaries had barely heard of. He had

³³ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 246.

³⁴ For a fuller treatment of this subject, see Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 370-382.

also acquired an immense knowledge of patristic sources, and – in his efforts to keep pace with Manning – a fair grasp of Catholic theological writings.³⁵

We shall see evidence of this immense knowledge in Chapter Four when we examine his Eucharistic theology.

Events in France

The French Revolution exerted a profound influence on British intellectual, philosophical and political life in the nineteenth century. These developments also had an impact on the life of the Church of England. Although the main events of the revolution took place within the space of a decade, the ripple effects of this period of intense political and social upheaval would be felt in Britain well into the following century. Many in Britain initially supported the revolution as a much-needed movement for change. They assumed that it would unfold in a manner similar to that of Britain's own Glorious Revolution of 1688. The Glorious Revolution represented the beginning of modern parliamentary democracy in Britain and the rejection of absolute monarchy.

In its early stages, the French Revolution appeared to be a triumph of reason over privilege and the perceived superstitions of religion. Many British observers of the events in France believed that the revolution of 1789 would lead to the same outcome. They were sorely disappointed and ultimately shaken as the revolution grew increasingly violent. The ruling Revolutionary Tribunal's ruthless extermination of all its potential enemies, including King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette, caused the British to recoil in horror.

On 9 November 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), a general during the French Revolutionary Wars, seized power by overthrowing the government and thereby effectively installed himself as dictator. In 1804, he declared himself Emperor of France. Napoleon was clearly not content to rule France only, and he sought to expand the territory under his control

³⁵ Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 373.

through a series of military campaigns that kept most of Europe in a state of fear for over a decade. Until the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815 and his subsequent abdication, this fear of invasion remained constant in Britain.

Enlightenment and Romanticism

In exploring the intellectual foundations of the nineteenth century, it is necessary to examine both Romanticism, the dominant philosophical and artistic current of the era as well as its immediate predecessor, the Enlightenment. A brief examination of both currents is helpful in order to provide a broad overview of nineteenth-century thought. Social, intellectual and artistic movements do not function like a clock pendulum swinging from one extreme to the other. A better image to describe them might be that of waves splashing on a beach: one wave recedes, another washes over it and elements of both become mixed together. Although Romanticism was a movement quite different from the Enlightenment, it nevertheless contained some elements of that earlier movement. An understanding of these currents of thought is necessary because they form part of the backdrop against which Robert Wilberforce wrote his theological works.

The philosophical attitude underpinning the events of the late eighteenth century was shaped by a movement known as the Enlightenment or the Age of Reason. Enlightenment thinkers drew upon ideas developed in the seventeenth century and used them as a foundation for their own thoughts. René Descartes's (1596-1650) emphasis on reason and Isaac Newton's (1642-1727) work on physics greatly influenced Enlightenment thought. The ancient Greeks and Romans also provided inspiration for the artists of the Enlightenment. Scientists and thinkers were united in their belief that reason was supreme: ordered rationality was their ideal. They challenged established beliefs and institutions and sought to effect practical change in order to

combat inequality and justice. This eagerness to question the status quo provided the intellectual basis for the French Revolution. The Enlightenment is often thought of as a French movement because French culture dominated Europe during this era, but the ideas associated with it also flourished in Britain as well as Germany. In England, John Locke (1632-1704) gained a reputation as a political philosopher while Thomas Paine's (1737-1809) support for American independence from Britain proved inspirational for French revolutionaries. In Scotland, an intellectual movement flourished in Edinburgh between 1750 and 1800. Among its notable thinkers were David Hume (1711-1776) and Adam Smith (1723-1790).

Enlightenment thought might be briefly summarised as the promotion of scientific and rational attitudes, the rejection of superstition and a belief in religious tolerance. In many ways, the Enlightenment was a reaction against the turmoil of the seventeenth century. The Thirty Years War (1618-1648) was one of the most destructive conflicts during that century. This war was fought mainly in Germany although most countries in Europe were involved in it at various points. The war began as a conflict between Protestants and Roman Catholics but it gradually expanded into a more general conflict involving the major European powers. The latter part of the Thirty Years War coincided with the English Civil War (1642-1649) which resulted in the execution of both the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, and King Charles I on the orders of the Puritan government. A temporary period of dictatorship under the rule of Oliver Cromwell lasted from the time of the execution of Charles I in 1649 until 1660, when the monarchy was restored under his eldest son Charles II. Given all this religious conflict, it is hardly surprising that by the eighteenth century Europeans were exhausted from the strife and were in a mood to show religious tolerance.

A range of opinion existed among Enlightenment thinkers on the subject of religion. While some rejected the religious world view as absurd, others espoused the concept of Deism. Deism accepts the idea of a supreme being but maintains that it is an impersonal force. This Supreme Being created the world and set things in motion but does not intervene in the daily affairs of the world. Deists rejected supernatural events such as miracles and prophecy. They viewed God as the Supreme Architect or Clockmaker who has a plan for the universe and that plan unfolds according to established laws and not divine intervention. As we shall see, Robert Wilberforce detected the strong influence of Enlightenment thinking in eighteenth-century Anglican theology and he considered it to be detrimental to the well-being of the Church of England.

In the early nineteenth century, this deference to reason gave way to a sense of emotional intensity and sentimentality. Romanticism, as it came to be known, highlighted freedom of self-expression and was often prone to extremes of nostalgia. This attitude was prevalent in the artistic endeavours of the age, from the music of Beethoven and Mahler to the paintings of English landscape artist Joseph Turner to the poetry and engravings of William Blake. The coldly scientific emphasis on reason was replaced by unrestrained emotional expression. The creative imagination was of paramount importance. One important characteristic of Romanticism was its emphasis on strong, irrational emotions. Whereas thinkers of the Enlightenment sought to dispel superstition, the writers and artists of the Romantic era sought to provoke strong emotions. This emphasis on emotionalism could be perceived as self-indulgence and escapism, but proponents of Romanticism insisted that a person could be morally and spiritually uplifted by cultivating a greater sensitivity to feelings.

Another characteristic of the Romantic era was a pronounced nostalgia for the past. This nostalgia may have been rooted in a desire to escape the uncertainties of the present. Whereas

Enlightenment artists found inspiration in ancient Greece and Rome, the Romantics looked to the creative spirit of Western Europeans of the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries. In theology, it was characterised by a return to the patristic era. This fascination with the Middle Ages continued in Britain until the end of the nineteenth century. It was reflected in groups such as the Cambridge Camden Society and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a collection of painters, poets and critics which was founded in 1848 and included such figures as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais and William Morris. The name “Pre-Raphaelite” is derived from the fact that the artists sought to return to a style of painting that predated the late fifteenth-century painter Raphael. Gilbert and Sullivan parodied the Pre-Raphaelite fixation with all things medieval in their 1881 opera *Patience*.

The Tübingen School

At the same time that Britain was experiencing the effects of these shifting intellectual currents, thinkers in continental Europe were coming to terms with the legacy of the eighteenth century. In Germany, idealism dominated cultural life from 1770 to 1840 and to some extent continued to influence German thought into the twentieth century. German idealism can be described as both a search for a new religious orientation and a reaction to the rationalism and natural theology of the Enlightenment. In that sense, it is a Romantic movement.³⁶ Roman Catholic theologians in Germany could not ignore this current of thought and found themselves faced with two possible options: they could either reject idealism outright or find a way to harmonise it with their faith. Their response was to attempt to steer a middle course between the extremes of blind faith and the pure reason of the Enlightenment.

³⁶ Donald J. Deitrich and Michael J. Himes, ed., *The Legacy of the Tübingen School: the Relevance of Nineteenth-Century Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), 11.

The Faculty of Theology at the University of Tübingen in southern Germany became known as the main centre for this new school of thought.³⁷ In 1817, the Roman Catholic university which had been founded at Ellwangen five years earlier was transferred to Tübingen as the Catholic faculty of theology. Johann Sebastian Drey (1777-1853) was the leading figure in this new faculty. Drey was widely suspected of being tainted by the “heretical” views of rationalist thinkers. His work was influenced by that of Lutheran philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854).³⁸ Within the first decade of its existence it had aroused the animosity of conservative elements in the Church and had fallen out of favour with the authorities in Rome. Drey’s work would have a long legacy: it has been described as one of the two theological systems represented in the nineteenth-century debate over theological method that was still alive in the twentieth century.³⁹

In 1823, Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838) was appointed to the faculty. He was influenced by the Romantic movement and was especially attracted by the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Schleiermacher was a Lutheran thinker who attempted to reconcile Enlightenment thinking with Protestant theology. Möhler’s interest in finding common ground between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism would influence the ecumenical movement of the

³⁷ In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the University of Tübingen served as the home of three different schools of theology, two Roman Catholic and one Protestant. The Old Tübingen School dates from 1777, when Gottlob Christian Storr (1746-1805) was appointed to the Faculty of Theology. It sought to provide a scientific understanding for the authority of the Bible and to demonstrate that divine revelation was neither absurd nor contrary to reason. In the early part of the nineteenth century, Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792-1860) formed a Protestant school of theology which focussed on a purely historical interpretation of the Bible. The third school, which is referred to in this thesis, is commonly known as the Catholic Tübingen School.

³⁸ Thomas F. O’Meara, “Schelling’s Religious Aesthetics,” in *Reform and Counter-Reform: Dialectics of the Word in Western Christianity since Luther*, John C. Hawley ed. (Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter., 1994), 128.

³⁹ Gerald McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York: Seabury, 1977), 265.

twentieth century. The study of the early church fathers is of particular importance to Möhler's work, particularly *Die Einheit in der Kirche*.⁴⁰ Möhler's approach is rooted in the Incarnation although it is not centred on the sacraments.⁴¹ His views were controversial and over time Möhler retreated from them as opposition to him from within the Church stiffened.

In the attempt to find a middle way between blind faith and pure reason, a number of theologians in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Germany began to read the Bible as a document of history. Many of these scholars asked essentially historical questions about the Bible itself. This new approach, which became known as the historical-critical method, sought to understand the Bible independently of any theological presuppositions. It caught on quickly among scholars. In 1821, Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Critical Essay on the Gospel of St. Luke* pushed the approach further. Schleiermacher argued that the original Gospel material had been circulated in the form of "memorabilia," or notes on which the Gospel writers later worked. Each of them had a particular understanding of Jesus in mind when they wrote their texts. In making this statement, Schleiermacher was asserting that the notion of divine inspiration of the world of God was untenable. He was going against the longstanding tradition that Jesus's words in the Gospel were the very words of God.⁴²

Robert Wilberforce had become aware of these developments in German theology during his German-language immersion studies in the early 1830s. Wilberforce's linguistic studies proved to be fruitful because he became well acquainted with Schleiermacher's work. He was critical of

⁴⁰ Johann Adam Möhler, *Die Einheit in der Kirche, oder, Das Prinzip des Katholizismus dargestellt im Geiste der Kirchenväter der drei ersten Jahrhunderte* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1925).

⁴¹ See Johann Adam Möhler, *Athanasius der Grosse und die Kirche seiner Zeit, besonders im Kampfe mit dem Arianismus* (Mainz: F. Kupferberg, 1827).

⁴² For a fuller treatment of this subject, see S. Neill and N. T. Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1861-1986* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Schleiermacher for downplaying the mediatory role of the sacraments and for his low estimate of the spiritual nature of the Church. Wilberforce attributes Schleiermacher's position to an improper understanding of the doctrine of the Incarnation and of the nature of the Trinity.⁴³

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen an overview of the nineteenth-century world that shaped the context in which Robert Wilberforce developed his Eucharistic theology. Wilberforce grew up during this era of political and social turmoil. The changing political circumstances of the early nineteenth century forced the Church of England to address the question of what it meant to be the established church in this new era. In times of uncertainty, some tend to look to the past for answers to their current dilemmas. In the case of Robert Wilberforce, his study of the early church led him to conclude that sacramental realism was an important aspect of early Christian thought and that it was consistent both with Anglicanism and with the broader Christian tradition. We may infer that Wilberforce believed this continuity with the early church would benefit the Church of England as it attempted to redefine itself in the new political context. Wilberforce produced his works of theology in response to the challenges of his era. As we have seen, he wrote his trilogy of works on Baptism, the Incarnation and the Eucharist during and immediately after the events of the Gorham case in an effort to stress the importance of sacramental realism at a time when it was being called into question. In the next chapter, we shall examine Wilberforce's incarnational theology.

⁴³ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ in its Relation to Mankind and the Church*, 3d ed. (London: John Murray, 1850), 345-347.

Chapter Three

WILBERFORCE'S INCARNATIONAL THEOLOGY

Introduction

The central tenet of Tractarian thought is the notion that the Church is a visible society with divinely empowered clergy, and sacraments and rites which are the channels of life-giving grace. As stated in the previous chapter, this idea of the sacraments as channels of grace rests on what the Tractarians called “the sacramental principle.” This principle implies that God works through the instrumentality of humans and material things which God turns into the means by which grace is conveyed. John Henry Newman states in his work *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, “The doctrine of the Incarnation is the announcement of a divine gift conveyed in a material and visible medium, it being thus that heaven and earth are in the Incarnation united. That is, it establishes in the very idea of Christianity the *sacramental* principle as its characteristic.”¹ Although this work was written

¹ <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/development/chapter7.html> Accessed 12 June 2013. The italics are Newman’s.

after Newman became a Roman Catholic the sacramental principle is one that Newman addressed in his writing as an Anglican.² The sacramental principle is rooted in the work of Athanasius (d. 373), who stated that “[God] became man so that we might be made divine.”³

Anglicanism has two principal sacraments, baptism and Eucharist. Article 25 of the Articles of Religion states this explicitly.⁴ This same Article goes on to discuss the other five Sacraments identified in the Christian West in the late medieval era:

Those five commonly called Sacraments, that is to say, Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony and extreme Unction, are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel, being such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures; but yet have not like nature of Sacraments with Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God.⁵

For Wilberforce, the sacraments are natural outgrowths of the Incarnation and are inextricably linked to them. This chapter will provide an overview of Wilberforce’s incarnational theology, his understanding of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, God’s role in bestowing grace upon humans and their role in receiving it, the sacramental and anti-sacramental systems of religion; and the frequency of the celebration of the Eucharist.

Overview of Wilberforce’s Theology of the Incarnation

Wilberforce defines the term “grace” as “God’s love in action.”⁶ By sending Jesus Christ to assume human nature and die on the cross for our sins, God demonstrated considerable love for humankind. For Wilberforce, the sacraments are natural outgrowths of the Incarnation. If the sacraments play a mediatorial role in conveying God’s grace to humankind it is because Christ’s humanity plays the same role. In order to explain this

² For a fuller treatment of this subject see Michael Sharkey, *The Sacramental Principle in the Thought of John Henry Cardinal Newman* (Rome: Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1976).

³ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/athanasius/incarnation.toc.html> Accessed 12 June 2013.

⁴ *The Book of Common Prayer* (Toronto: The Musson Book Company Limited, 1918), 668.

⁵ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 669.

⁶ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of Holy Baptism: With Remarks on the Rev. W. Goode’s “Effects of Infant Baptism”* (Philadelphia: Herman Hooker, 1850), 28.

mediatorial role of the sacraments it was therefore necessary for Wilberforce to develop a consistent theology of the Incarnation.

Underpinning Wilberforce's theology of the Incarnation is the notion that through God's grace in sending Jesus Christ to take human form, humans have been restored to the divine destiny that was thwarted by Adam. Wilberforce sees a "perfect parallel"⁷ between Adam, who caused humanity to fall, and Jesus, who promised it new life. He refers to Athanasius's *Orations against the Arians*, stating "...St. Athanasius speaks of the first man as 'having received grace from without, and having lost it.'"⁸ Jesus Christ is the second Adam: the obedience of Jesus reverses the negative effects caused by Adam's disobedience. This concept of God's grace overcoming human sin is referred to as "recapitulation" by the early Church Fathers. The idea was initially presented in Scripture⁹ and was later developed by thinkers of the early Christian era, notably Irenaeus.¹⁰ Wilberforce echoes Irenaeus in stating that

...it is set forth in numerous places of Holy Writ, that the peculiar purpose of that gift of the Holy Ghost, which is bestowed in the Gospel, is that through union with the Son of God, we may regain the perfect image of the Creator. Christ "became the head* of man's race," says St Irenaeus, "that in Him we might recover the likeness of God, which in Adam we had lost."¹¹

⁷ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ in its relation to Mankind and the Church* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street; John and Charles Mozley, Paternoster Row, 1850), 74.

⁸ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ*, 68.

⁹ Ephesians 1:10, 22; Romans 5.

¹⁰ For a fuller treatment of this subject, see Paul Lawrence Cioffi, *The Mediatorial Principle of the Incarnation analogously extended to Church and Sacraments in the writings of Robert Isaac Wilberforce (1802-1857)*, PhD diss., Washington: Catholic University of America, 1973, 126.

¹¹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ*, 69. In his own note in the text, Wilberforce adds, "'Recapitulavit.' Ἀνακεφαλαιόω was, no doubt, the original word of St Irenaeus, -- iii. 18, 1, p. 209." Wilberforce neglects to state that the title of St. Irenaeus's work is *Against Heresies*. John Keble was the first to translate *Against Heresies* into English. See St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, trans John Keble (Oxford: James Parker and Co., 1872).

In outlining his theology of the Incarnation, Wilberforce does not disguise his disdain for Enlightenment thought: he notes that it is the advent of this external Saviour that will redeem humankind and not the Rationalistic philosophy of self-improvement through human efforts.¹²

Wilberforce divides the subject of the Incarnation into two parts, the doctrine of the Incarnation itself and the benefits bestowed upon humankind by it.¹³ He devotes considerable space to explaining Jesus Christ as the “pattern man” who embodies perfection. While Christ possessed a nature that was fully human, “He assumed that perfect form of manhood which was free from the varieties of individual eccentricity. This was what qualified Him for relationship to collective humanity.”¹⁴ For Wilberforce, Christ’s humanity transcends individual human nature. Wilberforce observes that “since the advent of Christ, it is through union only with Him, that men can be heirs of the promise to Abraham.”¹⁵ Christ is not only the perfect man but also the perfect mediator. He is

..the only being who is capable of being Priest for fallen humanity...For a Priest is a Mediator in action. So that our Lord’s Priesthood does not arise only from His having an offering to make on our behalf; it lies in His constitution; it is the result of that personal union which binds man to God.¹⁶

In referring to Christ as the second Adam, Wilberforce is conscious of the fact that Christ’s primacy is quite different from that of Adam. Adam is the head because he is the progenitor of the human race. Both Christ and Adam remained entirely human, but Adam did not transcend that human nature. When Christ assumed a human nature, he became a

¹² Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 1.

¹³ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 4.

¹⁴ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 88.

¹⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 22.

¹⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 230.

“copartner”¹⁷ with humankind. The reality of this fact forms the basis of the connection between God and humans and is described as “mediation.”¹⁸

This concept of mediation rests on a proper understanding of the union of Christ’s human and divine natures. The salvation of humans depends upon their connection with the divine. Wilberforce does not consider this notion to be unique to Christianity:

The principle of life, to which all primitive mythologies witness, which the ancient mysteries of Egypt and Greece were designed probably to illustrate, is truly a chain, which links us to the Almighty...But man could not thus ascend to God, until God the Word had first stooped to manhood.¹⁹

Mediation is therefore an essential part of the sacramental principle. If God is to work through humans and material things, as the sacramental principle states, God must first make the effort to reach out to creation. God must initiate the connection with human beings in order for them to have the opportunity to respond. Given that he possessed both divine and human natures, Jesus Christ was the perfect mediator. Wilberforce provides a brief outline of the history of Trinitarian theology and notes the christological debates of the early centuries of the Christian era.²⁰ He stresses the importance of knowing that Christ was both fully human and fully divine. The Christian faithful must believe both that the Son is a separate person in the Trinity and that He assumed our human nature and therefore understood our shortcomings. For Wilberforce, an over-emphasis on either of Christ’s two natures creates an imbalance that destroys the foundation of faith, namely the union between God and humans.²¹

Wilberforce explains Christ’s human nature by stating that “He possesses the true nature of a man, save that His body is glorified. A *man* He still is, both in body and soul, but

¹⁷ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 53.

¹⁸ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 53.

¹⁹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 14.

²⁰ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 181-210.

²¹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 207.

so penetrated are both by that Godhead, from which they can never be separate, that both of them are raised to a height of surpassing glory.”²² Wilberforce maintains that in sending Jesus Christ to take on human nature, God has bestowed the “greatest honour”²³ upon humankind. He states that this action also demonstrates that God possessed a certain amount of confidence in human nature:

For that manhood should thus have been taken into Godhead, shows that there was between them such compatibility and accordance, as stamps the lower nature with that truth which belongs to the very essence of the higher...For had God been pleased to employ the organs of some inferior animal, as is once recorded in Holy Writ, for the expression of His will, such nature had not been susceptible of that personal union with Him which is set forth in the Incarnation of Christ. But that man was found susceptible of it – that his faculties required to be exalted, not destroyed – shows that the traces of that image in which He was first created had not been obliterated from his soul.²⁴

God obviously must have considered humans to be worthy of redemption. As stated above, it is God who must make the overture to humans in order to give them the opportunity to respond. The fact that God did so by sending Jesus to be the mediator between God and humans and enabling him to assume human nature indicates that God perceived some good in humankind. God nevertheless respects the freedom of the human will: humans may either accept or reject this offer of redemption.

God Working in Humans

Implicit in Wilberforce’s understanding of the mediatorial role of the sacraments is the notion that God is working in humans. The assumption that God’s grace is operative in us forms the basis of his understanding of both baptism and the Eucharist. For Wilberforce, sacraments are “channels to the faithful of those supernatural gifts, whereby God renews the

²² Robert Isaac Wilberforce, “Easter,” in *Sermons on the New Birth of Man’s Nature* (London: John Murray, 1850), 162. The italics are Wilberforce’s.

²³ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 209.

²⁴ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 209-210.

soul.”²⁵ Their immediate effect is to prompt humans to think of God. In times of doubt sacraments serve as a comfort by reminding us of God’s love. In happier times they function as an antidote to pride since they compel us to contemplate something larger than ourselves.²⁶ They do not simply provide succour, however. The sacraments effect a change on those who receive them: the recipients are joined to the Body of Christ. Through baptism we are welcomed into the Christian community and in the Eucharist we are replenished by partaking of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, the new Adam. Wilberforce draws on St Paul’s imagery of the Christian faithful as the Body of Christ, stating that sacraments are “the ‘joints and bands’ whereby the whole body in its dependence on its Head has nourishment ministered.”²⁷ Through this union between Christ and humans the Head of the Body becomes identified with its members.

In an Easter Sunday sermon, Wilberforce observes that “we need Christ within us, reconciling us to God, as much as Christ without us, by whom God is reconciled to us. This is a part of the truth of His mediation. His man’s nature is the seed of grace to ours.”²⁸ His reference to “Christ without us” is not simply to Christ who died on the cross but also to the ongoing mediation provided by the risen Christ. He further notes that

A new and living way has been opened to us through the God-man, Christ Jesus. Now, to the opening of this way Our Lord’s resurrection was plainly necessary. For this access depends on the truth of Our Lord’s manhood. We have such confidence in approaching God, as follows from knowing that our nature has place in heaven. A real work continues to be truly done on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary. And through Our Lord’s manhood does God the Holy Ghost visit every member of the Church of God.²⁹

²⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 406.

²⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 406-7.

²⁷ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 410.

²⁸ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, “Christ’s Resurrection Man’s Reconciliation,” in *Sermons on the New Birth of Man’s Nature* (London: John Murray, 1850), 179.

²⁹ Wilberforce, “Christ’s Resurrection Man’s Reconciliation,” 180.

Clearly, it is through Christ's human nature that we have access to God. The continuing influence of that nature is bestowed upon us through the human signs of sacraments.

Sacraments as Sources of Grace

Wilberforce points out that sacraments differ from other means of grace, e.g. prayer, in that they conduct believers to union with Christ rather than simply being a result of it. While prayer may benefit those who practise it, sacraments actually bind believers to Christ.³⁰ It is through the sacraments that the Head of the Church is united to the members. Wilberforce asks why the sacraments are specially employed to perform this task. He replies that the sacraments are particular means of grace in that they consist not only of inward actions but they are also evident to the external world. Wilberforce observes that "they have both 'an outward visible sign,' and 'an inward spiritual grace' – this compound nature marks them out as a singularly appropriate medium of intercourse between things, which are themselves compound, i.e. man who is to be renewed, and the Mediator whose presence renews him."³¹ In employing this terminology, Wilberforce is borrowing from Augustine.³² This language is also found in the catechism contained in the *Book of Common Prayer*. In this text, the catechumen is asked to define the word "sacrament." The expected answer is that given in the above passage concerning outward and inward elements. The next question in the catechism pertains to the parts of the sacrament. The correct answer is two: the catechumen is supposed to know that the sacrament consists of "the outward visible sign, and the inward spiritual grace."³³

Wilberforce uses this outward-inward distinction to explain his understanding of Eucharistic presence. He again draws on the prayer book catechism to provide the

³⁰ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 411.

³¹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 412.

³² For a fuller treatment of this subject see P.-Th. Camelot, "Réalisme et symbolisme dans la doctrine eucharistique de S. Augustin," *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 36 (1947): 394-410.

³³ *The Book of Common Prayer* (Toronto: The Musson Book Company Limited, 1918), 327.

terminology and considers its three-part distinction of the Eucharist to be of paramount importance. In pointing out that the terminology used in the catechism is the same as that used by a Church father, namely Augustine, Wilberforce is highlighting the catechism's connection to the early Christian era. Wilberforce's book on the Incarnation might be said to be, among other things, a kind of apologetic for the catechism. The catechism distinguishes between the outward visible sign of the sacrament and the inward spiritual grace, but it also speaks of the benefit of partaking of the Eucharist.³⁴ Wilberforce refers to the outward visible sign as the *sacramentum*, the thing signified as the *res sacramenti* and the effect of partaking as the *virtus sacramenti*.³⁵ He notes that baptism and the Eucharist possess both an outward sign and an inward grace. In baptism, however, the inward part consists of the blessing bestowed upon the individual while in the Eucharist the inward part is identical with both the thing signified, namely the body and blood of Christ, as well as the benefits of partaking. In baptism, the sign is the act of baptising itself, either through the sprinkling of water or immersion, and not the element used.³⁶ No permanent connection exists between the two parts of baptism, while in the Eucharist the sign is found in the elements of bread and wine, not in the act of consuming them.

Wilberforce warns against the tendency to forget the inward part of the sacraments.

He states that

In these [sacraments] there is a sort of external machinery, there are outward 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. And hence 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 was as safe to despise

³⁴ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 357.

³⁵ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (London: John and Charles Mozley, 1854), 14.

³⁶ Wilberforce, *Eucharist*, 14.

as to reverence. What we want then is, to discern that Our Lord's humanity is the vital principle of life in all His people.³⁷

The sacraments therefore should prompt us to cultivate that element of Christ's humanity that is within us. This passage provides a clue to the motivating concerns behind Wilberforce's works on baptism and the Eucharist: each of these books is an argument for and an explanation of Christ's objective presence and action in the sacramental signs.

The elements are instruments: the *res sacramenti* and *virtus sacramenti* are communicated through the *sacramentum*.³⁸ These external parts do not produce spiritual results as a consequence of their own natural qualities, however. To underscore this fact Wilberforce employs the distinction between physical and moral instruments made by Richard Hooker. He states that "when we speak of sacraments as moral instruments, we are merely discriminating between the order of grace, and the order of nature; we affirm that sacraments pertain to the first, whereas those things which are called physical instruments, belong to the second."³⁹ Given that sacraments convey benefits to those who partake of them, they are therefore moral instruments.

Regarding the Eucharist, Wilberforce examines the meaning of the word "is" in Christ's statements "this is my body" and "this is my blood." His goal is to determine the nature of the relationship between the *sacramentum* and the *res sacramenti*. "Is" could indicate either representation, identity or something that is dependent either on the intention of the giver or on the opinion of the spectator. Wilberforce rejects the idea of representation because there must be a real connection between the elements and Christ's body and blood.

³⁷ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, "The Sanctification of Humanity," in *Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature* (London: John Murray, 1850), 22.

³⁸ Wilberforce has borrowed these terms from Augustine. As we saw in Chapter One, they were also used by the Caroline divines, a group of seventeenth-century Anglican writers. For a brief history of the use of these terms through the centuries, see Eric Lionel Mascall, *Christ, the Christian and the Church: A Study of the Incarnation and its Consequences* (London: Longmans, Green, 1946), 189-192.

³⁹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 18.

He also rejects the idea of the word's dependency on the intention of the giver because he considers this idea to be rooted in the theology of John Calvin (1509-1564). Similarly, Wilberforce dismisses the possibility that it could be dependent on the opinion of the spectator as simply the theory of another sixteenth-century Swiss reformer, Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531). Wilberforce's understanding of the views of Calvin and Zwingli will be discussed in Chapter Four.

The views of these sixteenth-century Reformers found echoes in the Church of England in the early nineteenth century. The fact that Wilberforce chose to address the positions of the sixteenth-century continental Reformers indicates that he discerned traces of their thinking in the Church of his era. Had he not found some evidence of their ideas he would not likely have bothered to raise the subject. As we shall see later in this chapter, Wilberforce makes a distinction between what he describes as sacramental and anti-sacramental systems of religion. While the former system stresses the importance of the sacraments the latter downplays it. The anti-sacramental system may be said to have its origins in the views of the continental Reformers.

Sacramental Grace and the System of Nature

Wilberforce observes that Evangelical Christians question the reality of the sacraments on the grounds that there is no apparent connection between the outward sign and the inward benefit of partaking:

The washing of water, the partaking of visible elements, appear to have no relevance except to the body; that a spiritual influence should accompany means so simple, that men should be truly re-created through the due reception of Baptism; that their new nature should be really fed in the Holy Eucharist, are abhorrent to the imagination...Not that they deny to these ordinances an instructive efficacy, which renders them a beneficial lesson to the mind, but they think it impossible that virtue can be so indissolubly bound up with these ordinances themselves (however rightly

received), that they can be of use, except so far as the intellectual nature is competent to understand them.⁴⁰

He finds in this attitude the influence of Enlightenment thought. Instead of accepting that the outward sign and the inward benefit are transmitted in the sacraments, these Christians seek to explain the phenomenon either through their own thought processes or through their own subjective experience of the divine.⁴¹ Such persons deny that infants receive any benefit from baptism and cannot believe that any real re-creation takes place in the infant through this rite.

