‘The World Hath Not the Like’:
The Sacrament of Baptism in the Church of England, Its Development, Purpose, and Its Future

by

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Abstract

The sacrament of baptism, as it exists in the Anglican Communion, is the result of both its historical legacy, and the twentieth century occupation with ecumenical and inter-religious inclusiveness. In particular, the internal conflicts in the Church of England during the nineteenth century, which included the debate between High and Low Church factions regarding the theological and pastoral purpose of baptism, laid the groundwork for the changing public perception of the Anglican Church. The twentieth century, with its external conflicts, likewise affected public awareness of the dichotomy between the historical remnants of the Augustinian concept of Original Sin, and the pastoral need for acceptance and comprehensiveness. It is therefore possible to trace the evolution of the sacrament of baptism in the Church of England, and, implementing the examples present in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to predict its future development.
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...God is thanked for calling us to the knowleg of his grace, Baptisme being a blessing, that the world hath not the like.

- George Herbert
Prologue: *Fulfilling Righteousness*

John would have prevented him saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.”

- Matthew 3:14-15

On the day of Pentecost, after the coming of the Holy Spirit, and after Peter had addressed the assembled crowd of devout Jews from every nation under heaven’, the author of the book of Acts states that three thousand people repented of their sins and were baptized, becoming new members of the movement which would be known as Christianity.

This is certainly not the first mention of baptism in the New Testament, if one is reading in chronological order as opposed to the order in which these books were written, but it is the first instance of a mass baptism, implemented not only for the forgiveness of sins, but also as an act of initiation for newcomers to the Christian community. In the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles, baptism was variously described as a rebirth, a cleansing, or an act of saving grace. It was a literal act – that is, something which people performed or accepted – and a metaphorical term – something which was used to describe the Christian life and commitment. It was also a rite that Jesus Himself had undergone, and this compelled the earliest Christians to regard baptism as something of great importance.

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1 Acts 2:5.
The figure of John the Baptist is mentioned in all four Gospels, but only the Synoptic Gospels describe the baptism of Jesus itself. The baptism by John reflected the Jewish practice of ritualistic bathing, and the spiritual power found in the symbol of water was one which could be found throughout Jewish culture and history, from the rivers running out of Eden to the ritual pools in the city of Jerusalem. John stated that his baptism was one of repentance, an image of cleansing which would have been familiar to his Jewish listeners. Therefore, when Jesus of Nazareth presented Himself to John to accept this same baptism of repentance, John was quick to object, but Jesus insisted, saying ‘it is proper in this way to fulfill all righteousness’.  

Just what is intended by these words is not easy to interpret. Some, perhaps including the author of the Gospel of John, have been made uneasy by the implication that Jesus required such an act of repentance. Others have believed that Jesus’ acceptance of this baptism was an act of ‘submission and humiliation…in obedience to the Father’s will’. Still others, including Paul, appear to have no difficulty with the concept that the sinless Son of God accepted baptism. It is clear that, whatever the meaning, the incident involves Jesus’ acceptance of His vocation as the Messiah, in all the richness of that concept, as the accompanying heavenly voices make clear especially in the Gospel of Luke.

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3 Matt 3:15.
Almost from the very beginning, however, there has been dispute about baptism; what is its meaning, and what does it accomplish. Certainly, the baptism of the New Testament was an act of both repentance, and initiation or inclusion in Christ and Christ’s new community. Paul, in particular, compared the moment when a new Christian went into, and then emerged from the water, with the death and resurrection of Christ. Moreover, the authors of the New Testament were frustratingly vague about who was included in the act of Baptism. The meaning of the infamous word “household” has been bandied back and forth by advocates of believer’s baptism, and infant baptism alike. Did this term include children or infants – or indeed, women and slaves - as well as adults? The paedo-baptist (the advocate of infant baptism) would say yes, a household includes every person under its roof, including infants. The credo-baptist (the advocate of believer’s baptism) would say no, there is no such indication of the inclusion of infants, or very young children in the rite of baptism. The contemporary assumption was that the head of the household held an inclusive authority over the whole family, but whether this meant that his family were somehow enclosed in his baptism, regardless of their actual baptismal status, is equally vague.