In an attempt to counter this line of thinking, Wilberforce argues in favour of an objective offer of God's grace and against a more subjectivist notion. He draws a parallel between sacramental grace and the system of nature:

Take the case of such intellectual endowments as may be plainly shown to be an hereditary gift, by their re-appearance in those who are near of kin. Can we at all understand how such qualities are transmitted? Water, it is said, or bread and wine, have no natural aptitude to convey heavenly blessings. It is irrational, therefore, to expect them to be the channel of an influence, which is beyond their powers. But of what materials are our bodies constructed? They consist but of such ingredients as earth, and air, and water supply. In the bones and muscles, and nerves of a child, no other substances can be detected. Now what aptitude have these agents to convey intellectual gifts? When helpless infancy, therefore, is launched forth upon the troublous waves of life, what reason have we to expect that the unconscious being, who lies before us, will ever be competent to read the mysteries of nature, and extend the immortal limits of thought?⁴²

Flesh and blood are natural substances just like water, bread and wine. Given that we assume that with proper guidance a helpless infant will over time acquire the intellectual prowess and social skills to function as an adult, Wilberforce states we should also assume that spiritual gifts will be conveyed in the same way. Inert elements such as flesh and blood have no innate ability to transmit intellectual gifts. Wilberforce says we believe that by "some unknown law of transmission" the infant's intellectual capacities will be modelled upon those

⁴⁰ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, "The Re-creation of Man," in *Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature* (London: John Murray, 1850), 35-6.

⁴¹ Wilberforce, "The Re-creation of Man," 36-7.

⁴² Wilberforce, "The Re-creation of Man," 38-9.

of its parents.⁴³ Nothing in the nature of flesh and blood itself suggests that the infant will grow up to possess certain intellectual powers yet we are confident that these abilities will eventually develop. That being the case, Wilberforce says that it is illogical to deny that spiritual gifts can be transmitted in a similar fashion.⁴⁴ On the contrary, it is reasonable to assume that over time these spiritual gifts will grow and develop into a responsible profession of faith.

Wilberforce's parallel between an infant's intellectual and social development on the one hand and its spiritual development on the other is jarring to modern readers. Research in the field of psychology since the mid-nineteenth century has produced methods of measuring a person's intellectual development. It can no longer be said that this development is the result of "some unknown law of transmission." Modern sacramental theologians would not use intellectual and social development as a means by which to measure spiritual growth.

Wilberforce observes that another objection to the efficacy of the sacraments is that while the influence of Adam is clearly visible, i.e., humans are made of flesh and blood, the influence of Christ is not. If the sacraments convey grace to the human soul the benefits of it ought to be more apparent. He concedes that there is often little difference "between those who partake and those who reject that spiritual manna which comes down from heaven."⁴⁵ Wilberforce responds to this objection by noting that the gifts of grace that God bestows upon humans do not eliminate the freedom of the will. Humans are still able to act accordingly to their own will. He notes that "what is received, therefore, through the divine ordinances of God's grace, is not any such power as does away with the accountableness of mankind, but such a gift only as places man in a higher sphere of responsibility, gives him more to use, a

⁴³ Wilberforce, "The Re-creation of Man," 39.

⁴⁴ Wilberforce, "The Re-creation of Man," 40.

⁴⁵ Wilberforce, "The Re-creation of Man," 43.

more precious treasure for which to account.”⁴⁶ Humans can be influenced but not coerced. Free will still prevails, but having received the gifts of grace they are responsible for using them well.

Human Participation in Grace

It is not God alone, however, who participates in the transmission of grace. Humans have an active role to play in receiving the grace that is bestowed upon them. Wilberforce states

But though this process has its commencement in Him, it cannot take effect without our concurrence. We are not so wholly passive in this great work, that like the material element, on which we ourselves are fed, we should be absorbed into Him without our participation. We need, if not the active virtues by which we must acquire, yet the passive virtues by which we must accept salvation. The living principle of holiness must find a response in our hearts. The fire comes indeed from without; but our hearts must be the fuel to be kindled.⁴⁷

Humans therefore must be willing to accept the gift that God offers. It cannot be forced upon us.

Wilberforce asserts his belief in baptismal regeneration, which he states “has always been understood to refer to some gift of grace bestowed by God, the result whereof, is the renewal of man’s nature. So that it has reference plainly to two parties; God, who bestows grace, and man, who receives it.”⁴⁸ He adds, “...regeneration implies that even in this world a higher nature is bestowed upon man; he consists not only of an earthly, but of a heavenly being; he has not only the inheritance of his corrupt parent, but likewise that higher life which comes from above. This is God’s work in our fallen being.”⁴⁹ This renewal of human nature

⁴⁶ Wilberforce, “The Re-creation of Man,” 44.

⁴⁷ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, “Christ the Principle of Life,” in *Sermons on the Holy Communion* (London: J. and C. Mozley, 1854), 115.

⁴⁸ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of Holy Baptism*, 24. Wilberforce’s book on baptism was a response to the work of an Evangelical cleric who rejected baptismal regeneration. Both works were published during the ecclesiastical controversy known as the Gorham case, which was discussed in the previous chapter.

⁴⁹ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, “The Nourishment of the New Nature,” in *Sermons on the Holy Communion* (London: J. and C. Mozley, 1854), 139.

clearly involves participation in the divine nature. This participation has a transformative effect on human nature itself.

Wilberforce expands on his definition of regeneration by stating that

It is 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 re-constructed; 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 through unbelief or impenitence. It is not, therefore the general influence of the Divine Power, but the gift bestowed through the Mediator: neither is it the mere promulgation by Christ of a better law, but His re-creating presence. Nor yet is it attained by all men, nor even by all to whom it is offered; but by those to whom it is given of God, and who do not reject it. It is *Christ taking up His dwelling in men.*⁵⁰

This notion that both God and humans play an active role in the gift of grace is very important to Wilberforce's understanding of Eucharistic presence, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter.

Conversion and regeneration are closely linked. Wilberforce notes that the two terms have often been incorrectly treated as synonyms, and he seeks to make a distinction between them. He defines conversion as "that change or turning in man's individual being, whereby his will is altered, and in place of the love of sin comes the love of holiness."⁵¹ He points out that humans possess a will by which grace may be either refused or accepted. The acceptance of it can be described as conversion. Conversion, therefore, is a conscious act on the part of the individual. In contrast, regeneration is a gift that has been bestowed to humankind as a whole. Regeneration provides the groundwork upon which conversion takes place:

Regeneration...is essential to Christian conversion, because that alteration of heart, whereby every individual obeys the Gospel, derives its impulse from the divine renewal of humanity at large. But it depends on man's obedience to this impulse, whether the conversion of his individual will affords a true response to the opportunities of his position. For as regeneration is the re-creation of man's common nature, so is conversion the acquiescence of each single heart in

⁵⁰ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of Holy Baptism*, 40. The italics are Wilberforce's.

⁵¹ Wilberforce, "The Re-creation of Man," 47.

the perfect law of the Divine will. Through Sacraments is the common nature regenerated, because through them is the secret working of that Almighty Power, by which the world must be renewed, even as it was at first created: but the law of man's individual responsibility has its place likewise in that mighty work, whereby the children of earth may become meet to be the children of heaven.⁵²

Conversion could not take place unless regeneration had already been granted to humans.

The interaction of these two processes brings about a renewal and elevation of human nature.

It echoes Augustine's notion of "prevenient" grace, which can be defined as divine grace that precedes human decision and exists independently of human action. This notion was later expanded upon at the Council of Trent. This idea of the elevation of human nature is reminiscent of Augustine's assertion that God crowns God's own gifts.⁵³

Wilberforce's reference to individual responsibility will be discussed further in the next chapter. We shall see that Wilberforce's understanding of Eucharistic presence comprises not only God's grace bestowed in the elements but also an active response to that gift on the part of the recipient. The believer has faith that the gift has been offered, but it must be received, and whether or not it is received unto salvation or condemnation depends on the recipient's spiritual and moral state. The early church insisted that simply because a person receives a sacrament in the belief that it conveys God's grace, it does not mean that he or she automatically obtains the benefits of that grace.

Sacramental system vs. Anti-sacramental system

Wilberforce insists that the differences between those who stress the importance of the sacraments and those who downplay them are not merely the result of varying points of view but are in fact indicative of two separate systems of religion. In a sermon delivered at the University of Oxford the day after the final verdict in the Gorham case was announced, Wilberforce begins by pondering how to discriminate between God's spirit and that which is

⁵² Wilberforce, "The Re-creation of Man," 47.

⁵³ Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, ed. Peter King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 154.

opposed to God, i.e. between Christ and Anti-Christ.⁵⁴ In preaching on the text of I John 4:2-3, he provides an answer. The text of the King James version of the Bible reads, “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God: And 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.”

Wilberforce states that to deny the Incarnation is to deny Christ himself, “...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.”⁵⁵ He maintains that the author of the Gospel text is referring to mediation, i.e. the sacraments. Wilberforce states that this denial of the sacraments has led to “national unbelief.”⁵⁶ This expression is an echo of John Keble’s 1833 sermon on “National Apostasy,” which was discussed briefly in Chapter Two. He views “silent Churches, deserted altars, infrequent Eucharists” as symptoms of this unbelief.⁵⁷ As indicated in the previous chapter, during the first part of the nineteenth century the Church of England celebrated the Eucharist only four times a year. This pattern was an echo of the Reformation practice of infrequent celebration of the Eucharist, which in turn had been influenced by the late medieval practice of rare reception of this sacrament.

The terms “Christ” and “Anti-Christ” are very strong language to employ when describing the two different levels of emphasis on the sacraments. Wilberforce makes it clear, however, that he considers these two positions to be polar opposites. He says that “the Sacramental and Anti-Sacramental systems are two different religions, and to rest our hope of

⁵⁴ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, “The Sacramental System,” in *Sermons on the New Birth of Man’s Nature* (London: John Murray, 1850), 222.

⁵⁵ Wilberforce, “The Sacramental System,” 223.

⁵⁶ Wilberforce, “The Sacramental System,” 225.

⁵⁷ Wilberforce, “The Sacramental System,” 225.

salvation on the one, is to say anathema to the other.”⁵⁸ These two different religions are clearly mutually exclusive. He asks rhetorically, “If we adopt one, must we not discard the other? Can we confess Christ’s Mediation, and also deny it?”⁵⁹ In making this statement Wilberforce is suggesting that both sacramental and anti-sacramental currents are present within the Church of England. The existence of these different currents is a reflection of the conflict between the Evangelical and catholicising movements within the Church.

Referring to the text of I John 4:2-3, he states that the sacramental system is the truth of God and the anti-sacramental system is the spirit of the Anti-Christ.⁶⁰ In reference to Christ, he says,

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.⁶¹

The principle of the Incarnation is that by our humanity we are joined to Christ. All human nature is therefore bound to the Divine Word.

Wilberforce concedes that communion with Christ is not confined to the sacraments. He admits that activities such as prayer, public worship and private meditation are all valuable means of interacting with Christ. Real union with Christ, however, can only be achieved through the sacraments.⁶² Wilberforce is also critical of the notion that the act of reading the Bible will in itself enable humans to appreciate the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. He acknowledges that studying the Scriptures under the guidance of Church authorities will help to reveal God’s will. He insists, however, that the connection between God and humans cannot be explained solely by reciting some words of Scripture. To explore this

⁵⁸ Wilberforce, “The Sacramental System,” 233-4.

⁵⁹ Wilberforce, “The Sacramental System,” 237-8.

⁶⁰ Wilberforce, “The Sacramental System,” 227.

⁶¹ Wilberforce, “The Sacramental System,” 227-8.

⁶² Wilberforce, “The Sacramental System,” 228.

matter “implies an inquiry into the nature of man, and into the nature of God, which leads to the most mysterious secrets of Theology.”⁶³

In this same sermon Wilberforce reflects on the reasons why humans deny the concept of sacramental grace. He says that a lifetime of bad habits may partially explain this obstinacy: “Among the most telling arguments against Sacramental grace is the experience of ungodly men, who having sinned against it by riot in their youth, sin against it by incredulity in their age.”⁶⁴ He adds that the human tendency to seek quick answers to complicated problems is also to blame:

Inquire why men deny Sacramental grace, you will find the common reason to be that they have themselves misused it. Having cut themselves off from Christ’s presence by deadly sins, and impatient of so tedious a mode of reconciliation as confession, repentance, and amendment, they seek some shorter road of approach to God. And such they fancy themselves to possess in that excitement of feeling, which brings them into natural relation with their Maker. And they forget that the thing which they despise is the Mediation of Christ, and His true presence with His people. For these depend on that coming in the flesh, which has its effect through those Sacramental ordinances which they have slighted.⁶⁵

For Wilberforce, there is a close link between correct doctrine and an honourable life. He claims that to be an upright person and a responsible citizen one must adhere to the proper system of religion, which in his view is the sacramental system.⁶⁶ Clearly, much depends on the decision to follow a particular path.

Frequency of the Celebration of the Eucharist

Of the two principal sacraments in Anglicanism, the Eucharist is the only repeatable one. As stated above, Wilberforce and his fellow Tractarians were keen to promote frequent reception of the Eucharist in an era when it was celebrated only quarterly. In a sermon on the

⁶³ Wilberforce, “The Sacramental System,” 233.

⁶⁴ Wilberforce, “The Sacramental System,” 240.

⁶⁵ Wilberforce, “The Sacramental System,” 240-1.

⁶⁶ Wilberforce, “The Sacramental System,” 241.

subject of Holy Communion, Newman, referring to Christ, asks rhetorically, “What is the good of sitting at home seeking Him, when His presence is in the holy Eucharist?”⁶⁷ Pusey poses a similar rhetorical question of his own in his controversial sermon delivered at the University of Oxford in 1843, “How should there be the fullness of Divine life, amid all but a month-long fast from our ‘daily Bread?’”⁶⁸ Wilberforce’s call for frequent reception of the Eucharist is an echo of that sentiment.

Given the close connection that Wilberforce sees between the Incarnation and the sacraments, it is not surprising that he encourages the Christian faithful to receive the Eucharist frequently. Once again, Wilberforce draws a parallel between nature and the sacraments:

Our bodies require the support of daily food; and shall not our spiritual nature need perpetual replenishment? The notion then, that men should come to the Holy Communion on some great occasions only, arises from a mistake as to its nature and purpose. If men believe it to be the means whereby Christ bestows Himself as the food of their spiritual nature, they will see that if they only come rightly, they cannot too frequently draw near to God’s altar.⁶⁹

If our bodies must receive daily nourishment, then so must our souls. Wilberforce notes that the practice of quarterly communion is very different from that of the early Christian Church. He provides a brief outline of the history of frequency of the Eucharist from the early Christian era to the sixteenth century. He states that the Eucharist was celebrated daily during the early Christian era and that quarterly or even monthly celebrations were unknown.⁷⁰ He insists that the daily celebration of the Eucharist was the norm during the

⁶⁷ <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/parochial/volume7/sermon11.html> Accessed 21 June 2013.

⁶⁸ Edward Bouverie Pusey, “The Holy Eucharist a Comfort to the Penitent,” in *Nine sermons, preached before the University of Oxford, and printed chiefly between A.D. 1843-1855, now collected into one volume* (London: W. Smith, 1885), 40.

⁶⁹ Wilberforce, “The Nourishment of the New Nature,” 144-5.

⁷⁰ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 369.

time of the Apostles, as indicated in Acts 2:46.⁷¹ He notes that this pattern of daily reception continued in England until the sixteenth century.

Wilberforce asks what caused the change in this pattern. He finds an answer to his question in the changes that were made to the *Book of Common Prayer* during the reign of King Edward VI (1547-1553). In 1549, the first prayer book of Edward's reign was published.⁷² This book contains several indications that the Eucharist was to be received daily. Wilberforce notes that it includes provisions for daily communion in cathedral churches as well as directions for the celebration of the sacrament on work days and in private homes.⁷³ Weekly administration was expected in parish churches. This emphasis on daily reception of the Eucharist is absent in the 1552 version of the prayer book. Wilberforce sees this as evidence that the "Zuinglo-Calvinistic [sic] system took possession of our Churches."⁷⁴ Cranmer also included a number of liturgical revisions which suggest that his understanding of Eucharistic presence had shifted since the publication of the first prayer book. This matter will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Wilberforce's comments about the frequency of the reception of the Eucharist are problematic in that he equates infrequent communion with the idea that the sacrament does not convey grace. He does not entertain the possibility that some Christian groups may encourage frequent communion but do not necessarily link the presence of Christ with the Eucharistic elements. Similarly, Wilberforce's presentation of the reception of the Eucharist

⁷¹ Wilberforce, *Eucharist*, 370.

⁷² Wilberforce appears to be mistaken about the dates of publication. He states that Edward's first prayer book appeared in 1548 when in fact it was published the following year. In 1548, Thomas Cranmer produced a Communion rite and not a complete prayer book. Wilberforce states that Edward's second prayer book was published in 1552. This statement is correct. Presumably Wilberforce has confused the 1548 Communion rite with the 1549 prayer book. See Wilberforce, *Eucharist*, 377-8.

⁷³ Wilberforce, *Eucharist*, 377.

⁷⁴ Wilberforce, *Eucharist*, 378. Wilberforce consistently refers to sixteenth-century Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli as "Zuinglius."

during the early centuries of the Christian era lacks nuance. He neglects to mention that despite the importance placed on the Eucharist during the early centuries of the Christian era, various groups of people did not communicate. Many did not communicate precisely because the Eucharist was so important.

Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, was the principal author of the prayer books published during Edward's reign. His goal may have been to recover a Eucharistic piety centred on the receiving of the sacrament in contrast to that of that late medieval era, which focussed on the elevation of the elements during the institution narrative.⁷⁵ The 1552 prayer book was a compromise which accommodated a variety of opinions within the Church of England without fully endorsing any of them. It has been suggested that the liturgical revisions which Cranmer incorporated into this text do not represent a change in his Eucharistic theology but instead constitute a carefully conceived plan to gradually wean England away from the Catholicism of Henry VIII's reign.⁷⁶

In Wilberforce's time, the prospect of increased frequency of the celebration of the Eucharist raised the problem of proper preparation: "Now here occurs the practical difficulty, that, according to our present usage, all persons who are unprepared for so frequent a reception of the sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, would be excluded from the daily service of the Church."⁷⁷ The 1552 prayer book contained sentences which excluded those who were spiritually unprepared from receiving the Eucharist but these sentences were omitted from the 1662 prayer book, which was published two years after the restoration of

⁷⁵ Marion J. Hatchett, "Prayer Books," in *The Study of Anglicanism*, revised edition, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty and Jonathan Knight (London: SPCK/Fortress Press, 1998), 133.

⁷⁶ Colin Buchanan, *What did Cranmer think He was Doing?* (Bramcote, UK: Grove Books, 1976), 9.

⁷⁷ Wilberforce, *Eucharist*, 383.

King Charles II to the throne of England.⁷⁸ Given the absence of these sentences from the current prayer book, Wilberforce states that there is no reason why the Eucharist should not be celebrated more frequently.⁷⁹

In addition, Wilberforce states that it is the individual believers who are to be blamed for their lack of preparedness to receive the Eucharist rather than the Church itself. He notes that,

...the clergy are always as willing to minister the Holy Eucharist as their parishioners to receive it; and therefore that the abuse, if such it be, is the fault of individuals. And the weakness of individuals cannot be imputed as a defect to the collective Church, because it is inseparable from our common nature. But the obligations of the Church of Christ are one thing; the defects of its individual members are another...The Church does her part, when she daily spreads her board, and invites men to partake of it. The manna is daily poured forth around the camp; it is the fault of individuals if it be not gathered.⁸⁰

Individual Christians must therefore ensure that they are in a fit spiritual state to receive the sacrament. This notion that two parties, namely the Church and the faithful, are responsible for the efficacy of the Eucharist is also found in Wilberforce's understanding of Eucharistic presence, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Wilberforce cautions against being exclusive in admitting the faithful to the celebration of the Eucharist. He notes that while the early Church excluded a number of "notorious offenders" not only from the Eucharist but also from some of its more solemn prayers, there is no reason why the Church should now continue to do so.⁸¹

As it was noted earlier in this chapter, various groups of people were excluded from communion during the early centuries of the Christian era, not just those under church discipline. While Wilberforce does not criticise early Christians for this practice, he does

⁷⁸ Wilberforce blames this exclusion for the small attendance at the service of Holy Communion and lists it as another reason why the Eucharist came to be celebrated less frequently: smaller crowds meant that there was less need for the service to be held regularly. See Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 379.

⁷⁹ The 1662 prayer book was the one used by the Church of England during Wilberforce's era.

⁸⁰ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 383-4.

⁸¹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 384.

take issue with later generations who have done the same thing. He seems to be applying one set of rules to the early church and another to Christians of later centuries. His approach is therefore inconsistent.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an outline of Wilberforce's sacramental theology. In it the theme of God working in humans and the human role in the reception of the sacraments is evident. God sent Jesus Christ, the second Adam, to assume human form and thereby restore the divine destiny to humans that had been removed by the first Adam. For Wilberforce, the Incarnation consists of two parts, the doctrine of the Incarnation itself and the benefits bestowed on humankind by it. Sacraments are extensions of the Incarnation: those who receive them are joined to the Body of Christ. Sacraments convey God's grace to humans but humans are free to reject it. The transmission of grace is not one-sided, however. Humans must be willing to freely accept this gift of grace. Both God and humans therefore play active roles in this process.

Wilberforce makes a distinction between sacramental and anti-sacramental systems of religion. The former system stresses the importance of the sacraments while the latter downplays them. Wilberforce's statement indicates the extent to which he deplores the idea of sacramental minimalism held by so many Anglicans of his era. In the sacramental system, the Eucharist, as the only repeatable sacrament, must be received frequently by the faithful, and frequent reception requires proper preparation. Both the Church and the faithful therefore have a role to play in ensuring the efficacy of the Eucharist. In his reflections on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist discussed in the next chapter, Wilberforce will develop his argument in favour of sacramental realism in greater detail as it applies to a particular sacrament.

Wilberforce's view of the sacraments as instruments of grace requiring the involvement of both God and humans is one echoed by other Tractarians. Pusey's *Scriptural Views of Holy Baptism*,⁸² which makes up Tracts 67 through 69, is a defence of baptism as a sign of grace and regeneration. In his *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification*,⁸³ Newman asserts that individual faith and the sacraments combine to bring the human soul to God. In addition, in Tract 89 Keble stresses the need to insist upon the efficacy of sacraments.⁸⁴ Wilberforce was clearly not alone in maintaining that the transmission of God's grace is not one-sided.

This notion of both God and humans playing a role in the efficacy of the sacraments will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, which concerns Eucharistic presence. Readers should be aware not only of Wilberforce's assertion that God and humans both have a part to play in making the Eucharist effective but also that his firm purpose is to reconcile insights of apparently contradictory currents of thought within the Church of England in his day.

⁸² <http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/bap/ch1.pdf> Accessed 21 June 2013.

⁸³ <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/justification/> Accessed 21 June 2013.

⁸⁴ <http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/tract89/> Accessed 21 June 2013.

Chapter Four

WILBERFORCE ON EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE

Introduction

Wilberforce's thoughts on Eucharistic presence are to be found primarily in two of his works, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*¹ and *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*² as well as in *Sermons on the Holy Communion*.³ The subject is treated rather differently in each of these works, however. In his book on the Incarnation, Wilberforce gives the subject fairly short treatment, while in his work on the Eucharist he is more thorough in his study of it. The sermons were directed at laypeople who were not professional theologians. They are therefore more concise by Victorian standards. All of these works therefore warrant examination.

In writing *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, Wilberforce's goal was to indicate the connection between the Divine Word and Creation. Much of what he

¹ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (London: John Murray, 1850).

² Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (London: John and Charles Mozley, 1854).

³ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *Sermons on the Holy Communion* (London: John and Charles Mozley, 1854).

says about Christ's presence is not made in reference to the Eucharist but to baptism instead. For that reason, his comments about Eucharistic presence must be gathered from statements found throughout the work in different contexts. Wilberforce insists upon "The existence, ... of an external and objective mean, whereby we may in the first instance be united to Christ, is the very basis of subsequent obedience."⁴ He maintains that the Lord's physical body is in heaven⁵ but that His presence is nevertheless felt by believers on earth: "And while its [the body of Christ] material place is among the armies of heaven, its spiritual presence is among the inhabitants of the earth, when, how and wheresoever is pleasing to His own gracious will."⁶ His presence in the world is a result of the work of the Holy Spirit.⁷ It is a spiritual presence of the risen Christ. The idea of the Lord's physical body being in heaven is a consideration in the thought of John Calvin: Christ is risen and has ascended into heaven where he reigns at God's right hand.⁸

For Wilberforce, Christ is present in the Church not only as God but also as a human being: "Our Lord's acts on our behalf towards God, since His Ascension into heaven, are comprehended in Holy Scripture under the name of His Intercession. His actions as Mediator

⁴ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 447.

⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 278.

⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 282.

⁷ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 285.

⁸ For a fuller treatment of Calvin's position on the Eucharist, see B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Christopher Elwood, *The Body Broken: The Calvinist Doctrine of the Eucharist and the Symbolization of Power in Sixteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Bryan D. Spinks, "The Reformed Tradition: from Ulrich Zwingli to Eugène Bersier," in *Do This in Remembrance of Me: The Eucharist from the Early Church to the Present* (London: SCM Press, 2013); Joseph N. Tylenda, "The Ecumenical Intention of Calvin's Early Eucharistic Teaching," in *Reformatio Perennis: Essays on Calvin and the Reformation in honor of Ford Lewis Battles*, B. A. Gerrish, ed., in collaboration with Robert Bonedetto (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1981).

towards man may in like manner be summed up in the single term of His Presence.”⁹

Christ’s presence is revealed to us through Scripture and Wilberforce stresses that it is a spiritual and not a carnal one.¹⁰ Prior to the time of Christ, God’s interaction with humans was effected through other means but now Christ provides a new mode of mediation.¹¹ Sacraments are the most significant means by which this mediation occurs.¹²

The power of the Holy Spirit brings about the presence of Christ.¹³ Through Christ’s body, the spiritual gifts are conveyed to humans.¹⁴ Wilberforce is eager to stress that the spiritual presence of Christ is no less “real” than a “carnal” presence would be. He states “that such spiritual Presence is not less real than that which is material, depending only on another mode of existence, which has its own being and its own laws.”¹⁵ In this context, Wilberforce is using the term “real” as the opposite of “subjective.” He observes that “the reality of Christ’s Presence depends on Himself, not on those He visits.”¹⁶ It is divine initiative that brings about this real presence. Christ is present in the sacraments not simply because the faithful think or hope that he is there but because He makes Himself present to us.¹⁷ Wilberforce states that a carnal presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine would provide no benefit to communicants. He asks rhetorically, “Why should we be the better for the carnal devouring of our Lord’s body? What spiritual efficacy would result from

⁹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 264.

¹⁰ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 267.

¹¹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 272.

¹² Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 409.

¹³ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 267.

¹⁴ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 278.

¹⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 279.

¹⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 281.

¹⁷ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 281.

such a feast?”¹⁸ Clearly, the answer is none. Wilberforce seeks to debunk the incorrect understanding of Christ’s presence as a physical reality.

Alf Härdelin has observed that Wilberforce’s attempt in his work on the Incarnation to explain his doctrine of the real presence was not successful.¹⁹ Henry Manning, the Tractarian who was a close friend of Wilberforce during the latter part of his life and who influenced him in his decision to become a Roman Catholic, offered advice to his friend on how to clarify his explanations. Soon after the publication of *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, Manning wrote a letter to Wilberforce urging him to revise his terms. He encouraged Wilberforce to employ scholastic terminology in order to avoid confusion about the meaning Wilberforce intended to convey.²⁰

Manning’s efforts were not in vain. In his book on the Eucharist, Wilberforce describes the sacrament as an “extension of the Incarnation”²¹ and notes that it contains the body and blood of Christ which suffered on the cross.²² Wilberforce’s avoidance of the scholastic categories of “substance” and “accidents” suggests that he sought to use terminology consistent with the common tradition of the first Christian millennium.

Wilberforce’s Sources

Wilberforce is eager to stress that his claims about Eucharistic presence are bolstered by sources that should be undisputed by all Christians. He makes it clear that he considers Scripture to be the ultimate, infallible authority. Wilberforce says that this approach should be acceptable to Christians who consider Scripture to be the only authority on God’s will.²³ When the meaning of Scripture is in dispute, he turns to the early Church Fathers for

¹⁸ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 424.

¹⁹ Alf Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1965).

²⁰ Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 162.

²¹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 1.

²² Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 93.

²³ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 2.

clarification. He considers the writers of the early Christian era to be “a safer exponent of its [Scripture’s] real purpose than mere logical arguments.”²⁴ This statement contains a thinly-veiled criticism of the argumentation used in Scholasticism, the dominant system of logic in the Christian West during the later medieval era.²⁵

Wilberforce points out that the authorities that he draws upon for reference date from no later than the ninth century. He states plainly that “in this present work...the authorities cited are all previous to the time of Photius, before which the East and the West were not permanently divided; as well as to the time of Paschasius, when the Holy Eucharist first became a matter of dispute.”²⁶ His reasons for doing so are twofold. Wilberforce’s first reason for limiting his reference texts to those prior to the ninth century concerns Christian unity. In referring to Photius, Wilberforce reminds his readers of the controversy that arose in the 860s, which strained relations between the Christian East and the Christian West. The Bishop of Rome, Nicholas I, objected to the appointment of Photius, a lay scholar, as Patriarch of Constantinople. The controversy ended with the death of Nicholas in 867 but, regrettably, it was not the last conflict between East and West. Wilberforce’s eagerness to stress that his sources predate this conflict suggests that he places great importance on providing references that all Christians can accept as valid.²⁷

²⁴ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 2.

²⁵ In the eleventh century, a revival of learning occurred in Western Europe as a result of the reintroduction of the works of Aristotle. New importance was given to Aristotle’s principles of logic and they were used in later medieval theology until circa 1500. In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther would blame Scholasticism for many of the ills of the Western Church.

²⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 3. Wilberforce is mistaken in his assertion that the controversy involving Photius led to a permanent division between the Christian East and West, i.e., Constantinople and Rome. The permanent division did not occur until 1054.

²⁷ In his reference to the division of the Christian East and West, Wilberforce neglects to mention that the Oriental Orthodox Churches had separated from the rest of the Christian Church as a result of the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The Oriental Orthodox Churches were unwilling to accept the Christological

His second reason concerns the absence of disagreement concerning the Eucharist during the late patristic and early medieval era. For nearly the first nine centuries of the Christian era, the Eucharist was not a subject of disagreement within the Church. External opponents such as the Gnostics voiced their doubts about Eucharistic presence but they cut themselves off from the Church. Other opponents were cut off by official decree. Wilberforce believes that these external assaults simply highlighted the unanimity within the Church on the subject of the Eucharist.²⁸ It was only in the ninth century that dissenting views began to appear.

Wilberforce alludes to the dispute we saw in Chapter One involving two monks, Paschasius Radbertus and Ratramnus. Wilberforce relies on neither Paschasius nor Ratramnus as a source but instead uses the era of their dispute as a line of demarcation between the earlier centuries when the Eucharist was not a subject of controversy and the later centuries when it became a point of contention. Since he does not quote from either writer Wilberforce does not cite a reference for either Paschasius or Ratramnus.

When citing the church fathers, Wilberforce used the *Library of the Fathers*,²⁹ an annotated English translation of the works of early Christian writers. In 1836, Pusey and Newman developed an idea to provide Anglican scholars who possessed little or no knowledge of classical languages with access to the writings of the early Christian era. Pusey's biographer, H. P. Liddon, claims that the creation of *The Library of the Fathers* was brought about by the Hampden Crisis.³⁰ This controversy centred on the 1836 appointment of R. D. Hampden as Regius Professor of Divinity at the University of Oxford. Hampden

pronouncements made at this Council. Presumably Wilberforce does not mention this division because the dispute did not involve the Eucharist.

²⁸ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 3.

²⁹ *A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, Anterior to the Division of the East and West*, ed. E. B. Pusey *et al.* (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1840-1885).

³⁰ Henry Parry Liddon, *Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey* (London: Longmans, Green, 1894-1898), 409.

had been viewed with suspicion by the Tractarians since the publication of his 1834 pamphlet in which he advocated the abolition of subscription to the *Thirty-Nine Articles* as a condition of graduation from the university. His goal in making this suggestion was to enable non-Anglicans to study at Oxford. Perhaps not surprisingly, Hampden's position was not well received by the Tractarians. In a letter to his brother Samuel written in April 1835, Robert Wilberforce described Hampden as "a paradoxical prig and a heartless heretic."³¹

However controversial Hampden may have been during his own era, the translations of early Christian texts which appeared as a result of his case proved to be popular among High Church clergy. Robert Wilberforce himself subscribed to the series³² and used it as a reference, as we shall see later in this chapter. R. W. Church, who would later write a history of the Oxford Movement,³³ translated the Catechetical Lectures of Cyril of Jerusalem used by Wilberforce in presenting his views on Eucharistic presence.³⁴ Henry Wilberforce, Robert's youngest brother, translated a selection of Augustine's letters that are included in this collection. Noting that the *Library of the Fathers* was the first extensive body of English translations of patristic texts, Richard W. Pfaff states although "the translations were not always beyond scholarly reproach (nor the editorial matter beyond a hint of tendentiousness),"³⁵ the collection has nevertheless proved useful to subsequent generations of students.

³¹ Quoted in David Newsome, *The Partings of Friends: The Wilberforces and Henry Manning* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 166. For a fuller treatment of the Hampden controversy, see Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* vol 1 (London: SCM Press, 1987), 112-21; Geoffrey Faber, *Oxford Apostles: A Character Study of the Oxford Movement* (Harmondsworth UK: Penguin Books Ltd., 1933), 335-340 and 348-353.

³² Richard W. Pfaff, "The Library of the Church Fathers: The Tractarians as Patristic Translators," *Studies in Philology* 70, no. 3 (July 1973): 334.

³³ See R. W. Church, *The Oxford Movement: Twelve Years 1833-1845* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1966).

³⁴ Pfaff, "The Library of the Church Fathers," 334-335.

³⁵ Pfaff, "The Library of the Church Fathers," 344.

Wilberforce's use of sources that predate the Eucharistic controversies of the medieval era is understandable, but it is nevertheless problematic at times. Wilberforce has a tendency to impose the debates of his own era back on the early centuries of the Christian church. As we saw in Chapter One, early Christians did not view the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine in isolation from other aspects of the liturgy. The fixation on the elements developed during the medieval era. If the early Church Fathers did not dwell on the presence of Christ in the elements, it is because it was not a subject of debate during their time. In his eagerness to avoid the medieval Eucharistic controversies, Wilberforce neglects to mention the gradual movement away from the early Christian idea of the Eucharist as a community celebration eventually which led to the increased focus on the elements on the altar.

Consecration

In order for Christ to be present in the Eucharist certain steps must be taken before believers can receive this gift of grace. Consecration of the elements is the first step in imparting sacramental grace to the assembled faithful. Wilberforce places great weight on the words of institution because they were uttered by Jesus himself. The fact that they are instructions from Jesus indicates that consecration is the essential characteristic of the Eucharist. He quotes St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians to support his position: "*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the Blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the Body of Christ?*"³⁶

Wilberforce notes that the early Church provides considerable evidence that the idea of consecration is an essential element of the Eucharist. He divides that evidence into three groups, namely the ancient liturgies, statements of early Church writers and the way in which the elements were treated during the early Christian era.³⁷ He outlines the history of the

³⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 8. The italics are Wilberforce's.

³⁷ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 39.

various ancient liturgies, attaching particular importance to those of St. James and St. Mark.³⁸ For Wilberforce, the absence of any public formularies for most liturgical actions apart from consecration underscores its importance for the early Church: “... the consecration of the Holy Eucharist was the only thing (so far as we know) for which the early Church thought it necessary to provide a formal ritual by public authority. Hence we may infer the great weight which it attached to this action.”³⁹

In his discussion of consecration Wilberforce accepts as a given the notion that this act must be carried out by a priest. Some modern scholars dispute this assertion. Edward Schillebeeckx points out that during the early centuries of the Christian era the person who presided over the Eucharist was the leader of the community. That person was accepted by the Church as the leader and therefore a unifying figure. Schillebeeckx states that during this era the liturgical role of celebrating the Eucharist was simply one aspect of a multi-faceted pattern of presiding over the Christian community. He adds that the Eucharist was celebrated by the entire community of believers under the leadership of the presider.⁴⁰

Wilberforce points out that there is considerable variation among the ancient liturgies in the initiatory part of the service, but the words of institution are characterised by a striking sameness of expression. This sameness is no doubt due to their biblical origin. Referring to the words “who in the same night in which He suffered,” he states that

Throughout all Churches founded by the Apostles, the exact repetition of those words which Our Lord had originally uttered, were supposed essential to the consecration of the Eucharist. In all Liturgies, with the smallest possible exception, they are found to be identical. This proceeds upon the principle which is explained in the Liturgy of St. Chrysostom, that the real minister in the consecration of the Holy Eucharist is Christ Himself. The victim is identical with the priest.⁴¹

³⁸ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 39-50.

³⁹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 50.

⁴⁰ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1981), 49.

⁴¹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 52.

In this uniformity of expression Wilberforce finds evidence of the importance placed upon consecration by the early Church. He asks rhetorically, “For why this scrupulous care to repeat the exact words of Our Lord, unless some peculiar effect was dependent upon the action?”⁴² He observes that the emphasis on repeating the exact words of Jesus is based on the assumption that the Eucharist is a perpetuation of the Lord’s Passion. This perpetuation can be viewed as an ongoing Incarnation: Christ continues to carry out the same actions through the liturgy. For Wilberforce, the fact that the words of consecration were repeated with such care implied that they were an essential part of some important action: “And if so, it must have been this action itself, and that with which it was conversant, on which the value of the ordinance depended. Its importance must have rested, not merely on a consideration of the Giver or receiver, but likewise on the worth of the thing received.”⁴³

For Wilberforce, the sheer number of the liturgies in which formularies for consecration are found attests to the importance of this action. He lists them as follows:

... we have the Liturgy of Jerusalem, with its forty derivative Syriac forms, together with those of St. Basil and St. Chrysostom, which bear a certain relation to it, and are themselves illustrated by the Armenian and the three Nestorian Liturgies. Next, we have the Liturgy of Alexandria, the authenticity of which is witnessed by the three Coptic and the Ethiopic Liturgies. Then comes that of Rome and its related Ambrosian Liturgy. Finally, we have the Spanish Liturgy; and the Gallic, published in four shapes by Muratori, and in another by Mone. Thus we have sixty-two Eastern, and at least eight Western Liturgies. Indeed were the different forms under which the Gallic recensions occur, to be counted as different liturgies, the number of the whole would exceed one hundred.⁴⁴

He considers the essential characteristic of all these ancient liturgies to be “that they represent a certain transaction, a certain course of events, of which the crisis and consummation is that which is *done* in respect to the sacred elements themselves, with a view of giving to them their character and importance.”⁴⁵ Quoting Tract 63 of the *Tracts for the Times*, Wilberforce

⁴² Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 53.

⁴³ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 55.

⁴⁴ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 50-51.

⁴⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 51-52. The italics are Wilberforce’s.

notes that the liturgies resemble each other too much to have been composed independently.⁴⁶

In a footnote elsewhere in this chapter he observes that the words of institution are absent from the liturgies of Addai and Mari.⁴⁷

A comparison between the ancient liturgies and those of Zwingli and Calvin highlights the importance of the gift conveyed through the Eucharistic elements. Wilberforce notes that in the liturgies of the early Church the words of consecration were quoted literally and were part of a prayer to which the people were expected to answer with an Amen. In contrast, the Calvinistic formularies use a narration for the instruction of the congregation instead of a mystical action addressed to God.⁴⁸ Referring to a contemporary German Protestant theologian, Wilberforce states “here is an example of that which [August] Ebrard affirms to be true of all Protestant formularies, that ‘the consecration has only a declaratory, and no operative meaning.’”⁴⁹ Based on this statement, Wilberforce affirms that “the belief of the ancient Church, namely, that the words of consecration were effective and not exegetical is rendered more striking by the contrast. They were not recited to the people for their information, but pleaded before God for the attainment of the promise.”⁵⁰ So much attention was focussed on the words of consecration in the early Church because it was believed that a continuation of the gift given once and for all was bestowed in the Eucharist.

Wilberforce turns to the direct statements of early Christian writers to support his argument in favour of consecration of the Eucharistic elements. He notes that these thinkers tended to be circumspect in their writings about the subject because they considered it a topic

⁴⁶ “On the Antiquity of the Existing Liturgies,” in Newman et al., *The Tracts for the Times* (London: Printed for J. G. & Rivington, 1839-41), quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 49.

⁴⁷ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 57n.

⁴⁸ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 55.

⁴⁹ August Ebrard, *Dogma von Heiligen Abendmahl und seine Geschichte*, (Frankfurt: Heinrich Zimmer, 1845), 794, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 56.

⁵⁰ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 55.

too holy to be subject to the scrutiny of heathens.⁵¹ He nevertheless cites the work of several individuals who allude to consecration. Wilberforce begins with Justin Martyr, who stated that “‘the food which is sanctified by the word of prayer,’ which is ‘no longer common bread, and common drink,’ but ‘the Flesh and Blood of the Incarnate Jesus.’”⁵² He also cites Irenaeus: “It is when ‘the bread from the earth receives the invocation of God,’ that it is ‘no longer common bread, but Eucharist, consisting of two things, an earthly and a heavenly.’”⁵³ In addition, Wilberforce finds four individuals who wrote about the matter in some detail in their catechetical lectures to the newly baptised. Ambrose, Cyril, Gregory Nyssen and Gaudentius all stated their views on this subject. Wilberforce cites a passage from Ambrose’s *De Mysteriis* in which the author affirms the notion of a change in the Eucharistic elements brought about by benediction:

You may perhaps say, that which I see is something different: how do you prove to me that I receive the Body of Christ? This is what it remains for me to prove. What examples, therefore, am I to use? Let me prove that this is not that which nature has made it, but that which the benediction has consecrated it to be: and that the force of the benediction is greater than that of nature, because by the benediction nature herself is changed.⁵⁴

He goes on to cite another passage in which Ambrose reinforces the idea of an external element being used to confer an inward gift:

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself proclaims, *this is My Body*. Before the sacred words of benediction another species is named, after consecration the Body is implied. He Himself speaks of His Blood. Before consecration it is spoken of as another thing. After consecration it is named Blood. And you (i.e. the receiver) say Amen – that is, it is true. What your mouth expresses, let your inner mind confess – feel what you say.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 61.

⁵² Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, 66, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 8.

⁵³ St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, iv, 18, 5, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 8.

⁵⁴ St. Augustine, *De Mysteriis*, ix, 50, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 62-63.

⁵⁵ St. Augustine, *De Mysteriis*, ix, 54, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 63. The italics are Wilberforce’s. In a footnote to this citation Wilberforce states that St. Ambrose makes the same statement in more concise form in *De Sacramentis*, iv, 5, 23; however, Wilberforce says he has declined to

Wilberforce then turns to the lectures of Cyril of Jerusalem to bolster his argument. He cites an excerpt from the third Mystagogical Catechism, “The bread in the Eucharist, after the invocation of the Holy Ghost, is mere bread no longer, but the Body of Christ.”⁵⁶ He then includes an excerpt from the fourth Mystagogical Catechism, which admonishes readers to

Contemplate therefore the bread and wine not as bare elements, for they are, according to the Lord’s declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ; for though sense suggests this to thee, let faith stablish [sic] thee. Judge not the matter from taste, but from faith be fully assured without misgiving, that thou hath been vouchsafed the Body and Blood of Christ.⁵⁷

Wilberforce adds another quote in which Cyril tells the faithful to be “Fully persuaded, that what seems bread is not bread, though bread by taste, but the Body of Christ; and that what seems wine is not wine, though the taste will have it so, but the Blood of Christ.”⁵⁸

Wilberforce moves on to the *Catechetical Discourse* of Gregory Nyssen and his comments on change in the Eucharistic elements:

With reason therefore do we believe that the bread, which is now sanctified by the word of God, is transformed into the Body of God the Word. For that (natural) Body (of Our Lord’s) was in effect bread [*i.e.* as he has explained before, bread had been the food by which it had been nourished]. But it was sanctified by the indwelling of the Word, which tabernacle in our flesh.⁵⁹

Gregory compares this process to the Holy Eucharist:

For there too the bread, as the Apostle says, is sanctified by the Word of God, and by prayer, so that it does not pass into the Body of the Word by the process of eating

include this text in the body of his argument because the authorship of the treatise cannot with certainty be attributed to St. Ambrose.

⁵⁶ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 64, as “Oxford Translation, p. 268.”

⁵⁷ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 64, as “Oxford Translation, p. 271.”

⁵⁸ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 64, as “Oxford Translation, p. 272.”

⁵⁹ St. Gregory Nyssen, *Cat. Orat.* 39, vol. iii, p. 104, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 64. The parentheses, brackets and italics are Wilberforce’s. Wilberforce states in a footnote “The true text of this passage, as cited by Theorian, is given, Maio, Nova Collectio, vi. 370.”

and drinking, but is transformed at once into Body by a word, as the Word expressed it, saying, “this is My Body.”⁶⁰

He adds, “Humanity is made partaker of the Divine Nature through communion with Deity.”⁶¹ Gregory sums up with the statement that God, “Bestows these gifts, by changing the nature of the apparent elements into that [*i.e.* the immortal] by the power of the benediction.”⁶²

Gaudentius, Bishop of Brescia, is the final source Wilberforce draws upon to reinforce his notion of change in the Eucharistic elements effected by consecration. Gaudentius claims, “The Creator and Lord of nature, who produces bread from the earth, of bread again (because it is within His power, and His promise) makes His own body: and He who made wine of water, of wine makes His Blood.”⁶³ He elaborates on this point in the following passage:

The hereditary gift of the New Testament, is that sacrifice which on the night that He was betrayed to be crucified, He left as the pledge of His presence. This is that *viaticum* for our way, by which we are nourished in this journey of life, until departing from this world, we come to Him; by reason of which the same Lord said, “Unless ye eat My flesh, and drink My blood, ye have no life in you.” For he wished that His benefits should continue among us; He wished that through the image of His own Passion our souls should be always sanctified by His precious blood. He orders, therefore, His faithful disciples, whom He appointed also the first priests of His Church, to solemnise perpetually those mysteries of eternal life, which it is necessary that all priests, throughout every Church of the whole world, should celebrate till Christ comes again from heaven. This was done, that we, the priests, and the whole body of the faithful, having the representation of Christ’s Passion daily before our eyes, carrying it in our hands, and receiving it in our mouths, and bosoms, might be possessed with an indelible memorial of our redemption, and might obtain a sweet

⁶⁰St. Gregory Nyssen, *Cat. Oral.* 39, vol. iii, p. 104, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 64.

⁶¹Although Wilberforce does not provide an exact reference for this citation the reader can infer that it is drawn from the same text. Quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 65.

⁶²In the footnote to this reference Wilberforce includes a Greek text, presumably the original, and after it he adds the citation “Id. p. 105.” Quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 65. The brackets and italics in the English text are Wilberforce’s.

⁶³“Ipse naturarum Creator et dominus, qui producit de terra panem, de pane rursus (quia et potest et promisit), efficit proprium corpus: et qui de aqua vinum fecit, et de vino sanguinem suum.” St. Gaudentius, *Ad Neophytos, Bib. Pat. Max.* v. 946.[sic]. quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 65.

medicine and perpetual defence against the venom of the devil. As the Holy Spirit exhorts, “O taste and see how sweet the Lord is.”⁶⁴

These passages demonstrate that all four thinkers claimed the Eucharistic elements become the body and blood of Christ as a result of consecration. Clearly, the idea of consecration was taught to new members of the Church during the early Christian era. It is interesting to note that in none of these passages is the Holy Spirit referred to as effecting the change in the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine. Wilberforce’s approach to the matter of Eucharistic presence can therefore be said to be entirely rooted in the Incarnation and not in pneumatology.

Finally, Wilberforce points to the usages of the Church as evidence that some special status was conferred upon the elements through consecration. This practice is called “fermentum.” He notes that various early Christian writers such as Irenaeus in the late second century and Pope Innocent I in the fourth century mention that practice of bishops sending the consecrated elements to one another as a sign of intercommunion. From the middle of the second century it was common for deacons to take the consecrated elements to those who were prevented from attending public worship. Wilberforce notes that this action suggests that the Eucharistic elements conveyed a particular gift.⁶⁵ Although the practice was later abolished, it remained prevalent in the second and third centuries. Wilberforce notes that this practice was connected to the custom of retaining the consecrated elements in the church either so that they might be taken to the sick or kept so that it might be administered to the faithful on another occasion.⁶⁶ An example of the latter is found in the Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified, held during Lent in the Eastern Church. In the Western Church during the sixth century, the custom arose of joining a portion of the leftover elements from the previous

⁶⁴ St. Gaudentius, *Ad Neophytos*, 947, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 65-66.

⁶⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 66-67.

⁶⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 68.

day with those about to be consecrated. This practice was intended to be an assertion of the oneness and perpetuity of the oblation.⁶⁷

Wilberforce interprets all these usages as an indication that the Eucharistic elements were sanctified as a result of consecration, thereby making them the means by which God's grace was conveyed. The blessing received was bound up with the elements themselves.⁶⁸ He sees further proof of this in the fact that Christ was thought to be present in every portion of the elements. He notes that until the twelfth century the Eucharist was administered in both kinds, yet both the bread and the wine were believed to convey the same gift. "It is obvious, then, that the intervention of the elements themselves, was looked to as the appointed means of conveying the blessing."⁶⁹

The sacredness of the consecrated elements is further attested to by the fact that certain conduct was required of those who intended to receive communion. From as early as at least the second century, recipients were required to fast before attending the Eucharist. Wilberforce's reference to this practice as a "mark of respect"⁷⁰ is an understatement. The fast is in fact much more than a mark of respect: it is an act of vigilance undertaken in anticipation of the heavenly banquet. Another pious practice was to receive the sacrament with the hands cupped, right over left. Wilberforce quotes Cyril, who encouraged communicants to "'Make thy left hand, ... , as if a throne for thy right, which is on the eve of receiving the King. And having hollowed thy palm, receive the Body of Christ, saying after it, Amen.'"⁷¹ He notes that St. John of Damascus referred to this practice⁷² Communicants

⁶⁷ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 69.

⁶⁸ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 70.

⁶⁹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 70.

⁷⁰ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 72. Wilberforce cites Tertullian *Ad Uxorem*, ii, 5; *De Corona*, iii and St. Cyprian, *Epistle 63* as his sources for this assertion.

⁷¹ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, fifth *Mystagogical Catechesis*, 21, Oxford Translation 279, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 73.

were also told to ensure that none of the consecrated elements fell to the ground, as stated in Tertullian.⁷³ Wilberforce also quotes Cyprian, who stated that when the Eucharistic elements were taken to the homes of the faithful they were to be stored carefully in a closed repository to guard against loss:

Tell me, ... , if any one gave thee gold dust, wouldst thou not with all precaution keep it fast being on thy guard against losing any of it, and suffering loss. How much more cautiously then wilt thou observe, that not a crumb falls from thee of what is more precious than gold and precious stones.⁷⁴

Wilberforce cites all these ancient sources in an attempt to illustrate the importance placed by the early Church on the gift bestowed through the elements of bread and wine. He states, “The Church bears witness to the effects, and consequently to the reality of consecration, both by its public offices, by the voice of its doctors [i.e. teachers], and by the usages of its people.”⁷⁵

Following this examination of the view of the early Church on consecration, Wilberforce asks how it is possible to accept consecration and at the same time deny an efficacious presents in the elements of bread and wine. Referring to the elements, he wonders “With what intention can they be consecrated, except that they should be effectual?”⁷⁶ He questions why consecration would be performed unless it resulted in a change in the elements. Wilberforce notes that both the early Church Fathers and those eighteenth-century thinkers who deny the presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements share the assumption that consecration and the efficacy of the elements are connected. He states

⁷² St. John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, iv, 13, 271, cited in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 73. In the same footnote to this reference Wilberforce notes that this custom prevailed in the West, citing St. Augustine, *Against the Epistle of Parmenianus*, ii, 13. He cites Thierry Ruinart, *Acts of the Martyrs*, 95, as stating that this practice took place as early as the second century.

⁷³ Tertullian, *De Corona*, iii, cited in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 73.

⁷⁴ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, fifth *Mystagogical Catechism*, 21, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 73-74.

⁷⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 74.

⁷⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 74.

that “[The early Church fathers] ascribe efficacy to the elements, because they believed the validity of consecration; [eighteenth century theologians] deny it, because the validity of consecration is the very conclusion from which they wish to escape.”⁷⁷ These eighteenth-century thinkers were prepared to accept the prayers of the liturgy but were not willing to acknowledge their significance. Wilberforce goes on to say that it is not possible to reject one concept and uphold the other. Those who deny the presence of Christ in the elements cannot really believe in the validity of consecration. They cannot believe in consecration if they do not believe in its results.

Why then retain the rite of consecration if it is thought not to have any effect? Wilberforce says “Yet what a mockery is a Priestly commission which confers no powers, and a form of consecration whereby nothing is made holy! If these things are real, their consequences should be admitted; if unreal, they had better be discarded.”⁷⁸ Wilberforce displays indignation when he considers the possibility that those who do not believe in the presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements retain the rite of consecration simply as a matter of habit. He considers it better to abandon the rite altogether than “... to retain holy and sublime usages, pregnant with great truths, and associated with the love and devotion of all saints, yet to regard them with the cold contempt, with which men treat the unmeaning and obsolete fashions of a barbarous age.”⁷⁹

Wilberforce examines the statements “This is my Body,” and “This is my Blood,” noting that both contain a subject, a predicate and a copula. He looks closely at the components of these sentences. The subject of each sentence, the word “this,” refers to the consecrated bread and wine, not just any bread and wine. He maintains that the subject refers both to the outward and visible signs of bread and wine and, perhaps more importantly, to

⁷⁷ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 75.

⁷⁸ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 75.

⁷⁹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 75.

“the inward part or thing signified,’ which was the real object under consideration.”⁸⁰ He quotes Augustine to reinforce his point that the consecrated gifts of bread and wine are intended to be the subject of Jesus’s statements: “Our bread and our cup is not any one,’ *i.e.* any specimen of the food partaken, ‘but it is a mystical one, which is produced by a fixed consecration, and does not come by growth. That which is not produced in this way, though it may be bread and a cup, is a means of bodily refreshment, not a sacrament of religion.”⁸¹ He also quotes St. Ambrose: “Before the blessing of the sacred words another species is named; after consecration the Body is signified. Before consecration it is called a different thing; after consecration it is called Blood.”⁸²

Wilberforce underscores the importance of consecration by stating that the priesthood was a specific commission in which the power of consecrating the elements rested. The reality of consecration depends upon the validity of this commission. He notes that from the time of the early Church onwards it was understood that no valid Eucharist could be celebrated unless a priest was present to consecrate the elements.⁸³ Wilberforce states that over time numerous Christian writers observed that the consecration of the Eucharist was an office confined to the priesthood. He asks rhetorically, “unless there were some real efficacy in consecration, whereby the consecrated elements became other than they were before, why could it not be performed by the lower order of ministers?”⁸⁴ Given that consecration of the elements is a task reserved for the priesthood alone, it must be an essential task. He states

⁸⁰ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 7.

⁸¹ St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, xx, 13, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 8.

⁸² St. Ambrose, *De Mysteriis et De Sacramentis*, ix, 54, also *De Fide*, iv, 10, 124, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 8-9. It was St. Ambrose who first introduced the idea of a change in the elements as a result of consecration. For an exploration of his views on Eucharistic presence as well as those of St. Augustine, see William R. Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1989), 88-98.

⁸³ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 10.

⁸⁴ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 10.

that “in assigning to consecration the place awarded to it by the teaching of Scripture and the testimony of Primitive antiquity, we are not forsaking the principles of our own Church, but only bringing out those truths, which the circumstances of a former generation withheld it from expressing.”⁸⁵ Here Wilberforce alludes to a point made earlier in this thesis, namely the fact that the importance of consecration was downplayed by earlier generations of Anglican thinkers.

It is important to note that some modern scholars would dispute Wilberforce’s assertion that the early Church insisted upon the consecration of the Eucharistic elements by a priest alone. Gary Macy points out that during the early twelfth century there was disagreement among scholars about who could consecrate the bread and wine. He states that at least three scholars of that era claimed that the words of consecration themselves bring about the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ regardless of the identity of the person who utters them.⁸⁶

“Is”: Representation or Identity?

Wilberforce examines the meaning of the copula (or verb) in the statements “This is my Body,” and “This is my Blood.” He states that there are two interpretations which might be given to this word: it might express representation or it might express identity. The category of representation may be subdivided into two categories: one is the effect produced upon the receiver and the other is the intention of the author or giver.⁸⁷ Wilberforce views the first understanding of representation as the position of Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli:⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 16.

⁸⁶ Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 42. See pages 41-48 of Macy’s book for a fuller treatment of the subject.

⁸⁷ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 97.

⁸⁸ Wilberforce draws on the following works by or about Zwingli: Ebrard, *Dogma von Heiligen Abendmahl*, ii, 259; *De Coena Domini plana et brevis Institutio*; *Zwinglius’s Works* ii, folio 273; *Ad Principes Germaniae Epistola*, folio 545.

and the second understanding and the position of John Calvin⁸⁹, both of which will be discussed below. The understanding of identity he considers to be the position of the early Church. Wilberforce is dismissive of the positions of the Swiss reformers and opts for identity as the correct understanding. He states that as a result of consecration the elements are the body and blood of Christ and not merely some representation thereof. The subject and the predicate are connected and form a sacramental identity. This sacramental identity produces the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Wilberforce explains that the real presence occurs because “Christ’s *Body* is a medium through which He bestows spiritual blessings. Its characteristic truth is that Christ’s Presence is owing to the presence of His Body.”⁹⁰

Sacramentum, res sacramenti, virtus sacramenti

Wilberforce distinguishes three aspects of the elements that are received during the Eucharist. They are the *sacramentum*, the *res sacramenti* and the *virtus sacramenti*. The sacrament is the outward part, which is visible to the senses. The *res sacramenti* is the inward part, also known as the thing signified. The *virtus sacramenti* is the benefit derived from partaking of the Eucharist. The Scholastics used the categories of *res* (reality), *sacramentum* (sign) and *sacramentum tantum* (grace given). All these parts are different in character but are united to each other. Wilberforce notes that Augustine first used these categories to describe the elements of the Eucharist.⁹¹ He further observes that Bishop John

⁸⁹ Wilberforce draws on the following works by or about Calvin: Hermann Agathon Niemeyer, *Collectio Confessionum in Ecclesiis Reformatis Publicatarum* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt, 1840); *De Praedestinatione, Works*, viii, 614.

⁹⁰ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 149. The italics are Wilberforce’s.

⁹¹ Wilberforce cites the following sources for St. Augustine: *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, xxvi, 11; xxvi 15, xxvii, 11; *Epistola* cxl, 66; *De Baptismo contra Donatistas*, v. 9; in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 101.

Overall⁹² (1559-1619) used the same terms to describe the Eucharist when he wrote the catechism for the Prayer Book of 1604. For Wilberforce, it is essential that these three elements remain united:

Since the principle, then of the Holy Eucharist is that two dissimilar things, the outward and the inward, retaining each their own character are united into a heterogeneous whole, it follows that the complete idea of this sacrament implies, not only the maintenance of the two portions of which this *whole* is composed, but the law of their combination.⁹³

This threefold distinction forms the basis of his understanding of the Eucharist. The fact that the *sacramentum* and the *res sacramenti* must be brought together in order for the sacrament to be effective is, for Wilberforce, another fact which points to the central role of consecration in the sacrament.⁹⁴

Wilberforce compares the two sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism. He notes that while both contain an inward part and an outward part, there are significant differences between the two. Baptism consists of an outward part (water) and an inward part (blessing bestowed) whereas the Eucharist has three components: the outward part (the elements of bread and wine); the inward part (God's grace); and the benefit of partaking. In Baptism, the outward part has no permanent connection to the inward part because the rite can be administered only once. The Eucharist, as the only repeatable sacrament, provides an

⁹² Wilberforce may have referred to Overall not only because he wrote the 1604 Prayer Book catechism but because Wilberforce's adversary William Goode included a translation of one of Overall's Latin manuscripts in his book on infant baptism. See William Goode, *The Doctrine of the Church of England as to the Effects of Baptism in the Case of Infants* (New York: Protestant Episcopal Society for the Promotion of Evangelical Knowledge, 1853). Overall served as Bishop of Norwich from 1618 until his death. He has been described by one modern scholar as "an avant-garde conformist." See Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought 1600-1640* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 48; Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Bryan D. Spinks, *Sacraments, Ceremonies and the Stuart Divines: Sacramental Theology and Liturgy in England and Scotland 1603-1662* (Aldershot UK: Ashgate, 2002).

⁹³ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 102. The italics are Wilberforce's.

⁹⁴ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 15.

ongoing connection between the outward part and the inward part. In Baptism, Jesus did not state that a particular portion of the element was imbued with a specific quality: “it was not *this* water, but the element at large which was sanctified to be a pledge of the ‘mystical washing away of sin.’”⁹⁵

Baptism also differs from the Eucharist in that it is not essential that the elements used in the rite be specially blessed:

It is orderly and decent that the water should be set apart with prayer; and that the ceremony should be performed by Christ’s minister; but the absence of these conditions does not invalidate the act, either according to the belief of the ancient Church, or according to the existing law of the Church of England. For the setting apart of the element confers only a relative holiness; it is not necessary to the validity of the sacrament; the inward grace is associated with the act, and not with the element; and does not require that that the outward part should be brought into an abiding relation with any inward part or thing signified.⁹⁶

Similarly, it is not necessary for the rite to be performed by a specially ordained individual.