In any case, by very early in its history, the Church had adopted the practice of infant baptism alongside believer’s baptism, which declined in frequency, and the rationale behind such a practice would have great theological consequences. When defining their own theology and methodology, the reformed Church of England incorporated early Christian, and Medieval Latin, and Continental Protestant practices into their own model for baptism, in opposition to

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6 Rom 6:3-5.
“Anabaptist” primitivism. This mixture of theologies and practices would be the Anglican Church’s strength, and its weakness.

In the nineteenth century, conflict between High and Low Church factions would centre on several topics, including that of Baptism, and it may be argued that it was in this period of history, when the differing viewpoints became commonly known to the general public, that the Anglican Church’s capacity for internal conflict and upholding comprehensiveness was truly recognized.

Internal conflict was quickly followed by the external conflict of the twentieth century. A combination of social factors, an apparent decline in a devotion to organized religion, and an increasing interest in ecumenism, led to a close examination of most – if not all – aspects of the Christian Church, not least Christian initiation.

For almost two thousand years, the Church has quibbled over the minutiae involved in the office of baptism, but has been unable conclusively define what baptism is, and what its role is in the life of a Christian. Moreover, the doctrine of Original Sin possesses a long shadow in public culture, as well as in the historical and theological culture of the Western Church in general, and the Church of England specifically.

Historical evidence points to an increasingly inclusive rite of baptism. A review of the rites and practices of the past and present would suggest that inclusive and diverse pastoral practice is gaining an even greater influence. Moreover, pastoral practice must acknowledge that many un-churched persons may be approaching baptism as adults, and many who were baptized
as infants may be returning years later, wishing there to be some public sacramental recognition of that return. In this way, public perception coupled with congregational reality has had a perceivable influence upon baptism’s past, and present, developments. The Church of England has recognized a need to adapt to the social and spiritual changes inherent in the twenty-first century.

How, then, did John’s act of repentance develop to become the act of Christian Initiation which Anglicans celebrate today? How did the conflicts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries affect the development of baptismal practices in England? In what way is the baptism of the early Christians reasserting itself into modern Anglican practices? In what way can the future development of the sacrament of baptism be predicted, given both its historical development, and its apparent modern development as well?
Chapter 1: *Et Baptizati Sumus*

…and we were baptized, and anxiety for our past life vanished from us.

- Augustine, *The Confessions*  

In 1875, a document was discovered which would throw insight into the study of the early Christian Church. Commonly referred to as “The Didache”, it was a manuscript which detailed many standards and practices – to use the modern term – of the early Church. Probably written within the first hundred years of the Church’s history, the *Didache* refers to the baptismal procedure of the earliest Christians:

Concerning baptism, baptize in this way. Having first rehearsed all these things, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, in living water. But if you have not living water, baptize into other water; and if thou canst not in cold, in warm. If you have neither, pour water on the head in the name, etc…Before the baptism let the baptizer and the baptized fast, and others if they can.  

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Here the procedure was detailed, but neither the theology behind the act, nor the age of the candidates was recorded – a frustration to those attempting the track the evolution of certain developments within the early Church.

Tertullian, at least a century later, wrote against the practice of infant baptism, but it is not clear whether he was objecting to ‘an old-established practice reaching back to the days of the apostles themselves, or a new development’.\(^9\) Certainly, he did not describe the practice as an innovation. A generation later, both Hippolytus and Origen ‘regarded infant baptism as normal, deriving its origin and authority from the apostles’.\(^10\) If it was now “normal” to baptize infants, however, and baptism was for the forgiveness of sins, why then did infants require baptism? What occurred next was the result of a logical progression. The early Eastern writer Origen had alluded to a concept which would come to be known in Western theology as Original Sin due to ‘an inference [derived from] the practice of Infant Baptism’,\(^11\) Augustine would come to maintain that infant baptism was required because of Original Sin.