Although ideally a priest would perform the baptism, in the absence of one a deacon is authorised to do so. Wilberforce notes that the relation of the priestly office to the sacrament of Baptism is general and not specific because baptism is an act which can be performed by all Christians and does not depend on consecration, which requires a special commission.⁹⁷

The Eucharist differs from Baptism in both the above points. It is not the element at large spoken of in the Eucharist but rather this particular bread and this particular cup.

Likewise, the involvement of the priest is not simply a matter of ceremonial but is in fact essential to the validity of the sacrament.⁹⁸

Defining How Christ is Present in the Eucharistic Elements

Wilberforce describes Christ’s presence in the Eucharistic elements as supernatural, sacramental and real. Regarding the idea of the supernatural, as opposed to the natural, he

⁹⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 14. The italics are Wilberforce’s.

⁹⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 14.

⁹⁷ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 14-15.

⁹⁸ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 15.

claims “To say that Our Lord’s presence in the Holy Eucharist is supernatural, is to affirm that while His Humanity has a presence, which, except when He wills it otherwise, is accordant to the laws of material existence, it has also a presence of another sort, which is independent of those laws.⁹⁹ In this statement, Wilberforce declares that Christ’s presence is both human and otherworldly, or supernatural. He goes on to say,

Our Lord’s Human Body is not *subject* to the laws of material existence, because His Body is a glorified Body, and therefore not an object to our senses, unless such be His own will. That we do not commonly discern it is not owing, surely, to distance of place, but to the fact that glorified beings cannot be discerned by those who are in our present state, except at their own pleasure.¹⁰⁰

The glorified body is that which existed after the resurrection “under conditions very different from those which are usual to men.”¹⁰¹ It is this glorified body which is present under the form of the consecrated elements in the Eucharist.¹⁰² Wilberforce states that if Christ were a mere man he could not be present both in the Eucharist and in heaven. He says “it is by virtue of those new qualities which Our Lord’s Humanity has gained by oneness with Deity, that it exists under those conditions in which it is given to men in the Holy Eucharist.”¹⁰³ As evidence of this change, Wilberforce points to passages in the biblical text in which it is clear to the disciples that Christ’s body after the resurrection was not as it had been prior to that event.¹⁰⁴ As a result of the resurrection Christ’s body has become exempt from the laws of nature, and for this reason his presence in the Eucharistic elements can be described as supernatural rather than natural.

For Wilberforce, Christ’s presence in the Eucharistic elements is sacramental and not sensible. This assertion is based on the fact that, as outlined above, the *sacramentum* and the

⁹⁹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 130.

¹⁰⁰ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 131. The italics are Wilberforce’s.

¹⁰¹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 133.

¹⁰² Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 133.

¹⁰³ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 133.

¹⁰⁴ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 133.

res sacramenti are brought together by the sacramental identity that is a result of the rite of consecration. The union of these two brings about the presence of Christ in the elements. This presence cannot be perceived by the human senses and therefore cannot be described as “sensible.” As stated above, Christ’s presence in the Eucharist is supernatural and not natural; Christ can therefore be said to be present sacramentally. Wilberforce states that although in itself the *res sacramenti* has neither form nor place, it has them “in a manner” by being united with the *sacramentum*.¹⁰⁵ He adds that Christ’s body may therefore be said to have a form in the shape of the Eucharistic elements:

As the spirit may be said to be present in that place where the body is situated, and as light may be said to assume the shape of the orifice through which it passes, so may it be said that the *res sacramenti* borrows place and shape from the *sacramentum*, with which it is united by consecration.¹⁰⁶

Wilberforce’s assertion that the *res sacramenti* acquires a kind of form and place through its union with the *sacramentum* appears to be at odds with his statement that it cannot be perceived by the senses. He seems to suggest that the act of consecration causes the *res sacramenti* to acquire form. Wilberforce alludes to this possible contradiction but provides a rather weak response:

Whether the constituent portions of light may have any shape in themselves, and what is meant by the place of a spirit, are questions which philosophers can scarcely settle; and in like manner there are secrets respecting the *res sacramenti*, which must remain hidden from divines.¹⁰⁷

He is content to let the matter remain a mystery. He simply reiterates that consecration unites the outward and inward aspects so that the body and blood of Christ are communicated, as stated by the first *Book of Homilies*,¹⁰⁸ under the form of bread and wine.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 141.

¹⁰⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 141.

¹⁰⁷ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 141.

¹⁰⁸ *The Two Books of Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches* (Oxford: The University Press, [1859]).

Wilberforce does not provide a reference to this work.

¹⁰⁹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 141.

Wilberforce views Christ's presence in the Eucharist as real and not merely symbolical or virtual. This is the conclusion that must be reached as a result of the belief in the *res sacramenti*. He says that if the Eucharist were nothing more than a *sacramentum*, as Zwingli maintained,¹¹⁰ all that could be said is that Christ's presence is symbolical. If, in Calvin's view, the Eucharist consists of only the *virtus sacramenti*, then it could be said that Christ's presence is virtual. To acknowledge the *res sacramenti*, however, makes it impossible to deny the real presence of Christ.¹¹¹

Virtualism is a school of thought against which Wilberforce measures the standards of the Church of England. He defines virtualism as the belief "that Christ's Body is not present itself, but may be said to be present by reason of some influence or emanation which proceeds from it; and that this it is which the elements communicate."¹¹² Wilberforce states that according to virtualism the outward and visible part is the means of conveying the benefit of the Eucharist. If that is true, he asks, why does the catechism inquire about the benefits of which the faithful are partakers? He notes that the answer found in the catechism states that "the thing taken and received is the Body and Blood of Christ, of which this virtue or power is a consequence."¹¹³ This answer contradicts the assumption found in virtualism that the body of Christ is not present in the elements. Virtualism is therefore not compatible with the Church of England's understanding on this matter.

Wilberforce asks why belief in God's spiritual presence is not sufficient and why it is necessary to admit the real presence of Christ's body. To answer this question he turns to the early Church fathers. He quotes Cyril, who makes a distinction between the action of God the Father and that of Christ. God is inherent in the Father, while Christ forms the union

¹¹⁰ Wilberforce does not provide a primary source for this reference.

¹¹¹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 142.

¹¹² Wilberforce, "The Real Presence Taught by the Prayer Book," in *Sermons on the Holy Communion*, 284.

¹¹³ Catechism cited in Wilberforce, "The Real Presence Taught by the Prayer Book," in *Sermons on the Holy Communion*, 287.

between the father and humankind. This oneness with the Father, which is made possible by Christ the mediator, allows humans to receive great blessings. Wilberforce turns once again to the early Church fathers to bolster his argument: “‘We ask,’ says Cyprian, ‘that our bread that is, Christ, may be given to us daily, that we who abide and live in Christ may not depart from His sanctification and His Body.’”¹¹⁴ He also quotes Cyril’s statement that Christ “rendered his Body lifegiving, being Himself, as God, the principle of life by nature, that by making us partakers of Himself, not only in spirit but in body, He might render us superior to corruption.”¹¹⁵

Wilberforce quotes another long passage from Cyril:

The Son cometh to be in us, bodily as man, being mingled and united with us by the mystical Eucharist, and again spiritually as God, recreating our spirits to newness of life, by the energy and grace of His own Spirit; and making us partakers of His own divine nature. Christ thus appears to be the bond of union between us and God the Father, joining us to Himself as man, and as God being naturally inherent in the Father. For there was no other way in which nature, which was subject to corruption, could be raised to incorruption, than by coming down into it of that nature, which was superior to all corruption and mutability; so as to raise up its own good that which always lay depressed, and by communion and intermixture with itself, almost to lift it out of those limits which pertain to created nature, by transforming to itself that which has no such power. We are perfectly changed therefore into oneness with God and the Father, because Christ becomes the Mediator between us. For receiving into ourselves, both by the way of body and by the way of spirit, as I said just now, Him who is naturally and truly the Son, consubstantially united to the Father, we have the glory of partaking of that nature which is above all things.¹¹⁶

He follows this with another passage from St. Cyril:

That we might attain [sic] to oneness with God, and with one another, and might be joined together, though each of us individualised by his body and his soul, the Only-Begotten Son contrived a certain scheme, devised by His own wisdom, and by the counsel of the Father. For by bestowing a blessing upon all those who believe, through one Body, namely, His own, by means of the mystical reception, He renders them concorporate with one another and with Himself.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ St. Cyprian, *De Oratone Dominica*, 192, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 144.

¹¹⁵ St. Cyril, *Adversus Nestorium*, iv, 5 vol., 113, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 144.

¹¹⁶ St. Cyril, In Joan. Lib xi, 12, vol. iv, 1002, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 144-145.

Wilberforce notes that St. Cyril is not the only writer to address this theme. St. John

Chrysostom states:

that we may not only be joined in Christ by love, but may be united in reality to His Flesh. And this is brought about through the food which He has given us; for wishing to show the desire which He has for us, He has by this means mixed Himself with us, and united His Body to us, that we might be one, as a body united to its head.¹¹⁸

Referring to these early writers he quotes, Wilberforce says:

Now these passages cannot mean that Our Lord is only an object to men's thoughts, nor yet that He exercises a power which can be detached from Himself; they imply that He is present through His own essence. And since essence and substance are terms, which in their derivation are nearly identical, therefore various ancient writers have expressed this truth by saying that Our Lord is *substantially* present.¹¹⁹

He draws on these ancient sources to bolster his claim that Christ's presence in the Eucharistic elements is an objective reality that exists independently of human opinion. The word "substantially" in the above passage is a very Scholastic term. His choice of term may have been influenced by the fact that he was working from a Latin translation of Cyril of Alexandria.

Wilberforce sums up the notion of real presence in comparison with symbolical and virtual presence by drawing an analogy with the most famous leader of the Franks:

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 men, His *Real* Presence would in like manner be confined to that one place which He occupies in heaven. But by reason of those 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

¹¹⁷ St. Cyril, In Joan Lib xi, 11, vol. iv, 998, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 145.

¹¹⁸ St. John Chrysostom in Joan. Hom. xlvi, 3, vol. viii, 272. See also Hom. Slvii, i. 275. Quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 145.

¹¹⁹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 146.

Eucharist; not indeed as an object to the senses of the receiver, but through the intervention of consecrated elements.¹²⁰

Christ's presence therefore does not depend upon human thought but upon the rite of consecration and his own supernatural power.

Wilberforce on Transubstantiation

As we saw earlier in this chapter, Wilberforce limits his sources on Eucharistic presence to those that predate the Photian schism and Eucharistic dispute of the ninth century. He employs the same appeal to history in his examination of the doctrine of transubstantiation as he does to other matters relating to the Eucharist. Wilberforce states “... the manner in which Christ's presence is bestowed, whether it be by transubstantiation, or according to any other law, is a point which did not come under consideration during the first eight centuries. On this subject therefore it will not be necessary to enter.”¹²¹

While Wilberforce declines to examine the manner in which Christ's presence appears in the Eucharistic elements he nevertheless addresses the issue of change. In his examination of patristic sources Wilberforce finds only one writer, Athanasius of Sinai (fl. 7th century), who espouses the idea of a physical presence in the bread and the wine. He refers to this belief as the Capernaite doctrine.¹²² Referring to Athanasius, Wilberforce says, “... his argument would certainly seem to imply that Our Lord's Body is present in the Holy Eucharist, under the same natural conditions which attached to it when it was upon earth.”¹²³

He says of the Capernautes,

Not comprehending the mysterious character of that gift, which it was His merciful purpose to bestow upon His people, they could put no other meaning upon Our Saviour's words than that His Flesh was to be divided into portions, and distributed as natural food to men. Their own words show that they understood neither the

¹²⁰ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 152.

¹²¹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 5.

¹²² In the context of Eucharistic theology the term “Capernaite” refers to the literal understanding of Jesus's discourse at Capernaum on the bread of life. See John 6:26-58.

¹²³ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 107.

meaning nor advantage of the process contemplated. Without believing the mystery of the Incarnation, they could see no purpose in that communication of Himself, whereby it was Our Lord's gracious intention to impart spiritual grace.¹²⁴

Once again Wilberforce makes a connection between the Incarnation and the sacraments: the Capernaite's lack of belief in the Incarnation prevented them from understanding how Christ is present in the Eucharist.

Wilberforce states his objection to the Capernaite doctrine, "To suppose, as the Capernaite did, that Our Lord's Body is designed to be present as an object to the senses, is to omit the notion of an outward form; even though it should be believed, as it was apparently by Anastasius Sinaita [sic], that the operation of men's senses is supernaturally obstructed."¹²⁵ A physical understanding of Christ's presence is therefore not compatible with Wilberforce's notion of the Eucharistic elements possessing both an outward form and an inward grace. Wilberforce presents the Anglican objection to the idea of a physical presence in the elements by asking rhetorically,

Is it, then, that as His earthly body was nailed upon the Cross, so it is divided into morsels, and eaten as natural food by men? Such was the notion of the Capernaite [sic]; and the same opinion, with the addition that Our Lord's material body is capable of being distributed in portions, without limit and without destruction, and also that men's senses are supernaturally withheld from discerning it, is denied by our Church [the Church of England] under the name Transubstantiation. What other interpretations may be given to a word unknown to antiquity, and how far, considering the technical nature of the term *substance*, a more refined construction of it may harmonise with the decrees of the Council of Trent, is a question for those who have to subscribe to its formularies.¹²⁶

He therefore leaves it to followers of the Church of Rome to determine a correct understanding of the term "transubstantiation."

Wilberforce was well aware of the teaching contained in Article XXVIII of the Articles of Religion concerning transubstantiation. It states, "Transubstantiation (or the

¹²⁴ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 105.

¹²⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 128.

¹²⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 139-140. The italics are Wilberforce's.

change of the substance of Bread and Wine in the Supper of the Lord), cannot be proved by holy Writ: but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions.”¹²⁷ Wilberforce maintains that the opinion expressed in this statement is contrary to the sacramental principle in that the inward part and the outward part are bound together: the former is an object to the mind while the latter is an object to the senses. He claims that Aquinas and other Scholastic thinkers would have rejected this notion.¹²⁸

Wilberforce states there is a difference in meaning between the way the term “substance” is employed by Aquinas and the other Scholastics and the way in which it is used in Article XXVIII. In this Article it appears to be used to refer to the material in the consecrated elements, namely the *sacramentum* or outward and visible sign. He says, “To suppose that this passes wholly away would be the error of Anastasius [sic], and would overthrow the nature of a sacrament, because it would exclude one of those parts which is characteristic of such ordinances.”¹²⁹ Wilberforce goes on to state that Aristotelian philosophy, on which Scholastic thought was based, divided all objects into an accidental part, which was observable to the senses, and the substantial part, which was discernable only to the mind. When the Scholastics referred to the substance in the Eucharist they meant the *res sacramenti*, not the *sacramentum*.

Wilberforce maintains that this understanding of the word “substance” was employed by the Council of Trent when it declared itself opposed to the Lutheran doctrine of consubstantiation. He therefore concludes that the Anglican denial of a change in the substance of the bread and wine refers to the *sacramentum*, the object to the senses. When the Church of Rome refers to a change of substance it means the *res sacramenti*, that which is

¹²⁷ *The Book of Common Prayer* (Toronto: Cambridge University Press, 1928), 670.

¹²⁸ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 108.

¹²⁹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 108.

not an object to the senses.¹³⁰ The contradiction is really more a matter of words than of ideas. Wilberforce concludes that Article XXVIII really censures the carnal or Capernaite notion: “ ... to exclude the idea of a *sacramentum*, or external part, would overthrow the very nature of a sacrament.”¹³¹ Alf Härdelin claims this observation is possibly the first concrete result of Manning’s request that Wilberforce revise his terms.¹³² It is also one of the earliest and clearest statements that attempt to suggest why a misunderstanding has occurred, and how one might proceed to develop an agreement concerning Anglican and Roman Catholic Eucharistic doctrine.

Wilberforce also states that the Black Rubric denies a material presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine but does not contradict the early church’s understanding of Christ’s presence. He says,

This Rubric only affirms that Christ’s *natural* Body and Blood are in heaven and not here, and that no adoration is intended “either unto the sacramental bread and wine there bodily received, or unto any corporal presence of Christ’s natural Flesh and Blood.” (...) there is nothing in this Rubric which excludes the ancient belief, that Christ is present in the Holy Eucharist, by reason of the presence of His Body and Blood; and that the presence of His Body and Blood is witnessed by the adoration to which they are entitled.¹³³

For Wilberforce, the statements in both Article XXVIII and the Black Rubric make it clear that the Church of England rejects only the notion of a physical presence of Christ in the elements.

Wilberforce notes that the word “substance” has different meanings in Baconian and Aristotelian philosophies. For Francis Bacon, the founder of empiricism, experiment and observation are the sources of knowledge. A substance is therefore something that can be perceived by the senses. For Aristotle, substance is an abstract concept: it can be perceived

¹³⁰ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 108-109.

¹³¹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 109.

¹³² Alf Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 194.

¹³³ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 258-259. The italics are Wilberforce’s.

by the intellect and the mind only, while what the senses perceive is called the accidents.¹³⁴ The problem in understanding the term “substance” is therefore rooted in the shifting meaning of the word over the centuries. By Wilberforce’s time, Bacon’s scientific method had been widely adopted. Humans now understood their surroundings on the basis of what their senses indicated. The Aristotelian notion of substance as an abstract concept had long been lost.

For Wilberforce, the Anglican position is clear: “The Church of England in denying Transubstantiation means apparently to deny a *material* presence, for she explains the subject by saying that there is no ‘Corporal Presence of Christ’s natural flesh and blood’”¹³⁵ When the Church of England speaks of “the substance of the bread and the wine” it is in fact referring to the material in the consecrated elements. The term “substantial” is therefore meant to be synonymous with “material.” The difference between the Church of England and the Church of Rome on this issue is one of terminology. Canterbury and Rome express the same idea but couch it in different terms. Wilberforce states, “If we find, then, the same opinions and usages to have prevailed among parties who were divergent in their objects and modes of thought, it will be a further proof that their *belief* was fundamentally identical.”¹³⁶ He asserts that despite these identical beliefs Anglicans are not obliged to accept transubstantiation as a means of explaining Christ’s presence in the Eucharistic elements but instead suggests “they simply withhold their judgement, and affirm nothing respecting the Holy Eucharist but that which was affirmed by the whole Church, both in East and West, during the first seven centuries of its existence.”¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 543.

¹³⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 549. The italics are Wilberforce’s.

¹³⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 256. The italics are Wilberforce’s.

¹³⁷ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 254.

Wilberforce expresses his dislike for transubstantiation in a charge to the clergy of the East Riding of Yorkshire on the subject of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Addressing the question of how Christ's presence is brought about, he states,

All which need be said here is, that the Church of England affirms, that it is not brought about through Transubstantiation. For this is a question, on which at present it would be superfluous to enter: we are inquiring about the *truth* of Our Lord's Presence, not the *manner* of His approach. A person might maintain that Caesar had been in England, and yet admit that he did not come here through Germany.¹³⁸

When viewed against the backdrop of Wilberforce's other statements concerning transubstantiation it is clear that he objects to this Roman doctrine as a means to explain Christ's presence in the Eucharistic elements but not to the conclusion itself. He concurs that Christ's presence is to be found in the consecrated elements of bread and wine. His allusion to Caesar not arriving in England via Germany is meant to illustrate that the Church of Rome arrived at the correct conclusion but did so by the wrong means.¹³⁹

In making these statements about transubstantiation, Wilberforce must have been aware that he was broaching a sensitive issue. Since the Reformation in the sixteenth century, considerable misunderstanding had existed about what transubstantiation really meant. It was widely believed that this concept implied a physical presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine. In fact, the idea as promulgated by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and elaborated upon by Aquinas¹⁴⁰ later in the thirteenth century

¹³⁸ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, "A Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of the East Riding at the Ordinary Visitation, A. D. 1854," in *Sermons on the Holy Communion* (London: J. and C. Mozley/London and Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1854), 283. The italics are Wilberforce's.

¹³⁹ Wilberforce is no doubt referring to Julius Caesar's invasions of Britain in 54 and 55 BC during the course of the Gallic Wars. Caesar arrived in Britain via Gaul, not Germany. During Wilberforce's era this history lesson would have been taught to all British schoolchildren.

¹⁴⁰ . http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.TP_Q76.html. III, q, 76. Accessed 31 March 2013.

contained no such statement. The misunderstanding arose as a result of the extra-liturgical Eucharistic devotions that had developed in the later medieval era.¹⁴¹

From the Scholastic era until 1992, the compulsory doctrine of the Church of Rome concerning Eucharistic presence was simply that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. The Church did not attempt to declare exactly how God carried out this mystery. The Council of Trent stated that this change is “mostly aptly” (*aptissime*) called transubstantiation.¹⁴² In 1992, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* declared that transubstantiation was to be an article of faith. This change in spelling was used to differentiate this new technical term from the previous theological position.¹⁴³

In our era, it is difficult to appreciate the burden Wilberforce must have faced in making his statement about transubstantiation. Like other Anglican clergy, Wilberforce would have known that Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury and a leading figure of the English Reformation, had been burned at the stake in 1556 on the orders of Queen Mary I for, among other things, repudiating the doctrine of transubstantiation.¹⁴⁴ Anglican bishops Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley had suffered the same fate for the same reason in 1555. Wilberforce would no doubt have been aware of the Martyr’s Memorial,¹⁴⁵ located in Oxford near Balliol College not far from the actual site of the execution. Constructed in 1843, this

¹⁴¹ For a fuller treatment of this subject see Nathan Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1982).

¹⁴² See Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London: Sheed & Ward; Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990).

¹⁴³ For a fuller treatment of this subject, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994).

¹⁴⁴ For a fuller treatment of this subject, see Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven CN: Yale University Press, 1996).

¹⁴⁵ The construction of this memorial was to prove a point of contention between the High Church and Low Church parties in the Church of England. Newman saw it as a trap by the Low Church party to embarrass the Tractarians. See Michael Chandler, *An Introduction to the Oxford Movement* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2003), 47-49.

memorial commemorates the deaths of Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer. When making his observation that the positions of Rome and Canterbury concerning transubstantiation differed in terminology only and not in meaning, Wilberforce was probably aware that he was implying that the Oxford Martyrs died for nothing. In the context of the mid-nineteenth century Church of England, such a statement, even an implied one, would have been unthinkable. As we shall see in Chapter Five, Wilberforce was not without his critics.

Different Schools of Thought concerning Eucharistic Presence

Wilberforce examines several schools of thought concerning Eucharistic presence and asks to what extent the Church of England favours any of them. In a veiled allusion to Zwingli, Wilberforce is critical of the belief “that Christ’s Body is altogether absent, and the elements merely a sign or symbol by which it is remembered.”¹⁴⁶ Wilberforce shows disdain for what he considers to be Zwingli’s dishonesty in remaining a priest of the Church of Rome despite his misgivings about the Church’s understanding of the Eucharist. He also notes Zwingli’s denial of the effectiveness of consecration and of the commission of the priesthood, which Wilberforce describes as an attack on “that which is common to Christianity at large.”¹⁴⁷ He goes on to say that

having denied that the benefit bestowed was bestowed through the elements, he [Zwingli] defended his system by asserting that the characteristic of the ordinance was not the consecration of the elements, but the disposition of the receiver. The Holy Eucharist, he said, was not the communication of any *objective* gift, but merely a mode of giving expression to our *subjective* feelings.¹⁴⁸

Wilberforce finds this emphasis on the state of individual recipient to be ludicrous. Taking it to a ridiculous extreme, he states that “... if this ordinance turn exclusively upon the intention of the receiver, it is obvious that men’s common food might at any moment be converted, by

¹⁴⁶ Wilberforce, “A Charge to the Clergy,” in *Sermons on the Holy Communion*, 284. Wilberforce does not provide a reference. For a fuller treatment of Zwingli’s Eucharistic theology, see W. Peter Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

¹⁴⁷ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 21.

¹⁴⁸ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 23. The italics are Wilberforce’s.

a secret act of their will, into the Eucharistic symbols.”¹⁴⁹ We shall examine this emphasis on the state of the receiver in a later chapter. It is worth noting that this subjectivity was a prominent current of thought during Wilberforce’s time because of the influence of Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher’s emphasis on subjective experience was a Pietistic and Romantic reaction to the cerebral approach of the Enlightenment with its emphasis on rational thought.

Wilberforce turns to the catechism to refute Zwingli’s claims. He notes that in the section on Holy Communion¹⁵⁰ catechumens are asked about the outward part or sign, the inward part or thing signified, and the benefits bestowed upon the recipients. He observes that this question differs from that concerning baptism, in which the catechumen is asked about only the outward and inward parts.¹⁵¹ Wilberforce observes that in Zwingli’s position the efficacy of the inward part is denied. He notes that this denial is contrary to the Church of England’s position as presented in the catechism, which states that both the inward and the outward part make up the sacrament of the Eucharist. The inward part is therefore just as necessary as the outward part.¹⁵²

Zwingli’s denial of the efficacy of the inward part of the sacrament is described as “irreverent” by Wilberforce.¹⁵³ He states that not only is Zwingli’s position inconsistent with that of the early church, it also fails to take into account the various passages in the biblical text which state that the humanity of Jesus is communicated in a mysterious manner through the sacrament.¹⁵⁴ Worse still, in Wilberforce’s view, is the whiff of heresy he detects in Zwingli’s theory. Wilberforce states that “[Zwingli’s] system turns upon the notion that the

¹⁴⁹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 25.

¹⁵⁰ *The Book of Common Prayer* (Toronto: The Musson Book Company Limited, 1918), 327.

¹⁵¹ Wilberforce, “A Charge to the Clergy,” in *Sermons on the Holy Communion*, 285.

¹⁵² Wilberforce, “A Charge to the Clergy,” in *Sermons on the Holy Communion*, 286.

¹⁵³ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 26.

¹⁵⁴ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 25.

action of the Divine Spirit has superseded that of the God-man; and consequently, that Our Lord exercises no present influence through that ordinance, whereby He communicates Himself.”¹⁵⁵ Wilberforce describes Zwingli’s belief as a form of Sabellianism, a heresy which developed in the third century of the Christian era. He notes that Sabellianism views the second and third persons of the Trinity as successive modifications of the first person, and the functions of each successive emanation supersede those of the others.¹⁵⁶ To take that view to its logical conclusion, Wilberforce says “the action of God the Holy Ghost has done away in some measure with that of the Incarnate Son.”¹⁵⁷

Wilberforce moves on to examine the views of John Calvin on the subject of Eucharistic presence. He notes that, like Zwingli, Calvin denied the necessity of consecration. For Calvin, the intention of the giver, i.e. God, is the most important aspect of the Eucharist. Wilberforce quotes Calvin’s statement “the main end of sacraments [is] ‘that God may by them testify, represent, and seal His favour to us.’”¹⁵⁸

Wilberforce states that Calvin’s position does not contradict the biblical text and the early Christian writers concerning the communication of Christ’s humanity through the Holy Eucharist, yet it enables him to deny both the validity of consecration and sacredness of the elements. In Wilberforce’s understanding of Calvin, the elements are merely signs or pledges of the work God is performing in the Eucharist. Not all scholars would agree with this interpretation, and Wilberforce acknowledges that one of his own contemporaries maintains

¹⁵⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 25.

¹⁵⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 25.

¹⁵⁷ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 26.

¹⁵⁸ *Consens. Tigur.* vii. Niemeyer, 193, quoted in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 28-29. In the same footnote Wilberforce notes that in his *Institutes* Calvin gave a shorter definition of a sacrament: “*Divinae in nos gratiae testimonium, externo signo confirmatum cum mutual nostrae erga ipsum pietas testificatione.*” *Institutes* iv, 14, 1. The italics are Wilberforce’s.

that Calvin affirmed a spiritual presence of Christ.¹⁵⁹ Modern scholarship agrees with this position. Christopher Elwood states that the real hallmark of Calvinist doctrine is the notion that sacraments are instruments of God's grace.¹⁶⁰ Wilberforce claims that Calvin uses "ambiguous phrases" when referring to Eucharistic presence.¹⁶¹ That perceived ambiguity may have created some confusion in Wilberforce's mind about the meaning Calvin intended.

Wilberforce points out that pledges do not contain the character of that which they are certifying: they are simply assurances of the intention of the giver. Wilberforce claimed that Calvin considered this to be "... the sole purpose of the elements; they neither require consecration, nor are they the means of communicating any gift: they are merely like 'seals of a deed,' and convey to us an assurance of God's inward action."¹⁶² Calvin's idea of a "seal" is drawn from Augustine, for whom it was real and effective.

Wilberforce appears to contradict himself on the subject of Calvin's views of Eucharistic presence. He states, in Calvin's view, "The elements are not to be looked upon as an instrument effecting any thing, [sic] but merely as indications of the purpose of God."¹⁶³ Yet in the very next sentence he says, "For at the same moment when these pledges are exhibited to the lips, it pleases God to produce a supernatural relation between Our Lord's Humanity and the renewed soul."¹⁶⁴ It is illogical to state that the Eucharistic elements effect nothing and then claim that they provide a connection between God and humans.

Wilberforce notes that Calvin is uncertain about the means by which this supernatural relation is effected. He nevertheless concludes that Calvin's meaning is that the soul is lifted

¹⁵⁹ Ebrard, *Dogma von Heiligen Abendmahl*, ii, 556, 658, cited in Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 29.

¹⁶⁰ Elwood, *The Body Broken*, 71.

¹⁶¹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 29.

¹⁶² Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 30.

¹⁶³ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 28-9.

¹⁶⁴ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 29.

up to heaven. He states that the point on which Calvin was most insistent was “that the inward benefit of the Holy Eucharist is the union which takes place between Christ and the receiver’s soul.”¹⁶⁵

Wilberforce finds difficulties with Calvin’s position because he sees in it the assumption that all those who partake of the Eucharist are automatically united with Christ. He likens Calvin’s approach to the elements to the “chain and purple” of King David’s robes of office: the giving of the symbols immediately conveys the benefits of the office.¹⁶⁶ Wilberforce suggests that this notion is inconsistent with Calvin’s position that not all people receive the benefit of God’s grace. He asks how it can be said, given these circumstances, that the elements are pledges of God’s blessing. He concludes that according to Calvin’s position only the chosen elect receive the benefit conveyed by the elements while those who do not belong to that group receive only the bread and wine and nothing more.¹⁶⁷

Wilberforce’s main objection against Calvin’s position on Eucharistic presence is that “it involves that dogma of reprobation, which is the opprobrium of his system.”¹⁶⁸ He clearly objects to Calvin’s idea of predestination and finds that it taints even Calvin’s understanding of the Eucharist. Wilberforce nevertheless considers Calvin’s position on Eucharistic presence to be superior to that of Zwingli because the former asserts that a special blessing, namely the connection to Christ, is conveyed through the sacrament.¹⁶⁹

In his discussion of Calvin’s Eucharistic theology, Wilberforce neglects to mention the relationship between the elements of bread and wine and the Word of God. For Calvin, the Eucharistic elements do not exist in a theological vacuum. Referring to the bread and the wine, Lee Palmer Wandel notes, “Their meaning is not autonomous of God’s speaking. The

¹⁶⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 29.

¹⁶⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 32.

¹⁶⁷ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 32-33.

¹⁶⁸ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 33.

¹⁶⁹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 31.

faithful learn to read the true meaning of the elements within the culture of preaching the Word of God.”¹⁷⁰ Wandel goes on to add that the Word and the elements of bread and wine have an interdependent relationship: the Word articulates meaning while the elements serve as the visible means by which that meaning is conveyed to humankind.¹⁷¹

Wilberforce sees the influence of Calvin on Anglican thinkers. He says this influence is not surprising given that Calvin’s *Institutes* were widely studied for nearly a century. He also states that Calvin’s position was attractive to Anglicans because it rejected the possibility of a carnal understanding of Eucharistic presence but at the same time it did not detract from the mysterious reverence which had historically been associated with the Eucharist.¹⁷² A peculiar situation developed in the Church of England regarding the understanding of Eucharistic presence. It came to be accepted that the elements were merely pledges and not media through which God’s grace was conveyed, yet the act of consecration was nevertheless retained. Wilberforce points out that the purpose of introducing the idea of the elements as a pledge of God’s promise was to eliminate the need for a belief in the effective nature of consecration. He notes that it is inconsistent to retain consecration and at the same time to insist that the elements do not convey God’s grace.¹⁷³

Wilberforce compares the influence of Calvin as well as Zwingli in the work of two Anglican thinkers, Richard Hooker and Daniel Waterland, whose work is outlined briefly in Chapter One.¹⁷⁴ He notes that both theologians derived their opinions from the teaching of the early church and were members of a church which retained the rite of consecration. Wilberforce’s complaint is with those statements which suggest they have been influenced by

¹⁷⁰ Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation*, 157.

¹⁷¹ Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation*, 157.

¹⁷² Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 36.

¹⁷³ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 36.

¹⁷⁴ Wilberforce does not provide sources for either Hooker or Waterland. Presumably he is referring to Hooker’s *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.

continental Protestant thought. Specifically, he is critical of “such statements as that Our Lord’s Presence is to be looked for in the receiver, and not in the sacrament; and that the gift bestowed is bestowed through the ordinance, and not through the elements, are essential parts of those very theories which were invented as substitutes for the reality of consecration.”¹⁷⁵

Wilberforce notes that the two thinkers have different views on Eucharistic presence, which reflect the different eras in which they lived. During Hooker’s lifetime it was still usual to make a connection between the Eucharistic elements and the body of Christ, which Hooker does. By Waterland’s time, Wilberforce claims “belief in the efficacy of the Holy Eucharist had gone down entirely to the level of Zuinglianism [sic].”¹⁷⁶ It appears that Wilberforce is arguing for the need to make a correction to Anglican theology and practice because both had been overly influenced by the thought of continental Reformers.

Wilberforce does not explicitly make such a statement, however.

An examination of Brian Douglas’s work¹⁷⁷ reveals that Wilberforce’s claim about the diminished emphasis on sacramental efficacy during Waterland’s era is inaccurate. As we saw in Chapter One, various strands of thought concerning Eucharistic presence have co-existed within Anglicanism since the sixteenth century. As we shall see in Chapter Six, Douglas claims that those thinkers who insist on a connection between the Eucharistic elements and the presence of Christ form the majority within the Anglican tradition.

The Tractarian attitude toward the Reformers may have played a role in Wilberforce’s decision to examine the Eucharistic theology of both Calvin and Zwingli. In general, Tractarians were hostile toward the Reformation, both in England and on the continent. As an adherent of the Oxford Movement, Wilberforce may have felt compelled to continue this

¹⁷⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 37.

¹⁷⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 38.

¹⁷⁷ Brian Douglas, *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology* 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

battle against the Reformers.¹⁷⁸ Another possible reason for Wilberforce's discussion of Calvin is the apparent interest in the continental Reformer shown in the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1813, John Allen translated Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* into English.¹⁷⁹ In 1845, Henry Beveridge produced another English translation of this work.¹⁸⁰ Prior to the nineteenth century, the only English translation of the *Institutes* had been undertaken by Thomas Norton in 1561.¹⁸¹ The appearance of two English translations of Calvin's major work within a few decades after a gap of several centuries indicates a renewed public interest in this subject. In light of this development, Wilberforce may have considered it necessary to comment on Calvin. If Wilberforce was aware of these English translations of the *Institutes*, there is no indication of them in his work. He refers to the Latin version of Calvin's text but does not provide a complete bibliographic reference.¹⁸²

Wilberforce is concerned that important streams of Anglican theology have lost touch with the tradition that is present in the *Book of Common Prayer*, as represented in the rite of consecration and the words institution, and that stands in line with the broader tradition of Christianity. Although not stated overtly, Wilberforce's motives in producing his work on the sacraments are twofold: firstly, he provides a response to the Gorham case, particularly

¹⁷⁸ A prime example of Tractarian hostility toward the Reformation can be found in Hurrell Froude's *Remains*, which was published posthumously in 1838 due to the efforts of Newman and Keble. The *Remains* include Froude's expressions of disdain toward the Reformation. The public reacted negatively to Froude's comments about this major event in English history, and there was a certain backlash against the Oxford Movement. For a fuller treatment of this subject, see Michael Chandler, *An Introduction to the Oxford Movement* (New York: Church Publishing, 2003), 45-7.

¹⁷⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen (Philadelphia: P. H. Nicklin, 1816).

¹⁸⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845).

¹⁸¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Thomas Norton (London: Reinolde Wwolfe and Richarde Harissen, 1561).

¹⁸² Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 26, n.8, 9.

in his book on baptism; secondly, in concert with those involved with the Oxford Movement, he sought to help Anglicans recover the centrality of the Eucharist in their life of prayer.

His refutation appears as a rebuttal of Zwingli and Calvin, whose influence seems to have crept into the Church of England after the Elizabethan Settlement. In rejecting the positions of both Zwingli and Calvin, Wilberforce makes it clear that the benefit derived from Eucharist does not depend on the spiritual state of the recipient, as in Zwingli's thought, nor on the intention of the giver, as in Calvin's thought. That being the case, it is the gift itself that must be of the most value. Wilberforce is aware of the anti-Roman bias in the positions of Zwingli and Calvin. With irenic intent, he reaches back beyond the Scholastic controversies of the later medieval era to re-appropriate the sacramental realism of the Christian tradition as it was found in the Church fathers. This heritage is common to all Christians and is one to which the sixteenth-century Reformers laid claim.

Here we begin to see the lines of a methodology that is both historically minded and irenic. This point will be examined in more detail in Chapter Six. Although Wilberforce does not focus on an epicletic rite, as we saw earlier in this chapter his theology is one that places emphasis on the active and creative or transforming power of God's word: what God says is brought into being. God's word is effective: repeating the words of Christ from the institution narrative brings about once again what He accomplished once for all.

In the next chapter we shall look at the role of the recipient as it pertains to Eucharistic presence. It begins to emerge as an important concern. In currents of thought where Schleiermacher's influence was taking hold, the focus was almost entirely on the inner experience and disposition of the believer, with insufficient attention being paid to God's objective action through and presence in creation and created things. For this reason, Wilberforce deemed it necessary to insist upon the importance of the sacramental principle. In the next chapter will explore how Wilberforce addresses this issue. We shall see that he

seeks to balance the aspects of God's offer of grace, which is objectively present in the sacramental signs, and the free response of the believer who is properly disposed to accept it. Once again, Wilberforce turns to the origins of the Christian tradition to reinforce his argument.

Chapter Five

RECEPTIONISM AND REACTION

Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw how Wilberforce stresses the importance of consecration by pointing to evidence of it in the writings of the early Church Fathers. In an attempt to make his argument palatable to various factions within the Church of England Wilberforce is careful not to use sources later than the eighth century, when the Eucharist first became a subject of controversy. Consecration of the elements of bread and wine is not the only aspect involved in bringing about Eucharistic presence, however. A response on the part of the faithful is also necessary in order for the grace given in the sacrament to be conveyed to individual believers. Christians are expected to prepare themselves before receiving the Eucharist in order for the grace of the sacrament to be received with effect. In this chapter we shall examine the response required by the recipient as well as the views of those opposed to Wilberforce's synthesis.

The State of the Recipient

The last part of Wilberforce's synthesis, the idea that the recipient must be in a fit spiritual state in order to receive the benefit of partaking in the Eucharist, is not well documented. Referring to the Eucharist, Wilberforce states, "We are not so wholly passive in this great work, that like the material element, on which we ourselves are fed, we should be absorbed into Him without our participation. We need, if not the active virtues by which we must acquire, yet the passive virtues, by which we must accept salvation."¹ Clearly he believes that humans have some role to play in accepting God's grace. His argument also suggests that God does not impose grace upon the receiver but instead respects human freedom. It is not to be found in the Eucharistic elements alone. He adds that "... the benefit of this sacrament cannot be obtained without faith; seeing that it is only through faith that the inward part or *res sacramenti*, can be apprehended by the mind."² The same is true of our broader relationship with God:

Our union with Adam is natural, as we did not bring it about, so we cannot end it; our union with Christ is supernatural, but it is in our power to break it off by unbelief or by sin. Its maintenance depends upon those acts of Christ, whereby He joins Himself to us in Sacraments; but it also depends upon our faith and love.³

Wilberforce is adamant that the spiritual fitness of the recipient is just as important as the consecrated elements in ensuring the efficacy of the sacrament. Referring to the both the outward part (the bread and wine) and the inward part (the body and blood of Christ), Wilberforce states:

But though all who receive one receive the other, yet the benefit follows from this reception, except there be living faith in the receiver. For it is one thing to receive Christ's Body and Blood sacramentally, and another that the soul should

¹ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, "Christ the Principle of Life," in *Sermons on the Holy Communion* (London: J. and C. Mozley/J. H. Parker, 1854), 115.

² Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (London: John and Charles Mozley, 1854), 349.

³ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, "The Gospel Ministry," in *Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature* (John Murray/John and Charles Mozley, 1850), 220.

be brought into relation to Christ. The first depends upon the consecration of the elements; the second requires in addition the spiritual life of the receiver.⁴

Echoes of this notion of spiritual work required by the recipients are found in a document produced in the late twentieth century by the World Council of Churches, which states that the real presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements involves both an offer of God's grace (the gift) and the freedom of the human will to either accept or deny that gift (the response).⁵ This document is a reflection of the broad Christian tradition of sacramental theology which always holds in balance and tension the notions of the offer of God's grace in the sacramental signs and the free response of faith on the part the believer. Robert Wilberforce's theology is a reflection of the best of the sacramental tradition, which is summarised in the affirmations of the World Council of Churches' document.

Wilberforce devotes an entire sermon to the notion of religious declension based on Revelation 2:4. Preached during Lent, this sermon is intended to guard against falling away from God. "The neglect of prayer, the failure of watchfulness and self-denial" can result in the decay of the human spirit.⁶ Wilberforce lists the symptoms of decline, which include the Christian who "... comes to Church but does not inwardly apprehend Christ's presence; he comes to the altar but does not discern the Lord's Body" ⁷ Unworthy reception of the Eucharist is therefore a consequence of the lack of attention to our relationship with God. The implication is that Christians must make an effort to maintain that relationship. Such an effort will result in, among other things, the correct discernment of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. The faithful are therefore required to cooperate with God's grace in order to be able to participate fully in the Eucharist and reap the benefits of God's grace.

⁴ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 190.

⁵ See *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper no. 111* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).

⁶ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, "Religious Declension," in *Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature* (John Murray/John and Charles Mozley, 1850), 128.

⁷ Wilberforce, "Religious Declension," 128.

Although Wilberforce makes it clear that spiritual fitness is a requirement for the proper reception of the Eucharist his sources for this claim are slim. He was certainly familiar with the writings of Jeremy Taylor and he quotes him in a sermon.⁸ As we saw in Chapter One, in the eighteenth century Taylor's works found favour with John Wesley, who no doubt shared his enthusiasm for them with his fellow Evangelicals. Given that Wilberforce was raised in a strongly Evangelical household it is quite possible that he became familiar with Taylor's writings while at home. The lack of references to other sources that reinforce his belief in the need for spiritual fitness on the part of the recipient may be attributed to Wilberforce's background. The notion of Receptionism might have been deeply ingrained in the mind of this cradle Evangelical. It may not have occurred to Wilberforce to cite sources to bolster his position. Wilberforce is not a Receptionist; nonetheless, he does not fail to take seriously the freedom and the responsibility of the believer in the sacramental encounter.

Ex opere operato and Ex opere operantis

Wilberforce's efforts to find a common source for the understanding of Eucharistic presence constitute an attempt to reconcile differing positions within the Church of England and for that reason might be described as an *eirenicon*. An *eirenicon* may be defined as a proposition that attempts to harmonise conflicting viewpoints. A parallel may be drawn between Wilberforce's *eirenicon* and the Roman Catholic understanding of the efficacy of the sacraments. *Ex opere operato*⁹ refers to objective sacramental efficacy being derived from the Eucharist itself and therefore ultimately from God. *Ex opere operantis*¹⁰ refers to the

⁸ Wilberforce indicates his source as Jeremy Taylor's "Holy Living," [sic] cap. 1. s. 1. Cited in Robert Isaac Wilberforce, "Predestination," in *Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature* (John Murray/John and Charles Mozley, 1850), 310.

⁹ Latin: "from the work done."

¹⁰ Latin: "by the work of the doer."

proper dispositions of the recipient and minister in the reception and administration of a sacrament.¹¹ The validity and efficacy of the sacraments depends on the action/faith of the celebrant/recipient. Developed by Scholastic theologians in the thirteenth century, these two concepts go together: medieval thinkers employed them to describe the two aspects of divine gift and human response; the objective offer of grace in the sacramental signs, and the active response of the believing subject in the sacramental encounter.

There appear to be certain similarities between Wilberforce's understanding of Eucharistic presence and this Scholastic approach. Just as Wilberforce insists that the consecrated elements are the means by which grace is transmitted to the faithful recipient, the concept of *ex opere operato* also insists that the sacraments confer grace. Similarly, while Wilberforce asserts that the recipient of the consecrated bread and wine must be in a state of spiritual fitness in order to fully benefit from the Eucharist, *ex opere operantis* refers to the faith of the recipient. In the case of both Wilberforce's position and the Scholastic approach, the spiritual state of the recipient does not diminish the objective offer of God's grace. The recipient may not be spiritually fit, but that will not negate the grace offered through the sacrament.

Wilberforce may not have intended that his understanding of Eucharistic presence mirror the Scholastic doctrine. Nevertheless, the two approaches share much in common. It would be reasonable to state that Wilberforce's views on Eucharistic presence are fully consistent with Roman Catholic teaching on this subject.¹² Despite the absence of any

¹¹ See Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig, eds., *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, revised and expanded edition (Collegeville MN : Liturgical Press, 2004).

¹² Thomas Aquinas presents the Scholastic understanding of Eucharistic presence in Chapter 76 of the *Summa Theologica*: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.TP_Q76.html III, q.76, a. 1-7. Accessed 31 March 2013. The Church of Rome reiterated this position on the Eucharist in the canons of the Council of Trent of September 1551: <http://www.catholicliturgy.com/index.cfm/FuseAction/DocumentContents/Index/2/SubIndex/37/DocumentIndex/502> Accessed 31 March 2013.

ecumenical intent, Wilberforce's work can be described as a precursor to the approach taken by twentieth-century ecumenists who turned their attention to a common understanding of the Eucharist. Wilberforce's methodology is both historically-minded and eirenic. He sought to reach back beyond the Scholastic controversies of the late medieval era to reclaim the sacramental realism of the Christian tradition as it was expressed by the Church fathers. This heritage is common to most Christians and is one to which the sixteenth-century Reformers laid claim. His approach is irenic in that it gives equal weight to both the real presence associated with the Eucharistic elements and the importance of the spiritual fitness of the recipient. In doing so, he avoids the language of the Scholastic and later Reformation controversies relating to the doctrine of the Eucharist. In terms of understanding Eucharistic presence, Wilberforce would have been equally at home in the Roman Catholic Church as in the Church of England.

Consequences

For Wilberforce, the frequent reception of the Eucharist is the logical outcome of belief in the real presence of Christ. Once again drawing on evidence from the first centuries of Christianity to bolster his argument, Wilberforce points out that frequent communion was the norm during the early Christian era. Daily reception of the Eucharist was the ideal although at times it was received only on Sundays. He finds support for his position in the writings of both Augustine and Jerome.¹³ Wilberforce provides a summary of the practice of receiving the Eucharist during the first four centuries of the Christian era and concludes that a daily Eucharist was considered the ideal even though that was not always possible for a

¹³ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (London: John and Charles Mozley, 1854), 369. Wilberforce quotes the following sentence: "Ex auctoritate divinarum Scripturarum et universe Ecclesiae, quae toto orbe diffunditur, consensione." He attributes it both to the letters of Saint Augustine (IV:27; section 35, book I) and Saint Jerome (III, vol. iv, part 2, p. 579).

variety of reasons.¹⁴ Turning to Scripture, he notes that Acts 2:46 indicates that daily reception of the Eucharist was expected during the time of the Apostles. He includes this reference as a response to those who are disinclined to pay heed to the witness of the early Church, noting that there are no exceptions to daily communion in Scripture.¹⁵

Wilberforce asks why, given the evidence of Scripture and the example of the early Church, the practice of infrequent reception of the Eucharist prevailed in the Church of England during his time. He views this lack of attention to the Eucharist as surprising because the first prayer book of King Edward VI, published in 1549, provided for daily communion in Cathedral churches and gave directions for times when the Eucharist was to be celebrated on a work day or in private houses. Even parish churches were instructed to offer communion every Sunday.¹⁶

Wilberforce answers his own question by pointing to the introduction of Edward's second prayer book in 1552. Taking a clear swipe at Edward's role as Supreme Head of the Church of England,¹⁷ Wilberforce states:

By virtue of the more than Papal power which he assumed, Edward soon superseded the Book which he had formerly sanctioned, and imposed his Second Book of 1552 upon the nation. By this means, as well as by the forty-two Articles which were published the same year, and in like manner without any spiritual sanction, the Zuinglo-Calvinistic system took possession of our Churches.¹⁸

Wilberforce therefore sees the influence of the thought of both Zwingli and Calvin as the reason for the decision to reduce the frequency of communion. The Swiss Reformers promoted the idea of Eucharist celebrated only four times per year, on major feasts. Zwingli

¹⁴ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 370-376.

¹⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 370.

¹⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 377.

¹⁷ The title Supreme Head was rescinded during the reign of Mary I (1553-1558). It was changed to Supreme Governor following the accession of Elizabeth I in 1558.

¹⁸ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 378.

especially favoured this policy. Calvin promoted more frequent reception but was voted down by the Consistory of Geneva, which had become a theocratic state.

Reference to a daily communion was absent from the second prayer book and instead it was ordered that the Eucharist not be celebrated unless the number of attendees communicating was considered to be sufficient. The decision to celebrate or not was left to the discretion of the priest. This order can be considered an expansion upon that found in the 1549 prayer book, which indicated that the Holy Eucharist was not to be celebrated unless there was at least one person present to respond to the priest.¹⁹ Presumably this instruction was given as a reaction against the late-medieval practice of the priest celebrating mass in the absence of any communicants.

In addition to this constraint was the order that all persons who were not prepared to receive the sacrament were to leave immediately. While Edward VI's first prayer book had permitted non-communicants to remain in the church during the administration of the sacrament the second book made it clear that they were not welcome.²⁰ The consequence of this order was a small attendance at Holy Communion and a less frequent celebration of the rite. Turning again to the history of the early church, Wilberforce goes to some length to outline the practice of allowing the non-communicating faithful to be present during the administration of the Eucharist.²¹ He notes that while those who were not in communion with the Church, including catechumens, were told to leave before the celebration of the Eucharist it was not considered essential for those who remained to receive the sacrament every day of the week.

In Wilberforce's view, the reduction in the frequency of Holy Communion was hardly surprising given that Edward and his advisors had adopted the Zwinglian understanding of

¹⁹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 378.

²⁰ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 379.

²¹ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 391-411.

the Eucharist as merely a commemorative feast and not participation in a past event that was being recreated in the present. The practices of the Church were therefore altered to fit its new doctrine: since the real presence of Christ was denied, it followed that the doctrine of Eucharistic sacrifice must also be abandoned because there was no longer a need for a spiritual participation in the offering.²² For Wilberforce, a connection exists between the exclusion of non-communicating attendees and the diminution of the importance of the Eucharist:

It was the exclusion of the mass of men from the Christian sacrifice, which made it necessary to substitute other offices, by which the daily Eucharist has been practically superseded. Now no circumstance has had more influence than this upon the belief of the people. We may trace to it the popular conviction, which no argument can efface, that congregations meet together merely for the quickening of their feelings, or for the imparting of instruction, and not that they may obtain their petitions. And thus the notion of the Church's *work*, as an actual operative transaction, is well-nigh lost.²³

Wilberforce goes on to describe that work: “The *Mediation* of Christ means that work which He effects through His Human nature, because it is not the interference of any casual intercessor, but results from that position which He has vouchsafed to take between God and mankind.”²⁴ The exclusion of those who, for whatever reason, are not willing or able to receive the sacrament therefore led to a change in worship. The celebration of the Eucharist came to be replaced by other forms of private worship, e.g. individual prayer, and the centrality of the one repeatable sacrament in the life of the Church of England became lost.

For Wilberforce, this loss of emphasis on the Eucharist is inevitably tied to the degradation of Christ's role as mediator. As indicated earlier in this thesis, Wilberforce places great emphasis on Christ's mediation between God and humans. The efficacy of this mediation is displayed in the Eucharist.²⁵ Wilberforce states:

²² Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 379.

²³ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 414. The italics are Wilberforce's.

²⁴ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 414.

²⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 414.

... when the Holy Eucharist ceases to be regarded as a real action, wherein Christ's very Presence is exhibited on earth, and whereby prayer is truly rendered available, men fall back upon some other system of approaching to God, and with a change in belief comes a change in the principle of worship. Thus do individual prayer, and private faith, and single piety, take the place of that collective action, whereby the whole Church was supposed to ancient days to offer itself to God; and are supposed not only to be necessary, which they are, to the Christian life, but to have right in themselves to acceptance.²⁶

The idea of corporate prayer and worship is therefore lost when the focus on the Eucharist is removed. For Wilberforce, when the community fails to gather for the Eucharist it denies itself the opportunity to receive the benefit of Christ's mediation. Humans therefore do not receive the grace that would otherwise be bestowed upon them in the Eucharist. In Wilberforce's view, individual prayer and private faith are commendable but they do not convey God's grace in the same way as the sacraments do. Given that the Eucharist is the only repeatable sacrament, it would seem foolish for the faithful to deprive themselves of the opportunity to receive this gift of grace and the benefits associated with it.

In his criticism of the practice of infrequent communion, Wilberforce neglects to examine the reasons behind it. Although he notes that frequent communion was the norm during the early Christian era and that, for various reasons, not all who attended were expected to receive the sacrament, Wilberforce does not address the reasons why communication by the faithful became less frequent over the centuries. As we saw in Chapter One, in the early medieval era the Eucharist ceased to be a community celebration and instead became a ritual drama performed by the priest. The focus became the production of the real presence of Christ in the elements, while the faithful became passive spectators to this drama. As stated earlier in this chapter, the sixteenth-century Reformers, especially Zwingli, responded to this situation by promoting the celebration of the Eucharist only four times a year. The Reformers' goal in imposing this limitation was to avoid any celebration

²⁶ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 414-415.

where the laity were mere spectators: if there was to be no communion of the faithful, there would be no celebration of the Eucharist. They were simply reacting to a situation they considered unacceptable. Wilberforce's omission of this point may have been due to his focus on the early church. As we have seen, Wilberforce was keen to bypass the Eucharistic controversies of the medieval era by appealing to sources drawn from the first eight centuries of the Christian era. In his eagerness to avoid these medieval controversies, Wilberforce overlooked the reasons why the Reformers implemented a policy of infrequent communion in the first place.

Reception of Wilberforce's Theology in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

*Turbulent Priests*²⁷

In Chapter One reference was made to the difference of opinion over the sacraments in the two main factions within the Church of England, the High Church party and the Low Church Party, during the middle of the nineteenth century. The incident cited was the 1850 judgement rendered in the Gorham case, which involved baptismal regeneration. While the Gorham judgement highlighted concerns about both the Church's position on baptism and the role of the state in church matters, a series of controversies about the Eucharist further exposed factional divisions. The very fact that the Eucharist was a point of contention demonstrates the level of importance attached to it during this era.

During the height of the Oxford Movement, Edward Pusey found himself in trouble because of his views on the Eucharist. In 1843, he delivered a sermon at Oxford entitled *The*

²⁷ The section heading is an allusion to a statement reportedly uttered by King Henry II of England (reigned 1154-1189) in the context of his ongoing conflict with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket, over church jurisdiction in England. Henry is supposed to have asked the presumably rhetorical question "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?" The exact wording of the statement remains a disputed point, however. Four knights who heard this question interpreted it as a royal command and rode to Canterbury where, on 29 December 1170, they murdered Becket in the cathedral. Fortunately, neither Pusey nor Denison nor Wilberforce suffered physical violence as a result of their conflict with church authorities.

Holy Eucharist a Comfort to the Penitent.²⁸ Although it was not a precise doctrinal statement, university authorities were upset by its close association of the elements of bread and wine with the body and blood of Christ and Pusey was suspended from teaching for two years. The following is an example of the type of statement the authorities may have found offensive:

Our Blessed Lord, while chiefly speaking of Himself, as the Bread of life, the true meat, the true drink, His Indwelling, Resurrection from the dead, and Life everlasting, still says also, "the Bread that I will give is My Flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." As amid the apparent identity of this teaching, each separate oracle enounces some fresh portion of the whole truth, so also does this; that His Flesh and Blood in the Sacrament shall give life, not only because they are the Flesh and Blood of the Incarnate Word, Who is Life, but also because they are the very Flesh and Blood which were given and shed for the life of the world, and are given *to* those, *for* whom, they had been given.²⁹

Ten years later he preached a more carefully crafted sermon on the same subject entitled *The Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist*.³⁰ Although the content of this later sermon was essentially the same as that of the 1843 sermon, it differed considerably in its style. In his preface to the sermon Pusey acknowledges that this earlier sermon was misunderstood by some and declares in this new sermon, "I have stated grounds why I believe, with the Church of England, that this real and objective Presence does not involve any physical change in the natural elements, which are the veils and channels of our Lord's Unseen Presence."³¹

Pusey's biographer noted, "The doctrine enunciated was the same in both sermons; but the first was the language of unguarded fervour, the second that of precise definition on this side

²⁸ Edward Bouverie Pusey, "The Holy Eucharist a Comfort to the Penitent," in *Nine Sermons, Preached Before the University of Oxford, and Printed Chiefly between A.D. 1843-1855, Now Collected into One Volume* (London: W. Smith, 1885).

²⁹ Pusey, "The Holy Eucharist a Comfort to the Penitent," 55. The italics are Pusey's.

³⁰ Edward Bouverie Pusey, "The Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, in *Nine Sermons, Preached Before the University of Oxford, and Printed Chiefly between A.D. 1843-1855, Now Collected into One Volume* (London: W. Smith, 1885).

³¹ Pusey, "The Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist," vii.

and that.”³² As we shall see later in this chapter, Pusey’s position on Eucharistic presence vacillated over the years.

Pusey may have delivered this sermon as a gesture of support for Robert Wilberforce, whose book *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* caused a considerable stir when it was published in 1853. As outlined in Chapter Three, Wilberforce made a close connection between the Eucharistic elements and the body and blood of Christ. His immediate superior, the Archbishop of York, Thomas Musgrave, took exception to Wilberforce’s statements about Eucharistic presence and preparations were made to try him in an ecclesiastical court. This conflict is an example of how debate concerning the Eucharist divided the various factions within the Church of England. Thomas Musgrave was an Evangelical while Wilberforce was by this time very much a Tractarian. Wilberforce resigned his position before the trial could take place, however. While his resignation eliminated the possibility of judicial action, it also denied Wilberforce the opportunity to further explain his position on Eucharistic presence. He was therefore deprived of a forum in which he might have demonstrated how his understanding of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist fit into the broader Anglican tradition.

A similar controversy was found in the case of George Anthony Denison (1805-1896), the Archdeacon of Taunton.³³ In the same year that Wilberforce’s book on the Eucharist was published, Denison preached a sermon at Wells in which he, like Wilberforce, promoted the idea of a close association between the elements of bread and wine and the

³² Henry Parry Liddon, *Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, vol. 3 (London: Longmans Green, 1894-1898), 425.

³³ George Anthony Denison, *The Real Presence, A Sermon Preached in the Cathedral Church of S. Andrew, Wells, on Sunday August 7, 1853, with a Preface Explaining the Circumstances under which the Sermon has been Preached and Published and Appendix* (London: Masters, 1853), 11-48. Denison defended his views in an exchange of correspondence with Philip Freeman, Archdeacon of Exeter, in March 1866. See *Correspondence between the Archdeacon of Taunton and the Archdeacon of Exeter with Prefatory Note and Appendix* (London, Oxford and Cambridge: Rivingtons: 1866).

body and blood of Christ. Denison pushed the teaching of a real objective presence of Christ in the elements to what he considered to be its logical conclusion: the worthiness of the individual recipient was irrelevant given that the efficacy of the sacrament did not depend on it. He argued that if the Tractarians could accept the notion of objective sacramental efficacy in the case of baptism, it followed that the same must be true in the case of the Eucharist.³⁴ In 1856, Denison was tried and convicted in the court of the Archbishop of Canterbury and was stripped of his position. The conviction was subsequently overturned on appeal. This incident, too, revealed a factional split within the Church: the Archbishop of Canterbury at the time was John Bird Sumner (1780-1862), an Evangelical who happened to be a distant relative of Robert Wilberforce. Denison could best be described as a High Church cleric of the older party rather than a Tractarian, although he may have agreed with some of the teachings of the Oxford Movement. The Tractarians must have held him in some esteem because he received support from both Pusey and Keble.³⁵

The dispute over Eucharistic presence had made its way into academic circles a decade earlier. In 1844, R. D. Hampden, the Regius Professor of Divinity at the University of Oxford, gave a failing mark to one of the exercises for the Bachelor of Divinity degree submitted by R. G. Macmullen of Corpus Christi College. Macmullen, a Tractarian, rejected the view espoused by Richard Hooker that Christ is present in the elements only to worthy recipients. He saw the “very order and rite of consecration itself in our Book of Common Prayer” as “a presumption in favour of the view that the Church of England does teach that the sacramental elements are themselves changed into the body and blood of Christ.”³⁶ Macmullen’s insistence that a change takes place during the consecration of the bread and wine was based on his wish to safeguard belief in the real presence in the elements. The fact

³⁴ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 242.