The way in which Augustine accepted Christianity and baptism is perhaps the most famous conversion narrative in Christian literature. Some, including Alan Jacobs, have suggested that it was Augustine’s personality, and conversion experience, which led him to develop so tenacious a concept of Original Sin. Jacobs, writing about the Pauline tradition which

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\(^9\) Bridge and Phyper, 56.

\(^10\) Bridge and Phyper, 56.

Augustine was heir to, goes on to describe the way in which it affected Augustine’s spiritual and theological development:

…perhaps no one had ever made this core idea [of the Fall and humankind’s sinfulness] so central, had ruminated on it so obsessively… it became the very center of his whole anthropology, and he saw evidence for it everywhere, from the cry of a hungry baby to his own tendency to be distracted from prayer, contemplation, or the writing of sermons… When scholars studying these matters get angry at Augustine, as they often do, this is often not because of the core ideas of original sin, but because of the intensity with which he contemplates it…

In this way, Augustine’s personal experiences led him to adopt unbreakable views on matters of sin and salvation, and this would have an undisputed effect upon the sacrament of baptism in the Christian Church. Convinced as he was in the inherent, primal sinfulness of every human being, Augustine followed his arguments to their logical conclusion. Infants required the saving grace of baptism. Without it they were damned.

Although there were still adult converts to Christianity, like Augustine himself, infant baptism became the norm. Deprived of the catechumenal process which once occurred prior to all, or most, baptisms, young Christians were given instruction after their baptism, and the sacrament of confirmation was later developed in Western Christianity to allow the candidate to

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fortify a commitment made on their behalf. The concept of Original Sin, so logically conceived, and so pastorally distressing, established a stronghold in Christian theology and doctrine, a stronghold which would not be shaken for centuries to come.

The great theologians of the Middle Ages would make no real attempt to deviate from the theological developments of Augustine. Peter Abelard, for example, maintained the concept that the un-baptized infant was damned, even though he could make no sense of inherited guilt, which had been a building block for Augustine. Others, such as Thomas Aquinas argued on behalf of those who had committed post-baptismal sin, but maintained Augustine’s view of Original Sin and its transmission.13

One historian, writing about his research into the topic of baptism in the Medieval period, stated that he, ‘soon after beginning work on the history of baptism in the Middle Ages…found [himself] going backwards’.14 Certainly, it would be impossible to describe what was to occur in the Church of England, both at the beginning of its development, and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, without a brief overview of baptism in the early Church and in the Middle Ages. The practice of infant baptism, which slowly gained acceptance amongst the early Christians, led to the development of a rationalization for such a practice. In this way, the

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theological focus of baptism became that of the salvation of the candidate – a “rescue mission” of sorts – and the concept of baptism as an act of initiation was suppressed. The very idea of Original Sin would prove to be persistent, even into the present day, when it was no longer held to be a core doctrine. The effect of early Christian teaching and practice, and the further developments during the Middle Ages would continue to be felt by the theologians of the developing reformed Church of England.

Chapter 2: Sacred Waters and Heavenly Regions

Cum tener ad sacros infans sistatur aquales,
Quod puer ignorat, verba profana putas?
Annon sic mercamur agros? Quibus ecce Redemptor
Comparat aeterni regna beata Dei.