³⁵ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 242.

³⁶ Quoted in Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 242.

that Christ is present under the forms of bread and wine indicates that consecration effects a change.³⁷

All these incidents indicate that disputes concerning Eucharistic presence were taken very seriously during the mid-nineteenth century. It was because of such disputes that Robert Wilberforce felt obliged to produce his trilogy on the sacraments as well as his collections of sermons on both the Incarnation and Holy Communion. In writing these works, Wilberforce was addressing the issues that were of concern during his time. He did not lead the vanguard of the Oxford Movement but instead presented a systematic expression of Tractarian theology after the heyday of the movement had passed. His works were intended to be a response to those who took issue with the positions of the Tractarians.

Wilberforce was not the first Tractarian to write about Eucharistic presence. As we saw earlier in this chapter, Pusey preached two sermons at Oxford in which he made a close association between the body and blood of Christ and the elements of bread and wine. His first reference to the subject came in a lecture of 1836, in which he states that the Eucharist is “the Body and Blood of Christ, imparted by God by the means of the Bread and Wine.”³⁸ Regarding the Church Fathers, he notes “how deeply impressed they were with the union of the body and blood of Christ with the symbols of through which they were conveyed.”³⁹ Pusey wrote about Eucharistic presence on several occasions, including in an 1839 letter to the Bishop of Oxford in which he expresses his conviction that the Thirty-Nine Articles teach a real presence “conveyed by means of the elements”⁴⁰ and imparted through them. In Tract

³⁷ Alf Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1965), 180.

³⁸ Edward Bouverie Pusey, *Daniel the Prophet: Nine Lectures Delivered in the Divinity School of the University of Oxford* (Oxford: J. Parker, 1869), 70.

³⁹ Pusey, *Daniel the Prophet*, 70.

⁴⁰ Edward Bouverie Pusey, *A Letter to the Right Rev. Father in God, Richard Lord Bishop of Oxford, on the Tendency to Romanism imputed to Doctrines held of old, as now, in the English Church* (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1839), 130.

81 he expresses dissatisfaction with the 1552 and subsequent Prayer Books for not indicating a clear connection between the gift conveyed in the Eucharist and the actual reception of the elements.⁴¹

Newman also made his views on Eucharistic presence known. In an 1838 letter to Dr. Godfrey Faussett, the Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford, concerning the Eucharist he observes:

A thing may be said to be present to us, which is so circumstanced as immediately to act upon us and to influence us, whether we are sensible of it or no. Perhaps then our Lord is present to us in the Sacrament in this sense, that, far as He is off us, He in it acts personally, bodily, and directly upon us.⁴²

This statement seems a somewhat tentative assertion of the real presence, but elsewhere he is more certain: “When we touch the one [the outward signs of bread and wine], we touch the Other, when we eat the one, we eat the Other, when we drink the one, we drink the Other.”⁴³

Newman makes no attempt to define the nature of that presence, however. Both Newman and Pusey share a common misunderstanding of transubstantiation in that they believe it implies the physical presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine.

Opposing Voices

In the context of the nineteenth century, Wilberforce’s work was not well received. It was no doubt discredited by his decision to become a Roman Catholic. Whatever the reasons, Wilberforce’s work fell into neglect. David Newsome has offered two possible explanations for this lack of recognition. Firstly, explorations of Tractarian theology have generally tended to focus on the work of the four leading figures of the Oxford Movement, namely Newman, Pusey, Keble and Froude. Insufficient attention has been paid to the period

⁴¹ Edward Bouverie Pusey, “Testimony of Writers of the Later English Church to the Doctrine of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, with an Historical Account of the Changes made in the Liturgy as to the Expression of that Doctrine,” in John Henry Newman *et al.* *Tracts for the Times*. (London: Printed for J. G. & Rivington, 1839-41), 13.

⁴² <http://www.newmanreader.org/words/viamedia/volume2/eucharist2.html> Accessed 29 May 2006.

⁴³ <http://www.newmanreader.org/words/viamedia/volume2/eucharist2.html> Accessed 29 May 2006.

between Newman's secession to Rome in 1845 and the aftermath of the Gorham case, which echoed through the first part of the 1850s. As we have seen, it was during this period of time that Wilberforce produced his works on baptism, the Incarnation and the Eucharist.

Secondly, Newsome notes that mid-Victorian Anglican theology has often been studied through the work of Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-1872), a priest who became involved with the Christian Socialist Movement. Later generations have perceived Maurice's work as forward-looking and therefore well suited to address the theological issues of their day. In contrast, Wilberforce can be described as a conservative theologian in that he looked to the past, specifically the work of the early Church Fathers, to find answers to the questions of his time.⁴⁴

Turmoil occurred in 1860 following the publication of *Essays and Reviews*,⁴⁵ a volume of seven short works on Christianity. The topics covered in this volume include biblical research conducted by German scholars, the evidence for Christianity, religious thought in England and the cosmology of the Book of Genesis. *Essays and Reviews* challenged the conventional wisdom of the day and sparked a polarised debate about its contents. One of those who expressed opposition to this work was Samuel Wilberforce, who was Bishop of Oxford at the time. The authors of *Essays and Reviews* were vilified by church authorities and were labelled "seven against Christ."⁴⁶

The lack of attention paid to Robert Wilberforce's works may also stem from the nature of the works themselves. Subjects such as the ongoing effects of the Incarnation, sacramental efficacy, etc., can be rather difficult for the general reader to grasp. They are arcane topics which require a good deal of background knowledge and are usually best

⁴⁴ See Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 372-373.

⁴⁵ *Essays and Reviews*, John W. Parker, ed. (London: John W. Parker, 1860).

⁴⁶ For a fuller treatment of this subject see Ieuan Ellis, *Seven Against Christ: A Study of "Essays and Reviews"* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980).

addressed by theologians who specialise in them. Wilberforce did not write his works with non-specialist readers in mind. Although Wilberforce did mention both Eucharistic presence and the Incarnation in some of his sermons, he delves into these matters in much greater detail in his books on baptism, the Incarnation and the Eucharist. He was therefore targeting an audience of specialists rather than general readers. Despite objections by Church of England authorities to *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* and the threat to try Wilberforce in an ecclesiastical court, the general public does not appear to have shown much interest in this controversy. The fuss seems to have been confined to the ranks of church officials. The absence of public furor over the controversy may explain in part the later inattention to Wilberforce's works. Controversy often ensures an historical legacy: Charles Darwin is well remembered by theologians; sadly, Robert Isaac Wilberforce is not.

Lux Mundi

It is difficult to demonstrate Wilberforce's direct influence on others because so few writers have made studies of his work, particularly his Eucharistic theology. Alf Härdelin,⁴⁷ Eugene Fairweather⁴⁸ and Brian Douglas⁴⁹ are the most notable authors who have brought Robert Wilberforce's name to the attention of their readers. Douglas's work is particularly noteworthy because of his inclusion of Wilberforce among the mainstream of Anglican thinkers in terms of his views on Eucharistic presence. Härdelin provides far more depth than Fairweather. Härdelin does an extensive analysis of the Eucharistic thought of Wilberforce as well as other Tractarians, while Fairweather merely includes excerpts from Wilberforce's works and offers little comment on them. William R. Crockett acknowledges Wilberforce's

⁴⁷ Alf Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells), 1965.

⁴⁸ Eugene Fairweather, *The Oxford Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

⁴⁹ Brian Douglas, *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology* (Leiden/Boston: Brill Publishing, 2012).

work on the Eucharist, specifically his understanding of consecration.⁵⁰ Teresa Berger also discusses Wilberforce but does not add anything to Härdelin's earlier analysis.⁵¹ Other authors have mentioned Wilberforce in passing but have not explored his work in any depth.

Although Wilberforce's work was neither well known nor well received in his own day, his incarnational approach, marked by a return to the writings of the early Church Fathers and a study of the early liturgical texts, prefigures the approach that would inform much of the twentieth-century renewal in sacramental and liturgical theology. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Incarnation would form the central theme of a collection of twelve essays entitled *Lux Mundi*.⁵² Edited by Charles Gore (1853-1932), who served as Bishop of Oxford from 1911 to 1919, the essays were written by a group of eleven Oxford theologians in the late 1880s. Common to all the essays is the notion that the Incarnation is the central tenet of Christianity. For the authors of *Lux Mundi*, the Incarnation shapes and permeates all aspects of Christian thought. In addition to their emphasis on the importance of the Incarnation, the essays were also an attempt to engage with contemporary thought. Christian faith was presented as being consistent with developments in both science and politics. Because of their willingness to accept modern notions such as evolutionary theory and interpretation of the biblical text, the *Lux Mundi* group met with disapproval from the older generation of Anglo-Catholic thinkers.

In his essay on the sacraments, Francis Paget employs language of which Wilberforce would no doubt have approved. He states, "By the sacramental system, then, is meant the

⁵⁰ See William R. Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1989), 216-217; also William R. Crockett, "Holy Communion," in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty and Jonathan Knight (London/Minneapolis: SPCK/Fortress Press, 1988), 315.

⁵¹ Teresa Berger, *Spiegel der Kirche: Eine systematische-theologische Analyse des liturgischen Gedankenguts im Traktarianismus*. Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie, Band 52. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986).

⁵² *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies on the Religion of the Incarnation*, ed. Charles Gore (London: John Murray, 1895).

regular use of sensible objects, agents, and acts as being the means or instruments of Divine energies, ‘the vehicles of and sanctifying power.’”⁵³ Paget highlights three important points concerning the sacraments. Firstly, God works through the material and the visible: “The consecration of material elements to be the vehicles of Divine grace keeps up on earth that vindication and defence of the material against the insults of sham spiritualism which was achieved for ever [sic] by the Incarnation and Ascension of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁴ Secondly, Christianity places importance on the physicality of human bodies. Paget states, “Sacraments are a constant witness against our readiness to forget, to ignore, or to explain away the claim of Christianity to penetrate the bodily life, and, to affect the body itself, replenishing it here with powers which are strange to it,”⁵⁵ He goes on to state:

There is in the very nature of a Sacrament the forecast of some such hope as this: -- that He who said of the material bread “This is My Body,” may, in His own time, through changes which we cannot imagine, take to Himself and life into the transfiguring realm of spirit our material bodies as well as our souls; seizing, disclosing, perfecting capacities which under their present conditions we hardly suspect in them.⁵⁶

Sacraments therefore effect both physical and spiritual changes on those who receive them. Thirdly, sacraments offer a foretaste of the transformation that is to come: “... the ministry of Sacraments is a perpetual prophecy of the glory that shall be revealed in us; the glory that shall pervade and transfigure our whole being.”⁵⁷ They provide a glimpse of the afterlife that awaits.

Two years after the initial publication of *Lux Mundi*, Gore once again addressed the subject of the Incarnation in the Bampton Lectures, founded in 1780 at the University of Oxford. Gore’s essay in *Lux Mundi*, “The Holy Spirit and Inspiration,” had been criticised as

⁵³ Francis Paget, “Sacraments,” in *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies on the Religion of the Incarnation*, Charles Gore ed. (London: John Murray, 1895), 297.

⁵⁴ Paget, “Sacraments,” in *Lux Mundi*, 309.

⁵⁵ Paget, “Sacraments,” in *Lux Mundi*, 312.

⁵⁶ Paget, “Sacraments,” in *Lux Mundi*, 313-314.

⁵⁷ Paget, “Sacraments,” in *Lux Mundi*, 314.

unorthodox and the Bampton Lectures provided Gore with a forum to clarify his views. These lectures were compiled and entitled *The Incarnation of the Son of God*.⁵⁸ In this work Gore stresses his belief in the importance of sacraments as a means by which God's grace is conveyed: "Through the sacraments God bestows the gifts: through them is secured our spiritual contact with Christ."⁵⁹

The Old High Church Party

Opposition to Wilberforce's views on Eucharistic presence and to the Oxford Movement as a whole came from two distinct camps, the old High Church party on the one hand and the Evangelicals on the other. Both factions had been wary of the Oxford Movement from its inception and grew increasingly hostile to it over time, although each group had different reasons for its opposition.

As we saw earlier in this thesis, in the centuries since the Reformation the term "High Church" has been applied to a loose group of clergy who held similar views on apostolic succession, ecclesiology and the sacraments. This group has been known by various names, including "Zs," "Orthodox" and "high and dry." They approved of weekly communion and the emphasis on the centrality of the Eucharist in Anglican worship. There were, however, certain points on which the old High Church party differed from the Tractarians. Eucharistic presence was one of these points.

Virtualism and receptionism were the High Church party's two main interpretations of Eucharistic doctrine.⁶⁰ Virtualists held that as a result of consecration the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ in virtue, power and effect but not physically. They maintained that through the work of the Holy Spirit believers were able to receive the

⁵⁸ Charles Gore, *The Incarnation of the Son of God: Being the Bampton Lectures for the Year 1891* (London: John Murray, 1891).

⁵⁹ Gore, *The Incarnation of the Son of God*, 228.

⁶⁰ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 236.

spiritual body and blood of Christ while at the same time consuming consecrated bread and wine. John Johnson (1662-1725) was the originator of this interpretation. Robert D. Cornwall sees this apparent contradiction as a convoluted attempt by the Virtualists to maintain a tension between their own understanding of Eucharistic presence and their incorrect understanding of the doctrine of transubstantiation as implying a physical presence of Christ in the bread and wine.⁶¹

Following Richard Hooker's teaching, Receptionists maintained that the real presence is found only in the hearts of worthy recipients of the Eucharist. Although not espoused by the High Church party, Memorialism was a view found among some elements of the Broad Church party. It was promoted by Bishop Benjamin Hoadly and was similar to Zwinglianism. The Eucharist was seen as a memorial of Christ's death and passion. In the context of biblical literature, the word "memorial" has been interpreted in different ways. The Broad Church party interpreted it to mean a recollection of a past event, in this case the Last Supper. The bread and the wine were reminders of Christ's death and passion and were intended to point Christians toward good thoughts and practices. Christ was thought to be present in a general way in the worship and the fellowship. There was no association of Christ with the elements of bread and wine.⁶² "Memory" was understood in a figurative sense: it points only to the historical past and not to a lived, present reality. The biblical meaning of "memory" as *anamnesis* was therefore lost.

The old High Church party's understanding of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist was outlined by John Henry Hopkins (1792-1868), Bishop of Vermont. In an episcopal

⁶¹ Robert D. Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic: The Constitution of the Church in High Church Anglican and Non-Juror Thought* (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, 1993), 122.

⁶² Peter Toon, *Evangelical Theology 1833-1856: A Response to Tractarianism* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 196.

charge and in a series of open letters, Hopkins responded to the *Tracts for the Times*⁶³ and other writings of the Oxford Movement. In one of these letters, he addressed the idea of the objective real presence:

The elements of bread and wine, by virtue of the act of consecration, become the Holy Symbols of the Body and Blood of our crucified Lord. Thus far we hold the same view as the Zwinglians. But in the more important question of the inward and spiritual graces received in the Sacrament, we go incomparably further, believing that by the due reception of the representative Body and Blood, the faithful communicant is made, by the Holy Spirit, a partaker, verily and indeed, of the Body and Blood of Christ, after a heavenly and spiritual manner, so as to become mystically one with his divine Lord, and to strengthen the bonds of that glorious incorporation more and more with each repetition of the Holy Communion; provided he approach it with genuine repentance, lively faith, and fervent charity.⁶⁴

This position is moving toward a symbolic realism, although it avoids consideration of a metaphysical presence. Affirming the Receptionist position, Hopkins states “The Church [of England] confines the idea of the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ to the faithful receiver of the sacrament, while our Tractarian brethren place the Real Presence in the Sacrament itself, that is, in the consecrated elements on the Communion Table or Altar.”⁶⁵

Hopkins also took issue with the Tractarian assertion that their doctrine of the real objective presence was not the same as the Church of Rome’s doctrine of transubstantiation. He predicted several consequences of the Tractarian teaching, including genuflection, reverence for the altar and the communion vessels and Corpus Christi processions. It appears that Hopkins understood that the Tractarians’ understanding of a real objective presence was in fact identical to the original definition of this concept as presented at the Fourth Lateran

⁶³ John Henry Newman *et al.*, *Tracts for the Times* (London: printed for J. G. & Rivington, 1839-41).

⁶⁴ Quoted in Reginald H. Fuller, “The Classical High Church Reaction to the Tractarians,” in *Tradition Renewed: The Oxford Movement Conference Papers*, ed. Geoffrey Rowell (Allison Park, Penn.: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 58.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Reginald H. Fuller, “The Classical High Church Reaction to the Tractarians,” 60.

Council in 1215⁶⁶ and developed later in the thirteenth century by Thomas Aquinas.⁶⁷

Hopkins was not alone in his criticism of the Tractarian teaching on the Eucharist. The old High Church party considered Wilberforce's views on the Eucharist, as well as those of Keble and Pusey in the 1850s, to be incompatible with the church's formularies.⁶⁸ It has also been argued that Wilberforce's position was not consistent with that of either the Laudians or the Nonjurors.⁶⁹

Evangelicals

The initial suspicion with which the Evangelicals greeted the Oxford Movement turned to overt opposition over time. There was no shortage of writings critical of various aspects of the Movement. This opposition was not centrally organised and was expressed in different publications by both academic and parochial clergy as well as informed laity, and it varied in both content and quality.⁷⁰

The Evangelical response to the Tractarian understanding of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist has been summarised as a rejection of the claim that the doctrine is rooted in the teachings of the early Church Fathers and the Anglican tradition. Peter Toon, a twentieth-century Evangelical writer, has stated that the Tractarian teaching has its foundations in the Church of Rome's concept of transubstantiation and the Lutheran doctrine of

⁶⁶ <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct13.html> Accessed on 15 July 2013. The text of the relevant chapter on the Eucharist states, "... the Holy Synod teaches, and openly and simply professes, that, in the august sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, after the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and Man, is truly, really, and substantially contained under the presence of those sensible things."

⁶⁷ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.pdf> See III, q. 76, a 1-7. Accessed on 15 July 2013.

⁶⁸ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 244.

⁶⁹ William Herbert Mackean, *The Eucharistic Doctrine of the Oxford Movement: A Critical Survey* (London: Putnam, 1933), 156-7. William Laud is discussed in Chapter One. The Nonjurors were those clergy who refused to recognise William of Orange and his wife Mary as sovereigns following the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The group's numbers declined over the decades and it eventually died out in the mid-eighteenth century.

⁷⁰ Toon, *Evangelical Theology 1833-1856*, 5-6.

consubstantiation and is therefore an innovation in Church of England doctrine.⁷¹

Unfortunately, this accusation of innovation contains the implicit assumption that the Church of Rome understands a physical presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements. It also contains an implicit rejection of an attempted rapprochement between the Anglican position and the Roman Catholic one, even though the latter is not correctly understood.

Of all the Evangelical writers who voiced their opposition to Tractarianism, the most notable is William Goode the younger (1801-1868). This graduate of the University of Cambridge was the son of a well-known Evangelical priest whose contemporaries included the slave master-turned-abolitionist, John Newton. In a series of publications between 1838 and 1856, Goode addressed most of the major aspects of Tractarian teaching. He has been described as the most learned Evangelical for his understanding of historical theology, ecclesiastical history and law.⁷²

Goode maintains that the Tractarians misunderstood two distinct concepts. He accuses them of equating the doctrine of the real presence with their own doctrine of the real presence in the consecrated elements and of claiming that it was necessary to believe in the latter in order to believe in the former. He also accuses them of making a blunder by including a statement found in the first *Book of Homilies* (1547) concerning the Eucharistic elements which was not included in the first book. This advertisement contained the phrase “due receiving of His Blessed Body and Blood, under the form of bread and wine,” which appeared to agree with the teachings of Wilberforce, Pusey and Denison. Goode is critical of the fact that the Tractarians ignored a homily against transubstantiation published in the second *Book of Homilies*.⁷³

⁷¹ Toon, *Evangelical Theology 1833-1856*, 202.

⁷² Toon, *Evangelical Theology 1833-1856*, 6.

⁷³ Toon, *Evangelical Theology 1833-1856*, 199.

Goode states that earlier generations of Anglican thinkers interpreted the words “This is my body,” in a figurative sense. In an attempt to demonstrate how the teaching of the Church of England differs from Zwinglianism, he says:

Our Church does not hold that the consecrated elements are inoperative signs, to the reception of which by the faithful no particular blessing is, by promise, attached; but, that they are effective instruments, in the case of all faithful recipients, for bringing the communicant into a state of spiritual union and communion with Christ, and causing him to enjoy the blessings which such an union brings with it.⁷⁴

He does not acknowledge, however, that Wilberforce’s understanding of the real presence also incorporates this notion.

Goode also takes issue with the assertion that the early Church Fathers made a connection between the presence of Christ and the elements of bread and wine. Toon claims that Goode overstates this argument in that he neglects to mention that while the early Church Fathers did not write about a change in the Eucharistic elements the Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries did.⁷⁵ He is also critical of both Wilberforce and Pusey for not taking into account the tendency of the early writers to use imprecise language as well as their habit of mystifying the doctrines of their faith, which can be explained by their education in pagan philosophy.

John Charles Ryle (1816-1900), the first Anglican bishop of Liverpool, was another opponent of Tractarianism, and of Ritualism in particular. Ryle did not share the Tractarian enthusiasm for the early Church Fathers, stating that “the Fathers appear to me greatly overrated as commentators and expositors”⁷⁶ on the biblical text. Regarding Eucharistic presence, Ryle denies any physical presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine and states, “This is a point which is particularly painful to discuss, because it has long divided

⁷⁴ William Goode, *The Divine Rule of Faith*, vol 1. Quoted in Toon, *Evangelical Theology 1833-1856*, 200-201. Toon does not provide a complete bibliographic reference.

⁷⁵ Toon, *Evangelical Theology 1833-1856*, 201.

⁷⁶ John Charles Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of St. John* (London: J. Clarke, 1864), xii.

Christians into two parties, and defiled a very solemn subject with sharp controversy.”⁷⁷ The reader is left to infer from this statement that the two parties he refers to are those who believe in a physical presence in the elements and those who do not. Ryle does not acknowledge that the proper understanding of transubstantiation does not include the notion of a physical presence in the Eucharistic elements. He also neglects to provide references to any writers, Tractarian or otherwise, who claim that the consecrated bread and wine contain the physical body of Christ. In addition, he fails to mention that the understanding of transubstantiation became distorted in the centuries following its introduction at the Fourth Lateran Council and its subsequent elaboration by Aquinas.

Ryle may have been familiar with the arguments put forward by Robert Wilberforce in his work on the Eucharist. Although he does not mention Wilberforce by name, some of the arguments he refutes are in fact those raised by Wilberforce in defence of the notion of real presence. Ryle discusses the issue of representation versus identity in the meaning of the word “is” in Jesus’s statements “This is my body” and “This is my blood:”

Some persons, I am aware, suppose that such texts as, “This is My Body,” and “This is My Blood,” are proofs that Christ’s body and blood, in some mysterious manner, are locally present in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper, after their consecration ... The context of these famous expressions shows clearly that those who heard the words used, and were accustomed to our Lord’s mode of speaking, understood them to mean, “This *represents* My Body,” and “This *represents* My Blood.”⁷⁸

Ryle points to other passages of Scripture to reinforce his claim that the word “is” ought to be understood as representation and not identity. He cites the example of Matthew 13:38, “The field is the world, the good seed are the children of the kingdom.” Ryle says it is not possible to interpret the word “is” to mean identity in these passages.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ John Charles Ryle, *Knots Untied, Being Plain Statements on Disputed Points in Religion from the Standpoint of an Evangelical Churchman* (London: Chas. J. Thynne, 1885), 202.

⁷⁸ Ryle, *Knots Untied*, 205. The italics are Ryle’s.

⁷⁹ Ryle, *Knots Untied*, 206.

Another of Wilberforce's arguments that Ryle refutes is the assertion that the sixth chapter of John's gospel refers to the Eucharist. Ryle observes, "Some persons, again, regard the sixth chapter of St. John, where our Lord speaks of 'eating His flesh and drinking His blood,' as a proof that there is a literal bodily presence of Christ in the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper."⁸⁰ He also claims that the Eucharist was not instituted until a year after Jesus spoke those words.

In the absence of any direct reference to Robert Wilberforce in this text, it is impossible to be certain that Ryle was referring to Wilberforce. Certainly, Wilberforce never claims that Christ's presence in the Eucharistic elements is a physical one. Nevertheless, the fact that Ryle addresses three arguments advanced by Wilberforce in favour of the idea of a real presence of Christ in the elements suggests that he was familiar with the latter's work on the Eucharist. Ryle's misrepresentation of the Tractarian position on Eucharistic presence may have been deliberate or simply a misunderstanding.

Edward Bickersteth (1786-1850), an Evangelical clergyman, was another staunch opponent of Tractarianism. In one of his works condemning "popery," Bickersteth criticises the authors of the *Tracts for the Times* for their supposed promotion of Roman Catholicism:

A highly respectable, learned and devout class of men has risen up at one of our Universities, the tendency of whose writings is departure from Protestantism, and approach to papal doctrine. They publish tracts "for the times;" and while they oppose the most glaring part of popery, the infallibility of the pope, -- the worship of images, -- transubstantiation and the like, -- yet, though the spirit of the times is marked by the opposite fault, the very principles of popery are brought forward by them, under deference to human authority, especially that of the Fathers: overvaluing the Christian ministry and sacraments, and undervaluing justification by faith.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Ryle, *Knots Untied*, 206.

⁸¹ Edward Bickersteth, *Remarks on the Progress of Popery, including Observations on its True Character, the Causes of its Present Progress, its Final Fall, and the Difficulties and Duties of Protestants in These Days* (London: L. & G. Seeley, 1836), 48.

Like Ryle, Bickersteth downplays the importance of the Church Fathers. His concern about the Tractarians' lack of emphasis on justification by faith is typical of Evangelicals of his era. Bickersteth wrote this polemic in the early years of the first wave of the Oxford Movement, over a decade before Robert Wilberforce produced his trilogy of major works. His criticism is targeted at the movement whose theology Wilberforce would later systematise.

Bickersteth's dislike for Tractarianism appears to be rooted in his broader loathing for Roman Catholicism. His lecture on "popery" in Britain's colonies reveals a certain paranoia about the presence of Roman Catholics in the British empire.⁸²

While Ryle and Bickersteth targeted Tractarianism in general, others attacked the views of Robert Wilberforce specifically. The year after the publication of Wilberforce's book on the Eucharist, Robert Maguire referred to him as "the apologist of the Church of Rome, and this at the expense of the express teaching of the Church of England."⁸³ He accuses Wilberforce of promoting the idea of a physical presence in the Eucharistic elements and is critical of Wilberforce's assertion that there is no real difference between Rome and Canterbury on the subject of transubstantiation. Maguire's statement that Wilberforce and Rome "literally agree"⁸⁴ is presumably meant to be a condemnation of Wilberforce. He fails to recognise Wilberforce's argument that this agreement is consistent with the teachings of the early church on the subject of Eucharistic presence.

James Taylor also addressed Wilberforce's views on the Eucharist. He describes Wilberforce's *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* as "pure unalloyed Popery, in all its hideous deformity, hesitating at nothing save the adoption of the *word* transubstantiation, but

⁸² Edward Bickersteth, *Popery in the Colonies: A Lecture, Delivered before the Islington Protestant Institute, on Monday October 25, 1847* (London: J. H. Jackson, 1847).

⁸³ Robert Maguire, *Transubstantiation: A Tractarian Doctrine suggested by Archdeacon Wilberforce on the Holy Eucharist* (London: J. H. Jackson, 1854), 6.

⁸⁴ Maguire, *Transubstantiation: A Tractarian Doctrine*, 5.

in everything else adopting not only the doctrine, but even the phraseology, of Trent.”⁸⁵

Unlike Maguire, Taylor attempts to refute Wilberforce’s arguments systematically. He nevertheless falls into the trap of stating that Wilberforce insisted Christ’s presence in the elements of bread and wine was physical.⁸⁶ Like Goode, Taylor questions Wilberforce’s interpretation of the Church Fathers, stating he and other Tractarians err in interpreting figurative expressions used by the early writers in a literal or rigid way.⁸⁷ Taylor gives considerable space to the examination of the various Protestant confessions of faith, stating that “they generally agree in what they require and what they reject.”⁸⁸ He notes that their agreements outweigh their differences, and is critical of Wilberforce for seeing different positions in the views of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and Cranmer.⁸⁹ Taylor expressed his concerns about Wilberforce’s views on the Eucharist to the Archbishop of York, Wilberforce’s ecclesiastical superior.⁹⁰

Nineteenth-century Evangelicals approached Tractarian teaching from a perspective firmly rooted in the Protestant tradition, which was shaped by the sixteenth-century formularies of the Church, seventeenth-century Puritans and eighteenth-century Evangelicals such as John and Charles Wesley. They considered the post-Restoration Church of England to be a Protestant church which expressed a reformed faith. Evangelicals were strongly opposed to anything redolent of Romanism and resisted all attempts to encourage it. This

⁸⁵ James Taylor, *The True Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, as instituted in Scripture and received by the Catholic Church in all ages, in Refutation of Archdeacon Wilberforce’s book, “The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist,” and the Popish views of that Sacrament, in general* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1855), iii. The italics are Taylor’s.

⁸⁶ Taylor, *The True Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 53.

⁸⁷ Taylor, *The True Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 53.

⁸⁸ Taylor, *The True Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 409.

⁸⁹ Taylor, *The True Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 343.

⁹⁰ James Taylor, *An Appeal to the Lord Archbishop of York: On the Uncondemned Heresies of the Venerable Archdeacon Wilberforce’s Book, entitled, “The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist,”* (London : Wertheim and Macintosh, 1854).

opposition was rooted in the Evangelical understanding of faith. The theme of salvation by grace through faith is central to Evangelicalism. Justification by faith, the notion of a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, is of paramount importance. Following from this concept is the need for rebirth in the Holy Spirit.⁹¹ The Evangelical focus on the experience of the individual believer no doubt led to the emphasis on the presence of Christ being determined by the spiritual state of the recipient.