- George Herbert, De S. Baptismi Ritu

Neither the coronation of a Protestant monarch in 1558, nor the re-issue of the Book of Common Prayer in 1559, was sufficient to firmly establish the character of what would become the Anglican Church. For the next hundred years, early Anglican divines attempted to find a definition of, or theological approach for, the disputed practices of the English Church, a branch of Protestantism which was literally being created as they wrote. They were, as Kenneth

Stevenson put it, attempting ‘to justify an inherited system that was in need of adaptation’.\textsuperscript{16} There were those who strongly felt that the English Church was a Catholic Church in continuity with the Church that had existed in England for more than 1,000 years, but not a \textit{Roman Catholic} Church. There were others who felt that the Anglican Church, which had retained many of the rites and sacraments of a newly defined Roman Catholicism, was not Protestant \textit{enough} in nature. Both sides, however, could at least acknowledge that they were building a new approach to Christianity, evidenced in the colloquial term “The New Religion”.

Some historians, such as Geoffrey Bromiley have noted the dedication of Reformation theologians to ‘the supreme rule of Holy Scripture’,\textsuperscript{17} and have written that it was the scriptural, not the historical, background of theology, that interested them. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that many Reformation theologians on the Continent, and in England, looked to the Fathers and to Early Christian practices to justify their inherited system, especially since Scripture was silent about most of the practice and theology of baptism.

There was some diversity of opinion as to the actual procedure which should be undertaken at a baptism. Should a child be immersed in the water, or merely dipped in it? Should the variable English climate and the delicacy of the infant be taken into consideration, and water poured over the child’s head instead? Should the sign of the cross be employed? Should there be Godparents, who could speak for an infant, or should parents fill that function?


\textsuperscript{17} The phrase “supreme rule” itself is not Anglican, but comes from Puritan theology. Geoffrey Bromiley, \textit{Baptism and the Anglican Reformers}. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1953), 1.
Should laypeople, including midwives, be permitted to perform emergency baptisms if a child’s life was in danger? Were such baptisms valid, even if irregular? The historical Church had allowed or required these practices, but were they forbidden in Scripture?

There was also debate over the meaning of baptism. Did the infant exist in a state of Original Sin before he or she were baptized? Was baptism an act of rebirth? Of initiation? Was it an outward or an inward act? Theologians and authors from the whole spectrum of the English Church would spend many decades attempting to find - or create - answers to these questions, nor would they fully succeed, a fact which is evident a continuing baptismal debate which has lasted into the present century.

Church of England divines promoted their views in many different ways. They wrote theological works, both large and small, they preached and published sermons, and they wrote poetry and hymns. The usefulness of the printing press in distributing these works cannot be underestimated. We therefore have an ample supply of theological and pastoral opinions, along with various supporters and detractors of these opinions, which give us a clear view of the ebb and flow of Anglican thought during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The general consensus – at least until the rise of the Puritan party before the English Civil War – was that the injunctions of the Prayer Book should be followed, as indicating the order fixed by the Church. The custom of signing the baptized with a cross was vehemently derided by several members of the clergy as a part remnant of Roman Catholic superstition. Others, such as Richard Hooker or George Herbert, accepted, even promoted the sign of the cross as a sign of Christian belief. Hooker wrote that ‘[t]ouching therefore the sign and ceremony of the cross, we
no-way find ourselves bound to relinquish it’. Herbert, in his description of the way in which a Priest should baptize, wrote that the pastoral priest ‘willingly and cheerfully crosseth the child, and thinketh the Ceremony not onely innocent, but reverend.’ Jeremy Taylor also alluded to the physical act of making the sign of the cross over the child when he wrote about the way in which the Holy Spirit was to mark each Christian as God’s, ‘as the sheep of his pasture…the soldiers of his army…[and] the servants of his household’. Far from believing that the sign of the cross was a corrupt act of Popish superstition, these, and other writers, believed that the cross was a badge of honour, a sign of an infant’s entrance into the life of a Christian, and - being a symbol of the Crucifixion - as much a memorial of Christ’s sacrifice as the Eucharist.

There was some discussion of whether the infant should be dipped in the water or have water poured on its head. On the whole, the rubrics in the Prayer Book service left this to the individual Priest’s discretion, based upon the health of the child, and the time of year in which the baptism was taking place. Full or partial immersion in the middle of an English winter could prove fatal in certain cases. Therefore most acknowledged that England was not the Mediterranean, and the efficacy of the act was not dimmed by pouring.