This understanding of justification by faith precluded any approach which suggested that salvation could be attained by effort or merit. It also rejected the notion of any mediator other than Jesus Christ, be it Mary, saints or priests. Through faith, believers became members of the “invisible” holy, catholic and apostolic Church and also acquired privileges and duties in the visible local church.⁹² It has been suggested that the Oxford Movement was a continuation of the earlier Evangelical Revival. Some writers have disputed this claim, stating that Tractarian sacramental theology is a denial of the Evangelical emphasis on justification by faith.⁹³

The Evangelical Revival and the Oxford Movement -- Common Ground?

This suggested connection between the Evangelical Revival and the Oxford Movement is reasonable. The two movements have much in common: each sought to revitalise the Church of England in order to respond to the political situation of the day. The Evangelical Revival was a response to perceived laxity within the Church during the latter part of the eighteenth century while the Oxford Movement attempted to address the changed political circumstances in Britain during the early nineteenth century. It is worth noting that each movement developed in response to a situation in the broader society. Those involved

⁹¹ Peter Toon, “Anglicanism in Popish Dress,” in *Tradition Renewed: The Oxford Movement Conference Papers*, ed. Geoffrey Rowell (Allison Park, Penn.: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 181-182.

⁹² Toon, “Anglicanism in Popish Dress,” 182.

⁹³ Toon, *Evangelical Theology 1833-1856*, 209.

in the Evangelical Revival and the Oxford Movement believed the Church of England needed to change if it was to respond adequately to the challenges of the day.

In the early years of the Oxford Movement, it appeared to many that the Tractarians were simply carrying on the Evangelical Movement. Robert Wilberforce himself made this claim in 1851 in his charge to the clergy of his archdeaconry. Referring to the Evangelical and Oxford Movements, he notes:

During the first quarter of the century, men were roused from slumber and wakened to earnestness; the next period gave them an external object on which to expend the zeal that had been enkindled [sic]. For it must be observed, ... that these movements, though distinct, were not repugnant. On the contrary, persons who had been most influenced by the one, often entered most readily into the other So then the second movement was a sort of consequence of the first.⁹⁴

Peter Nockles suggests that until the latter part of the 1830s the two movements were thought to be complementary rather than antagonistic.⁹⁵

It might be said that at the root of both the Evangelical Revival and the Oxford Movement lay the question of self-understanding: each movement addressed the issue of what it meant to be the established church in a time of change. In the wake of the political turmoil and bloodshed caused in part by the religious quarrels of the seventeenth century the relative calm of the eighteenth-century church must have been welcome, at least for a time. As the century wore on, however, that calm was seen as an inadequate response to the issues of the day, such as the social dislocation caused by the nascent industrial revolution. John and Charles Wesley and their followers recognised the need for a more militant church to confront these challenges.

Similarly, the Oxford Movement grew out of a perceived need for a strong response by the Church of England to the political changes that affected British society during the first

⁹⁴ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Evangelical and Tractarian Movements: A Charge, to the Clergy of the East Riding, Delivered at the Ordinary Visitation, A.D. 1851*, quoted in Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 14.

⁹⁵ Peter Benedict Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship, 1760-1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 321.

decades of the nineteenth century. The Tractarians' efforts to revive the catholic tradition within Anglicanism might be seen as a typical reaction to uncertainty: in times of upheaval people often turn to the past for answers to their current dilemmas. As we have seen, Robert Wilberforce looked to the writers of the early church in an attempt to bolster his arguments about Eucharistic presence and therefore make them palatable to Christians of all denominations. In so doing, he was imitating his fellow Tractarians as they looked to previous centuries to find remedies for the challenges of their day. While Wilberforce's appeal to sources no later than the ninth century gives weight to his arguments, later generations of Tractarians were less careful in their efforts to retrieve the past. As we saw in Chapter Two, the Ritualists of the latter part of the nineteenth century revived liturgical practices of the later medieval era because they deemed them to be part of the catholic tradition. Ceremonies such as the veneration of the Blessed Sacrament and the procession on the feast of Corpus Christi date from the thirteenth century and therefore originated in a time when the Eucharist was a subject of contention. These practices were introduced in part because by this era the laity had become passive spectators at Mass. They may be said to be a sort of pastoral response, inviting more fervent participation of the devotional kind. Given the late date at which these ceremonies were introduced, it cannot be said that they are part of a broader catholic tradition.

The Eucharist is in itself an important subject for both the Evangelical Revival and the Oxford Movement. The Wesley brothers were keen to promote frequent reception of the Eucharist. The term "Methodist" came to be applied to them and their followers because of their insistence on weekly reception. As we saw in Chapter One, Charles Wesley expressed Daniel Brevint's High Church Eucharistic theology in his hymns. It is surely no coincidence that the frequency of communion was an issue for both Evangelicals and Tractarians. Given that a number of Tractarians, including the Wilberforces, Manning and Newman, were raised

in Evangelical homes, it is not surprising that the Eucharist would be a matter of concern to them. David Newsome states that during the early years of the Oxford Movement it was not evident that sacramentalism would later become a dividing factor between the two movements. Noting the Evangelical emphasis on frequent communion he says, “the tightest knot which bound the Evangelicals and the Tractarians together, ... , in these early years was the common pursuit of holiness.”⁹⁶

The objection noted earlier in this chapter that Tractarian sacramental theology is a denial of the Evangelical emphasis on justification by faith reflects a misunderstanding of the Tractarian position. As we saw earlier in this chapter, Wilberforce stresses the importance of the recipient’s response in order for the gift of God’s grace in the sacrament to be effective. He notes that the doctrine of *ex opere operantis* states exactly this point. Tractarian sacramental theology therefore does not dismiss the Evangelical focus on faith but instead reinforces it. The faith of the recipient is an essential aspect of the Eucharist.

Synthesis or *Eirenicon*?

Wilberforce’s position on Eucharistic presence could best be summarised as follows: consecration is the essential characteristic of the Eucharist. The validity of the sacrament depends on consecration, which produces a real presence in the elements of bread and wine. This real presence leads to the effect of partaking, i.e., it bestows benefits upon those who receive it. In order to receive those benefits, however, the recipient must be in a fit spiritual state. Although Wilberforce did not intend it to do so, this position draws together different facets of the Eucharist emphasised by different Christian groups. Wilberforce’s neat little formula links the aspects of the Eucharist highlighted by Tractarians and Evangelicals respectively within the Church of England. It extends beyond the Church of England, however, to those groups emerging from classical Reformation traditions as well as Roman

⁹⁶ Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 14.

Catholicism and Eastern Christianity. Wilberforce does not view his formula as an amalgam or the selective use of certain positions. Instead, his intent is to draw on the sources of a common Christian tradition. His formula therefore transcends confessional boundaries and theological positions.

Different Christian views highlight different aspects of Eucharistic presence. It would be inaccurate to state that one Christian group emphasises one aspect yet completely neglects others. For example, while some Protestant Eucharistic theologies would not make a close association between Christ's presence and the elements of bread and wine, few would state that Christ is not present in some form in the celebration of the Eucharist, be it through the ministry of the Word or the worship of the faithful. Similarly, while a position such as Receptionism stresses the need for the faithful to be in a fit spiritual state in order to receive the body and blood of Christ when they receive the sacramental signs of bread and wine, the wider catholic tradition of Eucharistic theology would certainly not deny the importance of spiritual fitness as a prerequisite for receiving communion.

To call Wilberforce's work a synthesis may be problematic because the different aspects do not mesh entirely harmoniously. One such example is Wilberforce's insistence upon the spiritual fitness of the recipient. He makes it clear that the Christian faithful must be spiritually prepared in order for the reception of the sacrament to be effective. This preparation requires a certain amount of effort on the part of the recipient. The individual must obviously possess a certain level of emotional and psychological maturity in order to be properly prepared. This observation leads to the question of what Wilberforce would have thought of the practice in the ancient church and the Eastern church of communicating infants. Another example is his emphasis on consecration as being all-important. The first chapter of *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* is entitled "Consecration the Essential

Characteristic of the Holy Eucharist.” This emphasis on the importance of consecration would presumably not be consistent with many Protestant Eucharistic theologies.

Wilberforce’s position on Eucharistic presence is a tying together of the important aspects of Eucharistic presence across the spectrum of Christian thought. While he may not have deliberately attempted a reconciliation of positions, Wilberforce nevertheless sought to transcend the polarisation and variety of views held within the Church of England during his era, which one might locate along a continuum of catholic and reformed or evangelical perspectives. The effect of returning to the undivided tradition of the first millennium is to effectively transcend the disputed categories and present a position which seems to honour the concerns of each in a non-controversial way.

Wilberforce’s work is nevertheless important because, consciously or not, he linked together the different aspects of the Eucharist emphasised by various Christian denominations. In his view, all aspects of the liturgical celebration carry equal weight and all are essential to a full experience of the Eucharist. As an Anglican, Wilberforce attempted to demonstrate that his understanding of Eucharistic presence was consistent with the wider catholic tradition. Wilberforce’s theology reflects a breadth that was not typical in the nineteenth century but that would later be reflected in twentieth-century ecumenical agreed statements on the Eucharist such as those published by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission⁹⁷ and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches.⁹⁸ His understanding of Eucharistic presence sounds decidedly ecumenical to the twenty-first century reader.

⁹⁷ http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/arcic/doc/e_arcic_eucharist.html Accessed 18 February 2013.

⁹⁸ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper no. 111* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 10.

It may be more appropriate to refer to Wilberforce's position as an *eirenicon* rather than a synthesis. An *eirenicon* can be defined as a proposition that attempts to harmonise conflicting viewpoints. The term "synthesis" implies a seamless drawing together of various aspects into a Wilberforce do not always sit easily together. In the next chapter we shall look both at influences on Wilberforce and his influence on others.

Chapter Six

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

In Chapter One, we saw an overview of Anglican Eucharistic theology from its roots in the early Christian Church until the time immediately preceding the Oxford Movement. Until the ninth century, the Eucharist was not subject of debate. The gradual disintegration of the notion of the Eucharist as a community celebration resulted in a fixation on the idea of Eucharistic presence. In the late medieval era, this preoccupation with the presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine led to misunderstandings about the nature of that presence. Thinkers of the Reformation era attempted to counter this preoccupation by stressing the importance of worthy reception of the sacrament. Generations of Anglican theologians have misunderstood transubstantiation to imply a physical presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements. Some of these thinkers have nevertheless associated the elements of bread and wine with the body and blood of Christ. Over the course of the following centuries, Anglicans have attempted to hold in tension the seemingly divergent notions of a presence

associated with the Eucharistic elements and the need for spiritual fitness on the part of the recipient.

Chapter Two of this thesis provided a broader context of the world in which Robert Isaac Wilberforce lived. It outlined the events of the early part of the nineteenth century in both Britain and continental Europe. The turmoil of French Revolution in the late eighteenth century created a negative reaction in Britain. Napoleon Bonaparte's seizure of power in 1799 led to more than a decade of war with Britain in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The political chaos in France caused paranoia in Britain about possible threats to the social order.

In Britain, political and social changes created unease. The political union of 1801 between Britain and Ireland resulted in a sudden increase in the Roman Catholic population, who had few civil rights. In 1828 and 1829, discriminatory legislation against Roman Catholics was repealed and in 1832 the *Reform Act* brought changes to the electoral system. The industrial revolution brought new challenges as large numbers of people moved from the country to the cities. Poverty and inadequate public services posed problems.

During this era the Church of England was in need of reform due to problems such as non-resident clergy. Its services were generally calm and subdued. The Evangelical revival of the late eighteenth century spilled over into the early nineteenth century. William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect figured prominently among the Evangelical wing of the Church. The Oxford Movement appeared in 1833 as a response to the perceived over-involvement of the state in church affairs. Romanticism was the prevailing intellectual current in Europe during this era. At the Tübingen School in Germany, J. A. Möhler sought to find common ground between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. It is in this precise context that controversies arise within the Church of England regarding the realism of the

sacraments, and it is in this context that Robert Wilberforce is formed and develops his systematic consideration of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.

Chapter Three focussed on Wilberforce as a sacramental theologian. He understands sacraments to be an extension of the Incarnation. God sent Christ to be the second Adam. Wilberforce's idea of the Incarnation contains two parts: the Incarnation itself and the benefits bestowed on humankind by it. Christ is the perfect man and perfect mediator and is both fully human and fully divine. Wilberforce views sacraments as channels of grace which provide union between God and humans. A connection exists between the outward sign of the sacrament and the inward benefit. Sacraments convey grace but humans are free to reject it. Sacramental religion and anti-sacramental religion are polar opposites. For Wilberforce, to deny the efficacy of the sacraments is to follow an improper system of religion. Wilberforce advocates frequent celebration of the Eucharist, ideally weekly. Proper preparation is necessary before receiving the Eucharist, indicating the importance of the proper disposition of the recipient to receive and cooperate with the grace there offered. Wilberforce's theology of Eucharistic presence is based not on pneumatology or Scholastic categories but on the Incarnation. Chapter Three highlighted the central role of the Incarnation in Wilberforce's work.

Chapter Four focussed on how Wilberforce understood Christ to be present in the Eucharist. The Holy Spirit brings about the presence of Christ. Wilberforce also stressed the efficacious power of the Word, in particular the words of the institution narrative. As a result of consecration, the elements of bread and wine are sanctified. The sentence "this is my body" indicates identity with Christ and not simply a figurative representation. Christ's presence in the Eucharist is sacramental and cannot be perceived by the senses. Wilberforce rejects the Eucharistic theology of both Zwingli and Calvin. He uses sources that can be accepted by all Christians: Scripture is the ultimate source and when it is unclear he turns to

the Church Fathers. He draws on authorities no later than the eight century. This was a time before divisions between the Christian East and West and before the appearance of controversies concerning the Eucharist. This chapter described the first part of Wilberforce's Eucharistic synthesis, namely the fact that Christ is objectively present in the consecrated elements of bread and wine.

In Chapter Five we saw how Wilberforce's position on Eucharistic presence states that the validity of the sacrament depends on consecration, which produces the real presence of Christ in the elements. This real presence bestows benefits upon those who receive it. In order to receive those benefits the recipient must be in a proper spiritual state. This position pulls together different aspects of the Eucharist emphasised by different Christian groups. It links the aspects of the Eucharist highlighted by both Tractarians and Evangelicals. While it was never Wilberforce's explicit intention, his theological position has much in common with Roman Catholicism, Eastern Christianity and those Protestant groups emerging from classical Reformation traditions. Wilberforce's position has an ecumenical tone to it. It might better be described as an *eirenicon* rather than a synthesis. It is similar to the Roman Catholic concept of *ex opere operato*. This chapter also outlined opposition to Wilberforce's views from within the Church of England. Chapter Five presented the second part of Wilberforce's Eucharistic synthesis, namely that those who receive the Eucharist must be in a fit spiritual state in order to do so. The gift of God's grace and the recipient's response to it carry equal weight: the absence of either one or the other renders the sacrament ineffective.

Straddling Rome and Canterbury

Any attempt to place Robert Wilberforce on a continuum of thought with Canterbury at one end and Rome at the other is futile because no such continuum exists, at least regarding the subject of Eucharistic presence. Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism share the same understanding of how Christ is present in the Eucharist: consecration performed by a

priest changes the elements of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. This presence of Christ in the elements is real and spiritual, not physical; when received by believers who have been properly prepared, it conveys benefits. The catholic tradition within Anglicanism has always stressed this formula but it came to be obscured in the centuries following the Reformation. The idea derived from the early Christian era that consecration brings about the real presence in the elements is balanced with the notion embraced by Evangelicals that the faithful must be properly prepared to receive the Eucharist. This formula parallels the Roman Catholic doctrine of *ex opere operato*, which refers to sacramental efficacy being derived from the Eucharist itself and therefore ultimately from God. The other side of that idea is *ex opere operantis*, which refers to the proper dispositions of the recipient and minister in the reception and administration of a sacrament. Both Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism hold the same views regarding Eucharistic presence but express them in different terms.

Eugene Fairweather notes that the thought of Robert Wilberforce is distinct from that of the other Tractarians in that it reflects an openness to ecumenical dialogue.¹ Although Wilberforce did not consciously set out to reconcile Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism on the subject of the real presence, his work does highlight their sameness. Ecumenical dialogue was a largely unknown phenomenon during Wilberforce's era, and he did not deliberately set out to find common ground between Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism.² He nevertheless managed to straddle both Canterbury and Rome in his views on Eucharistic presence.

¹ Eugene Fairweather, *The Oxford Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 283.

² One exception to this absence of ecumenical dialogue is the correspondence between Non-Jurors and Orthodox Christians from 1716 to 1725. See Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, new edition (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 98-99.

One Jesuit scholar sees Wilberforce's prescience as the result of his understanding of the doctrine of the church and of salvation. In Wilberforce's theology, this understanding of salvation and the church is linked to the Incarnation:

That Wilberforce should have arrived at a sophisticated liturgical theology and pastoral [sic] long before the Roman Church ought not to surprise us, for he had worked out the soteriological and ecclesiological base upon which liturgy depends – a base which needed more time to develop in Roman Catholicism. ... it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Robert Wilberforce had anticipated almost every major point of development which was to occur in Roman Catholic soteriology, ecclesiology and liturgy in the century which followed him.³

This basis forms the foundation upon which Wilberforce develops his position of Eucharistic presence as an *eirenicon*.

Influences on Wilberforce

Theological Influences

Wilberforce's sojourn in Germany in 1831 exposed him to the work of that country's leading theologians, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. From the Protestant camp he was familiar with Schleiermacher, although he disagreed with his understanding of the Church as a human institution and not the mystical body of Christ.⁴ Another Protestant whose work Wilberforce studied was Isaak Dorner.⁵ It has been claimed that Wilberforce relied heavily on Dorner's history of Christology and also that he made extensive use of the exegetical work of Hermann Olshausen.⁶ From the Roman Catholic camp, Wilberforce was familiar with the

³ Paul Lawrence Cioffi S.J., *The Mediatorial Principle of the Incarnation analogously extended to Church and Sacraments in the Writings of Robert Isaac Wilberforce (1802-1857)*, PhD diss., Washington: Catholic University of America, 1973, 312. The reception of the insights of the Tübingen School in Roman Catholic theology was delayed by the turn to Scholasticism as the norm for theology under the directives of Pope Leo XIII, and by the anti-Modernist campaign of Pope Pius X begun in 1907. This campaign raised doubts concerning historical-critical approaches to the study of Scripture and Christian tradition.

⁴ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ in its Relation to Mankind and the Church* (London: John Murray, 1850), 340-342.

⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 342.

⁶ Fairweather, *The Oxford Movement*, 284.

work of J. A. Möhler. Alf Härdelin has suggested that Wilberforce's understanding of the Church was influenced by Möhler but he is not certain of that extent of that influence:

Typologically Wilberforce's concept of the Church represents what we find in Möhler's *Symbolik*, though the extent of their agreement and of the actual influence which Möhler may have exercised on Wilberforce would need to be demonstrated by a detailed examination and comparison.⁷

In a footnote to the passage above, Härdelin observes:

There are in the whole book [Wilberforce's *Doctrine of the Incarnation*] only two explicit references to Möhler. In the first place (72 f.) [Wilberforce] refers to, and quotes from Baur's *Gegensatz des Katholicismus und Protestantismus*, which is a counter-attack on Möhler's *Symbolik*. In the second place (131) a note refers to the *Einheit*. There is thus no direct reference to the *Symbolik* at all.⁸

Härdelin goes on to say, "In the same way as Möhler in his work synthesised his own ecclesiogical thought, so Wilberforce brought to maturity that development which started when Newman defined the principle of mediation."⁹ Härdelin is referring here to Wilberforce's views on the Church as the mystical body of Christ.

Fairweather claims that Wilberforce refers to Roman Catholic philosopher Anton Günther although he does not provide a source.¹⁰ He does demonstrate, however, that Wilberforce was interested in the Mercersburg theological movement, which he describes as a "catholicising" tendency within the German Reformed churches in the United States.¹¹ The Mercersburg movement was also influenced by Möhler's incarnational theology.

Fairweather includes an excerpt from a letter from Wilberforce to W. E. Gladstone in which he commends the work of the Mercersburg movement:

... I wish you might fall in some day with the works of a remarkable school which is growing up among the German Protestants in Pennsylvania. It is founded on a study of Primitive Antiquity, and of Mediaeval History, as given in German writers. Its chief writer is a Dr. Nevin, who has contributed many essays of great ability to

⁷ Alf Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1965), 86-87.

⁸ Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 87, f. 98.

⁹ Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 87.

¹⁰ Fairweather, *The Oxford Movement*, 284.

¹¹ Fairweather, *The Oxford Movement*, 284.

the Mercersburg Review. He takes the highest tone in maintaining Church Authority, the Sacramental Theory, and all the points, for which we are contending in this country; and in ability as well as learning exceeds I think the American Episcopalians, whom I have met with.¹²

Wilberforce therefore had an interest in other movements in theology which sought to stress the importance of church authority and sacramental efficacy through a study of the early church.

Raised in a staunchly Evangelical home, Robert Wilberforce would have been well acquainted with the body of literature intended for spiritual guidance and improvement so favoured by those in his church party. One of those writers was Jeremy Taylor, who we saw in Chapter One. Taylor was an Anglican cleric who achieved prominence during Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate (1649-1658) and was known both as a writer of devotional works and as a theologian. He produced a number of works of spiritual guidance, including *Holy Living and Holy Dying*,¹³ as well as theological works, including one on Eucharistic presence.¹⁴ *Holy Living and Holy Dying* was a favourite of John Wesley and was therefore not surprisingly quite popular with his Evangelical followers. Wilberforce quotes Taylor in a sermon on predestination.¹⁵ Section X of *Holy Living and Holy Dying* focusses exclusively on preparation for the reception of the Eucharist. It offers Christians advice on how to ready themselves for this event. Taylor reminds the faithful that they must receive the sacrament in a state of repentance for their sins and that they must examine their own souls and actions in an attempt to improve themselves in the future.¹⁶

¹² Quoted in Fairweather, *The Oxford Movement*, 284.

¹³ Jeremy Taylor, *Holy Living and Holy Dying*, ed. P. G. Stanwood (Oxford, Clarendon Press, [1989]).

¹⁴ Jeremy Taylor, *The Real Presence and Spiritual of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament proved against the Doctrine of Transubstantiation*, vol. 2, (London: Bohn, [1867]).

¹⁵ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, "Predestination," in *Sermon's on the New Birth of Man's Nature* (London: John Murray, 1850), 310.

¹⁶ Taylor, *Holy Living and Holy Dying*, 256.

As indicated in Chapter Five, Wilberforce's sources on the state of the recipient are slim. The notion of Receptionism would have no doubt been deeply ingrained in him thanks to his Evangelical upbringing. It may therefore not have occurred to him to provide extensive sources to back up his position. Given that Receptionism was a prevailing current of thought within Anglicanism at this time he may not have felt a need to elaborate on it as he did when outlining his position on consecration and the real presence of Christ in the elements.

Changing Camps

In 1845, John Henry Newman left the Church of England and became a Roman Catholic. Newman had been the *de facto* leader of the Oxford Movement since its inception in 1833 and his decision to join Rome prompted some other Tractarians to do the same. Although Robert Wilberforce eventually joined the Church of Rome his decision to do so was not based on Newman's actions. It has been suggested that Wilberforce may have had doubts about Newman's sanity and that "there was something in [Newman's] mind which he disliked and distrusted."¹⁷

As we saw in Chapter Two, Robert Wilberforce and Henry Manning had been friends for many years. They grew up in the same privileged Evangelical milieu and were connected through marriage. Between 1845 and 1854, Robert Wilberforce and Henry Manning maintained a correspondence in which they exchanged their views on the state of the Church of England. Manning was also a strong influence in the development of Wilberforce's theological views. Shortly after the publication of Wilberforce's book on the Incarnation, Manning wrote to his friend encouraging him to revise his terms. For the sake of clarity, he encouraged Wilberforce to use scholastic terminology rather than terms of his own

¹⁷ Geoffrey Faber, *Oxford Apostles: A Character Study of the Oxford Movement* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), 175.

invention.¹⁸ In the late 1840s, Manning expressed his concerns about Anglicanism following a series of controversies within the Church. It was the final decision of the Gorham Judgement in March 1850 concerning the efficacy of Baptism which prompted Manning to leave behind Anglicanism and join Rome and it was Manning who helped persuade Wilberforce to eventually do the same. Even before Wilberforce officially became a Roman Catholic, Manning assumes that he will do so. In a letter dated 6 March 1852, Manning cautions Wilberforce about putting his ideas in writing:

... do not commit yourself in print to a syllable contrary even to the terminology of the Catholic Church of the subject of the Real Presence. It would be a mistake. Whether, dear Robert, you can accept or defend its definitions or no, one thing is certain, if the Divine Spirit guides the Church, no individual, unless he be in submission and under the guidance of that Church, can without peril oppose its definitions or even its terms.¹⁹

Manning had become a Roman Catholic in the year before this letter was written, so his eagerness to defend the teachings of his new church is not surprising. Given the position Wilberforce puts forth in his book on the Eucharist, however, the conspiratorially-minded might read this letter and conclude that Manning was encouraging Wilberforce to promote the Roman position knowing that Robert was on his way to becoming a Roman Catholic. The Tractarians had been accused of being a fifth column within the Church of England, intent on returning the Church to the authority of Rome. In light of the publication of *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* and Wilberforce's subsequent decision to join the Church of Rome, opponents of the Tractarians might have viewed this passage as an indication that Wilberforce was well under the influence of Roman thought before he produced his book.

While Manning was supportive of Wilberforce's efforts to explain the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, he clearly did not understand, as Wilberforce did, that the positions of

¹⁸ Edmund Sheridan Purcell, *Life of Cardinal Manning, Archbishop of Westminster*, vol. 2 (London: MacMillan, 1896), 31, note 1.

¹⁹ Purcell, *Life of Cardinal Manning, Archbishop of Westminster*, vol. 2, 28.

Rome and Canterbury on the subject were identical. In the same letter, Manning states, “I am convinced that the Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence is alone in harmony with reason and revelation, with Scriptures and philosophy.”²⁰ To reinforce this view, Manning urges Wilberforce to read both Aquinas and Spanish Jesuit theologian Gabriel Vasquez (d. 1604). Wilberforce clearly heeded Manning’s advice. His use of scholastic terminology in his work on the Eucharist indicates that he found the work of later medieval theologians to be helpful.

Wilberforce’s disillusionment with the Church of England included a growing uneasiness about the role of the British monarch as Supreme Governor of the Church. In the months after the publication of his book on the Eucharist Wilberforce reflected upon the notion of royal supremacy. *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* had generated considerable controversy and while he waited to learn if he would be tried for it in an ecclesiastical court Wilberforce turned his thoughts to matters of church governance. By this time Wilberforce was no doubt in a negative frame of mind concerning the Church of England. His book rejecting the royal supremacy over the Church²¹ was published around the time of his reception into the Church of Rome.

In his letter of resignation to his superior, the Archbishop of York, Thomas Musgrave, dated 30 August 1854, Wilberforce, referring to Queen Victoria, states “I am as ready as any one to allow her Majesty to be supreme over all persons, and in all temporal causes, within her dominions, and I shall always render her, I trust, a loyal obedience. But that she or any other temporal ruler is supreme ‘in all spiritual things or causes,’ I can no longer admit.”²² The possibility of prosecution in an ecclesiastical court notwithstanding, it is his rejection of the concept of royal supremacy over the Church of England and not his understanding of

²⁰ Purcell, *Life of Cardinal Manning, Archbishop of Westminster*, vol. 2, 28.

²¹ Robert Isaac Wilberforce, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Church-Authority: Or Reasons for Recalling my Subscription to the Royal Supremacy*, (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1854).

²² Wilberforce, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Church-Authority*, vii.

Eucharistic presence which leads Wilberforce to resign his position as a priest and leave the Church altogether. His difficulty with the Church of England was therefore its governance structure and not its Eucharistic theology. Robert Wilberforce considered his work on sacramental theology to be entirely consonant with the very best of the Anglican tradition.

Wilberforce's Influence on Others

As we saw in Chapter Five, few writers have examined the Eucharistic theology of Robert Wilberforce. There is no evidence of any direct influence of Wilberforce on later developments in Eucharistic theology. Nevertheless, many of his ideas have found vindication in recent times.

In a recent work,²³ Brian Douglas addresses the variety of philosophical assumptions that underpin Anglican Eucharistic theology. He provides extensive case studies of Anglican thinkers from the sixteenth century onwards. The sheer number of writers Douglas studies is helpful for those who wish to become better acquainted with Anglican Eucharistic theology. One shortcoming of Douglas's work is that he does not provide much context for the theologians he studies. All of these individuals, including Robert Wilberforce, produced their works in the context of the broader events taking place both in the Church and in the world around them. More information about the era of each theologian would have been helpful.

Douglas has developed a philosophical model consisting of four categories: moderate realism, immoderate realism, moderate nominalism and immoderate nominalism.²⁴ Douglas places each of the thinkers in his case studies into one of those four categories according to their views on the Eucharist. His categories are rather broad, especially given the varied opinions about the Eucharist that have been found within Anglicanism over the centuries. It is difficult to imagine that the many Anglican thinkers Douglas has listed can all fit neatly

²³ Brian Douglas, *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology* 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

²⁴ For a fuller explanation of these categories, see Brian Douglas. "Ways of Knowing in the Anglican Eucharistic Tradition" (Ph.D. diss., University of Newcastle, 2006).

into one of four categories. Moderate realism is nevertheless an appropriate category for Robert Wilberforce's position on Eucharistic presence.

Douglas's category of moderate realism consists of those who see a connection between the Eucharistic elements and the presence of Christ. He states, "In terms of Anglican Eucharistic theology those who adopt a moderate realist analysis of the Eucharist will argue that the particulars of bread and wine and their offering in the Eucharist as a state of affairs instantiate the identity of Christ's nature."²⁵ He adds, "Some theologians call this [the connection between the elements and the presence of Christ] 'the sacramental principle,' meaning that God chooses to work through particulars or signs in this world (e.g. bread and wine and their offering as memorial remembrance) in order to convey God's grace to people."²⁶

Douglas places Robert Wilberforce's view of the Eucharist within the category of moderate realism. Given the criteria he has established for his categories, that placement is appropriate. As we saw earlier in this thesis, Wilberforce and the Tractarians adhered to the sacramental principle. For Wilberforce, the *sacramentum* (the signs of bread and wine) and the *res sacramenti* (the thing signified, namely the body and blood of Christ) are united. Douglas notes that of the many Anglican Eucharistic theologians he has examined in his study, most fall within the category of moderate realism.²⁷ The fact that Wilberforce is among those moderate realists indicates that his views are consistent with those of the majority of other thinkers within the Anglican tradition. Contrary to the claims of some of Wilberforce's opponents, his Eucharistic theology belongs to the mainstream of Anglicanism.