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20 Stevenson, 102.

21 Stevenson, 61 and 65.
Baptisms performed by mid-wives, or even lay-people, was a thornier issue. Infant mortality being what it was, it was not unusual for infants to die at, or soon after, birth. Objections to the practice of such baptisms were two-fold. Firstly, there were those who strongly felt that baptism should be a public occurrence, done in the sight of a congregation and often in the context of a worship service, so that the baptismal vows of all present could be renewed and contemplated. Baptism should therefore not be done quickly and almost clandestinely, without the benefit of the presence of the Christian community. Secondly, not only was there the fact that mid-wives and other lay-people were not Ordained ministers of God, there was also the implication that an emergency baptism indicated a certain belief in the doctrine of Original Sin that trumped God’s election of some infants, and a certain disbelief in the grace of God in the life of infants who were elect, but not baptized. Most especially, allowing emergency baptism by mid-wives countenanced baptism by women, who were not allowed to preach, and therefore should not be allowed to administer a sacrament, a form of enacted sermon.

Even those such as George Herbert, who believed that baptism should occur ‘on Sundayes, or great [Feast] dayes’, 22 could acknowledge both the practicality and fitness of emergency baptism, when the life of a child was thought to be in danger. That being said, the preference was strongly for public baptism, not just for the benefit of the baptized (and presumably their parents or Godparents), but for the community as a whole, that they might once more acknowledge their own baptism. The question then became “Are the souls of the

22 Herbert, A Priest to the Temple, 48.
unbaptized saved?” This question was raised by Augustine’s theory that children inherited the guilt of Adam at birth— but many such as Jeremy Taylor, who wrote that infant baptism ‘does not so forgive future sins that we may do what we please’, 23 believed – as many Medieval theologians and writers before them – that God is too merciful to hold an innocent child responsible for sins for which he or she was not responsible, that is they did not attribute original guilt in such a way as to imply eternal death for unbaptized children. John Bramhall, who spent many years during the Civil War and the Interregnum in exile, discussed the issue of baptismal grace, and his belief in the distinction between unbaptized infants, and unbaptized adults. He believed that God would take into consideration the circumstances of each case of an unbaptized child, and that His mercy would allow the ‘invisible grace’ to be conferred, even in the absence of the ‘visible sign’ of the baptism itself. Bramhall also wrote that the unbaptized child received more mercy than the unbaptized adult, who had possessed ‘the contempt or wilful neglect of Baptism when it may [have been] had.’ 24 This logic may, or may not, seem faulty to the modern reader, but it once more emphasizes the general belief amongst many Reformation-era theologians that, whilst an infant may receive God’s grace without the sacrament of baptism, it was still preferable for them to receive baptism before reaching adulthood.


The issue of Godparents was partially tied into the stand on infant baptism. If the Church continued to require certain vows at the time of baptism, and the person in question was baptized as a child who had not reached years of discretion, then it was necessary for a person or persons to stand in for that child, and make the promises on their behalf. A small minority argued that the parents (or a parent, usually the father) should make the baptismal vows, and that Godparents or Sponsors should be omitted. An even smaller minority (within the Church of England, at least), believed that no promises needed to be made at all, and it was sufficient that the baptized was brought by believing parents.25 Richard Hooker, writing about several issues relating to baptism, from the sign of the cross, to the administration of the sacrament by laypeople and midwives, to the nature of the baptism itself, also addressed the issue of Godparents:

Albeit therefore neither deaf nor dumb men, neither furious persons nor children can receive any civil stipulation, yet this kind of ghostly stipulation they may through His indulgence, Who respecting the singular benefit thereof accepteth children brought unto Him for that end, entereth into articles of covenant with them, and in tender commiseration granteth that other men’s professions and promises in baptism made for them shall avail no less than if they had been themselves able to have made their own.26

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25 Stevenson, 36.