Douglas points out inconsistencies in Wilberforce's thinking that may lead readers to conclude that he is suggesting a physical presence in the Eucharistic elements. In Douglas's

²⁵ Douglas, *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology*, vol. 1, 55-6.

²⁶ Douglas, *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology*, vol. 1, 57.

²⁷ Douglas, *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology*, vol. 2, 733.

categories, this physical presence is described as “immoderate realism.”²⁸ Douglas says Wilberforce’s statement in *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* that the *res sacramenti* has shape and form seemingly contradicts his argument that it cannot be perceived by the senses.²⁹ Douglas also sees a suggestion of immoderate realism in Wilberforce’s claim that the Lord’s body has an agency independent of the spiritual action in the Eucharist. He says Wilberforce places too much emphasis on the Eucharist itself rather than on Christ’s saving work in it.³⁰ Douglas states that despite these criticisms Wilberforce’s overall work nevertheless places him within the category of moderate realism.³¹

As we saw in Chapter Five, Wilberforce’s opponents accused him of accepting transubstantiation, which they incorrectly assumed to imply a physical presence in the elements of bread and wine. The statements identified by Douglas, however, were not among those cited by those who were critical of Wilberforce’s views. These observations about two instances in which Wilberforce may be said to veer toward immoderate realism, as Douglas describes it, are noteworthy, but they are not sufficient in themselves to remove Wilberforce from the category of moderate realism, as Douglas acknowledges.

Douglas states that one of his goals is to suggest that the various factions within Anglicanism today move past their entrenched positions and become more aware of what the broader Anglican tradition is saying about the Eucharist.³² This goal can be achieved through dialogue. This dialogue would ideally lead to a fuller knowledge and understanding of the Anglican and catholic tradition in all its breadth. The approach taken by Robert Wilberforce could serve as a model for the development of a systematic theology of the Eucharist in the Anglican tradition today. It might be helpful to follow Wilberforce’s example by examining

²⁸ Douglas, *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology*, vol. 1, 57-8.

²⁹ Douglas, *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology*, vol. 1, 619.

³⁰ Douglas, *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology*, vol. 1, 620.

³¹ Douglas, *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology*, vol. 1, 621.

³² Douglas, *A Companion to Anglican Eucharistic Theology*, vol. 1, 734.

each aspect of Eucharistic presence, namely consecration; the Eucharistic elements as a means of grace; and the necessity for spiritual fitness on the part of the recipient.

Wilberforce's study of the patristic sources could also be emulated. The documents on the Eucharist produced by both the World Council of Churches and the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission might benefit from the inclusion of material concerning the early church's views on this sacrament

E. L. Mascall has described Robert Wilberforce as "*theologically* perhaps the greatest of the Tractarians."³³ He states that Wilberforce anticipated the work of twentieth-century theologians such as Émile Mersch, Yves Congar and Henri de Lubac.³⁴ Wilberforce's idea of the Church as the mystical body of Christ, present in German Romanticism, finds echoes in Mersch's book *La théologie de corps mystique*.³⁵ Yves Congar's work *Diversités et communion : dossier historique et conclusion théologique*³⁶ contains themes of ecumenism that would no doubt have appealed to Wilberforce. De Lubac's book *Corpus mysticum : l'Eucharistie et l'Église au Moyen Âge, étude historique*³⁷ explores the relationship between the Church and the Eucharist. Interestingly, both Congar and de Lubac were important contributors to the Second Vatican Council. Mascall also sees parallels between Wilberforce's book on the Incarnation and Anscar Vonier's work *A Key to the Doctrine of*

³³ Eric Lionel Mascall, *The Recovery of Unity: A Theological Approach* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958), 164. The italics are Mascall's.

³⁴ Eric Lionel Mascall, *Corpus Christi: Essays on the Church and the Eucharist, 2nd ed.* (London: Longmans, 1965), 37.

³⁵ Émile Mersch, *La théologie de corps mystique* (Paris Desclée de Brower, 1944).

³⁶ Yves Congar, *Diversités et communion : dossier historique et conclusion théologique* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1982).

³⁷ Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum : l'Eucharistie et l'Église au Moyen Âge, étude historique* (Paris: Cerf, D.I.,2010).

the Eucharist,³⁸ especially with regard to sacramental signification.³⁹ Unfortunately, Mascall does not bother to document this claim.

Twentieth-century documents produced by ecumenical bodies also contain echoes of Wilberforce's themes. The 1982 statement of the World Council of Churches says the following about Eucharistic presence:

The words and acts of Christ at the institution of the Eucharist stand at the heart of the celebration; the Eucharistic meal is the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, the sacrament of his real presence. Christ fulfills in a variety of ways his promise to be always with his own even to the end of the world. But Christ's mode of presence in the Eucharist is unique. Jesus said over the bread and wine of the Eucharist: "This is my body ... this is my blood ..." What Christ declared is true, and this truth is fulfilled every time the Eucharist is celebrated. The Church confesses Christ's real, living and active presence in the Eucharist. While Christ's real presence in the Eucharist does not depend on the faith of the individual, all agree that to discern the body and blood of Christ, faith is required.⁴⁰

This passage resonates with Wilberforce's assertion that Christ's presence in the Eucharist is a dynamic one. It also reinforces Wilberforce's point that the benefits of the Eucharist are attainable only through faith.

Regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist, this same document makes the following claim:

The Spirit makes the crucified and risen Christ really present to us in the Eucharistic meal, fulfilling the promise contained in the words of institution. The presence of Christ is clearly the centre of the Eucharist, and the promise contained in the words of institution is therefore fundamental to the celebration. Yet it is the Father who is the primary origin and final fulfilment of the Eucharistic event. The incarnate Son of God by and in whom it is accomplished is its living centre. The Holy Spirit is the immeasurable strength of love which makes it possible and continues to make it effective. The bond between the Eucharistic celebration and the mystery of the Triune God reveals the role of the Holy Spirit as that of the One who makes the historical words of Jesus present and alive. Being assured by Jesus' promise in the words of institution that it will be answered, the Church prays to the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit in order that the

³⁸ Anscar Vonier, *A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist* (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne Ltd., 1925).

³⁹ Eric Lionel Mascall, *Christ, the Christian and the Church: A Study of the Incarnation and its Consequences* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1996).

⁴⁰ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper no. 111* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 10.

Eucharistic event may be a reality: the real presence of the crucified and risen Christ giving his life for all humanity.⁴¹

This statement is consistent with Wilberforce's position that that the Holy Spirit serves as an agent in the consecration of the Eucharist. It also alludes to the important role of the words of institution, an aspect of the *Book of Common Prayer's* rite of consecration that Wilberforce found to be a central pillar in his argument in favour of the effective and objective presence of Christ in the sacramental signs of the bread and the wine. In a commentary on this statement the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry document states:

This is not to spiritualise the Eucharistic presence of Christ but to affirm the indissoluble union between the Son and the Spirit. This union makes it clear that the Eucharist is not a magical or mechanical action but a prayer addressed to the Father, one which emphasises the Church's utter dependence.⁴²

This passage echoes Wilberforce's statement that Christ's presence in the Eucharist is a real one and not a virtual one.

The *Agreed Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine* first published by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) in 1971⁴³ says the following about Eucharistic presence:

Communion with Christ in the Eucharist presupposes his true presence, effectually signified by the bread and wine which, in this mystery, become his body and blood. The real presence of his body and blood can, however, only be understood within the context of the redemptive activity whereby he gives himself, and in himself reconciliation, peace and life, to his own.⁴⁴

⁴¹ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper no. 111* (Geneva: Word Council of Churches, 1982), 10.

⁴² *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper no. 111* (Geneva: Word Council of Churches, 1982), 10.

⁴³ A set of "Elucidations" was published by ARCIC in 1979 in response to the "Observations" by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and to Anglican commentators. Resolution 33 from Lambeth 1978 asks for "further explication" <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1978/1978-33.cfm> Accessed 26 August 2013.

⁴⁴ http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/arcic/doc/e_arcic_eucharist.html Accessed 18 February 2013.

This statement is consistent with Wilberforce's understanding of the real presence.

Wilberforce can be seen as a forerunner of this twentieth-century approach. As stated in the introduction to the Final Report,⁴⁵ ARCIC's approach is to avoid the controversial language of the past and state in mutually agreeable terms what they can affirm together. Much of this mutually-agreed language is rooted in Scripture and the writings of the church fathers. In a footnote to the first sentence of this passage it is noted:

The word *transubstantiation* is commonly used in the Roman Catholic Church to indicate that God acting in the Eucharist effects a change in the inner reality of the elements. The term should be seen as affirming the fact of Christ's presence and of the mysterious and radical change which takes place. In contemporary Roman Catholic theology it is not understood as explaining how the change takes place.⁴⁶

This statement bypasses the historically thorny issue of how the change in the Eucharistic elements occurs. Neither Wilberforce nor ARCIC use the term "transubstantiation" but in employing other language they express essentially the same reality or meaning.

Conclusion

Robert Wilberforce was attempting to bridge the diversity in the Church of England of his era. In so doing, he unwittingly became a precursor to the ecumenical renewal of sacramental theology of the twentieth century. As we have seen, the Eucharist was a point of dispute between the Evangelicals and the Tractarians during the mid-nineteenth century. Wilberforce sought to reconcile the warring factions within the church and in so doing he made the case for Anglicanism in the broader Christian tradition. Wilberforce wrote all of his work as an Anglican. He considered his thoughts on Eucharistic presence to be an accurate representation of Anglicanism in continuity with the broader Christian tradition. As we have seen, Wilberforce took issue with Evangelicals who denied the presence of Christ in the

⁴⁵ http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/arcic/doc/e_arcic_final.html Accessed 18 February 2013.

⁴⁶ http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/arcic/doc/e_arcic_eucharist.html Accessed 18 February 2013. The emphasis appears in the original document.

sacraments. Through constructive argument he attempted to persuade others that his views were correct.

Wilberforce foreshadowed the methodology of the twentieth-century ecumenical movement by turning to the early Christian era to find answers that would transcend confessional differences. His theology of Eucharistic presence is a re-appropriation of the classical approach to the subject. Drawing on the early church fathers, Wilberforce provides considerable evidence to support his claim of an objective presence in the elements of bread and wine. In so doing, he attempts to persuade other factions within the Church of England to explore its broader roots. This search for the roots of the tradition is exactly what the Oxford Movement as a whole attempted to do. Wilberforce provides a theological framework for the Oxford Movement: he gives a developed, sustained and systematic approach to Tractarian theology.

The Oxford Movement was not alone in its quest to find the roots of the Christian tradition. Nineteenth-century Europe witnessed a renewal in both theological and liturgical scholarship. Patristic texts became more readily available and new ones were discovered. Jacques-Paul Migne compiled and published two vast editions of the writings of the early church fathers: in 1844-1845 the *Patrologia Latina*⁴⁷ appeared, and in 1856-1857 the *Patrologia Graeca*⁴⁸ was published. Migne undertook this project as a contribution to the formation of the clergy and for the renewal of Roman Catholic theology in the wake of the French Revolution.

⁴⁷ Jacques-Paul Migne, *Index alphabeticus omnium doctorum, patrum, scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum quorum opera, scriptaque vel mimima in Patrologia latina reperiuntur* (Ridgewood NJ: Gregg Press, [1965]).

⁴⁸ Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, seu Bibliotheca universalis, integra, uniformis, commode, oeconomica omnium SS. Partum, doctorum scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum, si ve latinorum, si ve graecorum, qui ab aevo apostolic ad aetatum Innocentii III (ann. 1216) pro latinis et ad Concilii florentini tempore (ann. 1439) pro graecis floruerant* (Ridgewood NJ: Gregg Press, [1965]).

The first signs of interest in liturgical scholarship in the Roman Catholic Church came with the restoration of the Benedictine Abbey at Solesmes, France, in 1832 under the leadership of Dom Prosper Guéranger. Guéranger and his associates initially focussed on the liturgy of the medieval era, which they held to be an ideal. This interest in the liturgy continued into the twentieth century and was supported by Pope Pius X, who was elected in 1903. Pius X encouraged more active participation by the faithful in the liturgy as well as the frequent reception of communion by the faithful. Belgian monk Dom Lambert Beauduin stated that worship was a common action of the people of God and was not performed solely by the priest.⁴⁹ In making this statement Beauduin was returning to idea of the Eucharist as it had been understood during the early Christian era, namely as a community celebration. Beauduin was later involved in the Malines conversations of the 1920s, a series of informal ecumenical discussions between representatives of both the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England. In the twentieth century the Roman Catholic Church sought renewal through an examination of both Scripture and the writings of the early church fathers. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) provided the forum in which this discussion was to take place.

In Chapter Two we saw how the Oxford Movement sought to revive the catholic tradition within the Church of England. One of the points stressed by the Tractarians, including Robert Wilberforce, was the need for frequent reception of the Eucharist by the faithful. In the decades following the Oxford Movement and the Ritualist Movement that call was not universally heeded within Anglicanism. While Anglo-Catholic parishes continued a weekly, and often daily, celebration of the Eucharist, other parishes maintained the habit of celebrating the Eucharist on only one in four Sundays. This pattern of infrequent reception continued until the 1970s and 1980s, when changes to the liturgical texts within the member

⁴⁹ See Lambert Beauduin, *La piété liturgique* (Montreal: Fides, [1947]).

churches of the Anglican communion led to a weekly celebration of the Eucharist. These changes coincided with the introduction of the Roman Missal by the Roman Catholic Church in 1970, which permitted, among other things, the reception of the Eucharist in both kinds. In addition, this era also witnessed the emergence of ecumenical consensus on Eucharistic theology that we have seen in ARCIC's Agreed Statement and in Faith and Order's statement in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.

The Incarnation is of paramount importance to Wilberforce's understanding of Eucharistic presence. The Eucharist is an encounter with a person, namely the risen and glorified Christ, and not with a thing. The consecration of the elements results in Christ's presence in the bread and wine. When the faithful receive the sacrament in a proper disposition God's grace is conveyed to them. Robert Wilberforce was one of the first theologians to closely link the Incarnation with sacramental theology. As we have seen, the Incarnation would prove to be an important theme for Anglican theologians in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Gore and his associates would later draw on the Incarnation in their attempt to come to terms with the new scientific developments of their day.

Wilberforce was not the only nineteenth-century theologian to show interest in the Incarnation as a subject for study. As we saw in Chapter Two, J. A. Möhler looked to the Incarnation in his search for common ground between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. While Wilberforce makes a link between the Incarnation and the sacraments Möhler links the Incarnation to the church. Wilberforce takes very seriously the idea of God working through material signs such as bread and wine. His emphasis on the objective contrasts with the approach taken by Schleiermacher, who places great importance on the inner feeling of the individual.

Robert Wilberforce could be described as a sober Evangelical. Unlike many of his fellow Anglicans of the Low Church party, Wilberforce was critical of taking an entirely

subjective approach to religion. He nevertheless acknowledged that subjective experience is one aspect of his position on Eucharistic presence: the faithful believer must be in a state of spiritual fitness when receiving the consecrated elements in order for God's grace to be effective. This subjective experience is only one part of the encounter with the risen Christ in the Eucharist. The consecrated elements provide the objective aspect of that encounter.

The sobriety of Wilberforce's Evangelicalism suggests that he did not fully embrace Romanticism, the prevailing intellectual current of the nineteenth century. Romanticism was partly a reaction to both the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the social changes brought about by the industrial revolution. This movement stressed emotion, intuition and the aesthetic experience over reason. In this respect, Wilberforce also differed from thinkers such as Schleiermacher and Möhler, who embraced the ideals of Romanticism. Wilberforce did appropriate some aspects of Romanticism, notably the turn to the early church fathers, but he rejected the focus on subjective experience.

While Wilberforce remained immune to the lure of the Romantic Movement many in the High Church party during the latter half of the nineteenth century did not. As we saw in Chapter One, the Ritualist Movement, which can be described as the second wave of the Oxford Movement, introduced pre-Reformation liturgical practices to Anglican worship. The "smells and bells" approach of Ritualism was at heart an aesthetic experience. It appealed to the late-nineteenth century longing for beauty: the visual, aural and olfactory stimulation provided by Anglo-Catholic liturgy was no doubt a welcome contrast to the dirt and grime of daily life in industrial Britain. Like the first wave of the Oxford Movement, Ritualism looked to the past. Instead of seeking answers in the early church fathers as Wilberforce and other Tractarians had done, Ritualists turned to the later medieval era for inspiration. This fondness for medievalism was mirrored in broader British society by the Pre-Raphaelite

Brotherhood and the Arts and Crafts Movement, two artistic movements which found inspiration in the Middle Ages.

Wilberforce did not live to see the full flowering of the Ritualist Movement and, in any event, his decision to become a Roman Catholic in 1854 removed him from matters pertaining to the Church of England. It is therefore impossible to know what he would have thought of Ritualism. Given the negative reaction of the first wave of Tractarians, notably Pusey, to Ritualism it is nevertheless reasonable to assume that Wilberforce would have shared their views. As we have seen, Wilberforce was very knowledgeable about church history and would no doubt have been well aware that extra-liturgical Eucharistic devotions such as the veneration of the Blessed Sacrament and processions on the feast of Corpus Christi were not part of the worship of the church of the early Christian era. He was also careful to bolster his arguments by using sources that predate the Photian schism and the Eucharistic controversy of the ninth century. His concern to find sources that were common to all Christians would likely have caused him to disapprove of the thirteenth-century extra-liturgical innovations so beloved by the Ritualists.

Robert Wilberforce wrote his major works in response to the challenge posed by the Gorham case. He was following a pattern established by Anglican thinkers over the centuries. Paul Avis observes that Anglicans have shown a tendency to respond to specific incidents rather than to articulate their positions in a more general way. He also notes that they have selected various aspects of their teachings that seem to be relevant to the particular situation. For example, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Anglicans stressed the church's catholicity and its continuity with the pre-Reformation church against charges of schism.⁵⁰ Similarly, Wilberforce places emphasis on the notion of Christ's presence in the Eucharist being consistent with the teachings of the early Christian church.

⁵⁰ Paul Avis, "What is 'Anglicanism?'" in *The Study of Anglicanism*, revised edition, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty and Jonathan Knight (London/Minneapolis: SPCK/Fortress Press, 1998), 462.

Avis quotes a 1947 Anglo-Catholic document entitled *Catholicity* concerning Anglicanism's witness to the Christian tradition, 'The history of Anglican theology shows that it possesses a power of construction which has made for synthesis rather than division.'⁵¹ Avis challenges this statement that Anglicanism fosters synthesis by pointing to the disagreements between the various church parties as evidence that the church has had difficulty over the years in reaching an internal consensus. He states that while there may have been some compromise there has not been synthesis as such.⁵² Wilberforce's work on Eucharistic presence does not fit into Avis's rather negative assessment of Anglican theology. It contrasts sharply with his suggestion that Anglican theology has an "occasional" character or does not lend itself to systematisation. In Chapter Four we saw that Wilberforce's formulation for Eucharistic presence is better described as an *irenicon* than a synthesis. It nevertheless represents a reconciliation of different understandings of Eucharistic presence within the Church of England. Wilberforce's careful analysis of Scripture, the writings of the early church fathers, ancient liturgies and the *Book of Common Prayer* indicate a systematic approach to his subject that disproves Avis's assertions.

Another reason why the term "synthesis" may not be appropriate to describe Wilberforce's understanding of Eucharistic presence lies in the usage of the term itself. Referring to the response of the *Lux Mundi* group to the challenge of new knowledge in the late nineteenth century, Avis states, "it became necessary to stretch the fabric of the Anglican synthesis to accommodate the findings of biblical scholarship, scientific discoveries and immanent world views."⁵³ This image of stretching the fabric does not fit with Wilberforce's work. Gore and his colleagues were attempting to come to terms with the new

⁵¹ *Catholicity: A Study in the Conflict of Christian Traditions in the West, being a report presented to His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury*, quoted in Avis, "What is 'Anglicanism?'" 463.

⁵² Avis, "What is Anglicanism?" 463.

⁵³ Avis, "What is Anglicanism?" 466.

learning that had developed during his time and to reconcile it with their Christian faith.

Wilberforce exemplifies a movement that was in the process of rediscovering the tradition of the early church, the tradition that informs Anglicanism. He represents a new, historically-minded theology. He may have been less interested in incorporating the new insights of contemporary science and philosophy than in drawing on the Christian tradition to demonstrate that his position was consistent with both Scripture and the views of the early church. He was turning to the past to recover knowledge that had been forgotten for several centuries, almost since the time of the Reformation. For this reason, it would be inappropriate to say that Wilberforce was stretching the fabric of Anglicanism and creating a synthesis. His work is more of an *eirenicon* in that it endeavours to appeal to differing factions within the church. For Wilberforce, the fabric of Anglicanism remained intact: he simply highlighted important but neglected strands within it.

The need to find common ground within the Anglican Communion was first recognised several years before Wilberforce's death. In 1851, Bishop John Henry Hopkins of Vermont wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury suggesting a meeting of Anglican bishops to discuss matters of mutual concern. In the same year, the possibility of such a meeting was raised during the jubilee of the Church Missionary Society in London. The catalyst for these meetings, however, came in 1865 from the Canadian bishops in response to a Privy Council decision. The Archbishop of Canterbury agreed and in 1867 the 144 bishops of the Anglican Communion met at Lambeth Palace, the official London residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury.⁵⁴ This meeting was the first of what came to be known as the Lambeth Conferences. Since 1867, they have been held approximately every ten years. The fact that these conferences take place at all indicates an awareness of Anglicanism as a diverse

⁵⁴ For a fuller treatment of this subject see D. Morgan, *The Bishops Come to Lambeth*, revised ed. (London: Mowbrays, 1967).

confessional family. The seeds of the later ecumenical movement were sown during the mid-nineteenth century.

While Robert Wilberforce did not produce his work with the intent of drawing the various factions of the Church of England into dialogue, his attempt to bridge the differences between these factions suggests that he implicitly understood that Anglicans needed to discuss both their differences and their commonalities. Moreover, although Wilberforce did not consciously set out to foster ecumenical dialogue it can be said that he anticipated both the Lambeth Conferences and Anglican-Roman Catholic bilateral discussions in the twentieth century.

Wilberforce's thought can be said to anticipate the developments found in ARCIC's *Final Report*. In the section on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist it is acknowledged that Christ is present in various ways in the celebration of the Eucharist. Like Wilberforce, the authors of the report stress the importance of the consecration of the Eucharistic elements:

According to the traditional order of the liturgy the consecratory prayer (anaphora) leads to the communion of the faithful. Through this prayer of thanksgiving, a word of faith addressed to the Father, the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit, so that in communion we eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood.⁵⁵

Here we see echoes of Wilberforce's statements concerning Eucharistic presence. The report associates Christ's presence with the elements of bread and wine. As we saw in Chapter Three, Wilberforce made exactly the same assertions.

It is telling that even in the latter part of the twentieth century both Anglicans and Roman Catholics considered it necessary to address the issue of transubstantiation. Any Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue on the subject of Eucharistic doctrine must address the challenge posed by Article XXVIII's assertion that "transubstantiation ... cannot be proved by

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http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/pdf/final_report_arcic_1.pdf Accessed 24 August 2013.

Holy Writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of scripture, overthroweth the nature of a sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions.”⁵⁶ Robert Wilberforce demonstrated that behind this article lies a misunderstanding of Roman Catholic doctrine by the Church of England that has persisted through the centuries. Anglicans ought to acknowledge that Article XXVIII, like the other Articles of Religion, is a product of the time in which it was written. It reflects the broad misunderstanding about Eucharistic presence that prevailed during the later medieval era. This fact could perhaps be acknowledged in a codicil to the Articles of Religion. Such a codicil might state that the article is a document of its time and that subsequent research has revealed its assertions about transubstantiation to be incorrect. Similarly, the Roman Catholic Church might acknowledge the centuries-long confusion surrounding the doctrine and make efforts to communicate that information both to the faithful and to its partners in ecumenical dialogue.

The fact that transubstantiation is mentioned in the *Final Report* indicates that the authors are aware of the controversy that has surrounded the term for centuries. Their need to make a statement about it further suggests that they recognise the confusion about the subject that still exists concerning the meaning of the term. They note that transubstantiation is not the only point of contention. In the section on comments and criticisms of the report the authors state:

Some critics have been unhappy about the realistic language used in this Agreed Statement, and have questioned such words as become and change. Others have wondered whether the permanence of Christ's Eucharistic presence has been sufficiently acknowledged, with a consequent request for a discussion of the reserved sacrament and devotions associated with it. Similarly there have been requests for clarification of the Commission's attitude to receptionism.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *The Book of Common Prayer* (Toronto: The Musson Book Company Limited, 1918), 670.

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http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/pdf/final_report_arcic_1.pdf Accessed 24 August 2013.

The section immediately following this paragraph states, “Behind these criticisms there lies a profound but often unarticulated anxiety that the Commission has been using new theological language which evades unresolved differences.”⁵⁸ This statement implies that critics are unaware that the supposedly new theological language is in fact an attempt to reach past the controversial language of the medieval era and employ the terms used in the early centuries of the Christian era. The questioning of the terminology used in connection with the Eucharistic presence as well as the comments concerning Receptionism suggest that the report’s critics are unaware of the proper understanding of both concepts. Fortunately, in recent years there has been some evidence of a shift in thinking. An article by Brian Douglas suggests that some Anglicans do fully understand the true meaning of transubstantiation.⁵⁹

The *Final Report* states the following about the nature of the Eucharistic presence:

The Lord's words at the last supper, "Take and eat; this is my body", do not allow us to dissociate the gift of the presence and the act of sacramental eating. The elements are not mere signs; Christ's body and blood become really present and are really given. But they are really present and given in order that, receiving them, believers may be united in communion with Christ the Lord.⁶⁰

This passage calls to mind Wilberforce’s comments on the meaning of the word “is.”

Wilberforce claimed that in this context the word “is” refers to identity and not representation: the elements of bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ and are not merely signs. We see the same assertion in the above passage. It is a clear refutation of the Zwinglian claims that the Eucharistic elements are devoid of Christ’s presence.

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http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/pdf/final_report_arcic_1.pdf Accessed 24 August 2013.

⁵⁹ Brian Douglas, “Transubstantiation: Rethinking by Anglicans?” *New Blackfriars*, 93, no. 1046 (July 2012): 426-445.

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http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/pdf/final_report_arcic_1.pdf Accessed 24 August 2013.

The *Final Report* goes on to say:

The sacramental body and blood of the Saviour are present as an offering to the believer awaiting his welcome. When this offering is met by faith, a lifegiving encounter results. Through faith Christ's presence, which does not depend on the individual's faith in order to be the Lord's real gift of himself to his church, becomes no longer just a presence for the believer, but also a presence with him. Thus, in considering the mystery of the Eucharistic presence, we must recognize both the sacramental sign of Christ's presence and the personal relationship between Christ and the faithful which arises from that presence.⁶¹

This statement echoes Wilberforce's comments on the state of the recipient, namely that in order for God's grace freely given in the Eucharist to be effective the recipients must be in a state of spiritual fitness. To put it in other terms, the recipients must have faith in the risen Christ. Just as Wilberforce maintains, the *Final Report* states the encounter with Christ in the Eucharist provides benefits for the recipient.

The echoes of Wilberforce's work found in the *Final Report* may not be coincidental. As we saw earlier in this chapter, Eugene Fairweather was aware of Wilberforce and included a sizeable selection of Wilberforce's writings in his book on the Oxford Movement. Fairweather served as a delegate to ARCIC and may have been influential in incorporating Wilberforce's ideas into the Final Report.

Wilberforce's experiences as an Anglican theologian reveal much about the state of the Church of England during his day. As shown by the Gorham case, the depth of factional disagreement is striking. Evangelicals and Tractarians were far apart on a number of issues including Eucharistic presence, as we have seen. Wilberforce's goal in his writings on the Eucharist was to demonstrate that the views of both parties on this subject could be reconciled. Another notable point is the depth of ignorance within the church about various theological matters. The strongly negative reaction to *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*,

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http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/pdf/final_report_arcic_1.pdf Accessed 24 August 2013.

particularly Wilberforce's close association between the elements of bread and wine and the body and blood of Christ, shows that authorities of this time were unwilling to accept the idea of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The fact that preparations were made to try Wilberforce in an ecclesiastical court demonstrates the intense hostility of church authorities to his idea.

Much of this hostility was likely rooted in ignorance and prejudice. As we saw in Chapter Three, Anglicans of Wilberforce's era would have been taught that Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer, the three "Oxford Martyrs" executed on the orders of Queen Mary I, had gone to their deaths in part because of their objection to transubstantiation. Their understanding of transubstantiation, however, was the erroneous one so common in the late medieval era, namely that the presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine was a physical one. To state that Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer were mistaken in their understanding of the doctrine of transubstantiation would have been tantamount to stating that they had died in vain. This misunderstanding of transubstantiation was common in Wilberforce's era, as the objections to his writings demonstrate. As we have seen above in the ARCIC statement, the doctrine continued to be misunderstood in the twentieth century. In some quarters that misunderstanding persists to this day.

Transubstantiation was inevitably linked to Roman Catholicism, and the dislike of this doctrine was probably part of a broader suspicion of all things redolent of the Church of Rome. We saw in Chapter One that during the early part of the nineteenth century misunderstanding of Roman Catholicism was widespread in Britain and Roman Catholics did not enjoy the same civil liberties as Anglicans. Not surprisingly, Roman Catholicism in Britain was subdued and secretive. The hostility towards Wilberforce's position on Eucharistic presence was rooted more in a knee-jerk reaction to Roman Catholicism than in rational thought. It is perhaps somewhat ironic that in the latter part of the nineteenth century

the situation was reversed and some of the High Church party decided to become Roman Catholics. That fact in itself is noteworthy. While there are many reasons why people choose to leave one Christian denomination for another, it is reasonable to assume that those Anglicans who became Roman Catholics had no difficulty in accepting Rome's position on Eucharistic presence. Like Robert Wilberforce, their difficulty with the Church of England was with its governance and not with its Eucharistic theology.

In this thesis we have seen Robert Wilberforce's role as the systematiser of Tractarian sacramental theology and as the forerunner of modern Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue on the Eucharist. We have also placed him in the broader context of his time. Wilberforce charted an Anglican *via media* between, on the one hand, the wider catholic tradition of Eucharistic theology with its emphasis on consecration and, on the other, the focus on the spiritual fitness of the receiver. The different aspects carry equal weight for Wilberforce. While Wilberforce may not have consciously undertaken his work with the idea of reconciling different Christian positions on the subject of Eucharistic presence that is nevertheless what he achieved. His foresight in anticipating the methods used by twentieth-century ecumenists is striking. Robert Wilberforce's work merits much greater attention in the history of Anglicanism, of sacramental theology and of ecumenical approaches to the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, than it has received until now.

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