26 Hooker (chapter lxiv), 334-335.
Moreover, Hooker would also condemn those Priests who sought to stipulate who could receive baptism, writing that ‘God hath appointed them ministers of holy things, [yet] they make themselves inquisitors of men’s persons a great deal farther than need is.’

Hundreds of years before the discussion in the twentieth century regarding universal baptism, Richard Hooker would maintain that ‘God hath ordained baptism in favour of mankind. To restrain favours is an odious thing, to enlarge them acceptable both to God and man.’

The question of whether baptism should be administered to infants at all, or should be withheld until a later date – a question which, even today, has yet to be conclusively answered – was also hotly debated. Tied as it was to the dispute over the presence of Godparents or Sponsors, it was also argued that anyone who could not answer for themselves, or understand what was occurring at the baptism itself, was not a suitable candidate for something so life-changing and vital to the Christian life. George Herbert, responding to – he believed – an attack on infant baptism, wrote Latin verses describing the validity of the sacrament itself, and the benefit it held, even for those who needed other feet to carry them to the font, and other voices to declare their dedication to Christ. Hooker wrote that it was certain that ‘infants may contract and covenant with God’, and Taylor, as we have already seen, believed that God’s mercy was

27 Hooker (chapter lxiv), 336.

28 Hooker (chapter lxiv), 336.

29 A passage from this work is quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

30 Stevenson, 49.
far greater than the infant’s supposed sinfulness, added that ‘there is infinitely more reason, why infants may be communicated, than why they may not be baptized.’

The general picture given by the Anglican divines writing in the ninety years between the coronation of Elizabeth I, and the execution of Charles I, is of a group of theologians who are consolidating doctrine and theology implied by the practices in the Book of Common Prayer, and applying it to their own methods and beliefs. Theology, however, never exists within a vacuum, and for that reason, we also see the way in which the pastoral life of these, and other members of the clergy, affected their convictions, and their practices. Of these, it is Herbert whose writings, particularly on the habits of a parish Priest, address the minutiae of baptismal practice, from the garments which a Priest should don for the ceremony, to the idea that ‘no vain or idle names’ should be chosen for the child. In the writings of others such as Hooker, Andrewes, or Taylor, we see the way in which concepts of grace and salvation have entered into their works on baptism.

In particular, an examination of the first one hundred and fifty years of Anglicanism shows the theological preoccupations of early divines of the reformed Church of England and the reformed Church of Ireland. These preoccupations involved issues of liturgy, and theology and its meaning, which had not been solved to their satisfaction by the finest minds of the early Christian, or Medieval eras. Indeed, baptism - how it should be carried out and what it accomplished - symbolized the way in which these unanswered liturgical and theological subjects involved questions about Grace and Salvation, and the very nature of Christianity itself.

31 Stevenson, 105.
Chapter 3: *Mystery and Mystification*

I would earnestly entreat Dr. Pusey and his friends, to consider whether…they are not getting rid of a mystery for the sake of introducing a mystification.

- F.D. Maurice\(^{32}\)

In 1834 and 1835, Edward Bouverie Pusey, Regius Professor of Hebrew at Christ Church College, Oxford, contributed publications to the newly inaugurated *Tracts for the Times*, and so publicly threw in his lot with the Oxford Movement. Pusey’s chosen subjects had been fasting, and baptism, and it was the latter topic which would gain much attention and controversy.

In retrospect, Edward Bouverie Pusey would attempt to soften his earlier writings by emphasizing his title, “Scriptural Views of Holy Baptism”, which was not simply current Church Doctrine, but rather a description of the teachings on baptism based upon Scripture. For all Pusey’s efforts, coupled with the later interpretations of his intentions by Henry Parry Liddon, his loyal biographer, it cannot be denied that Pusey’s early statements on baptism were disconcerting for many of his readers.

The most publicly vocal opponent to Pusey’s baptismal statements was Frederick Denison Maurice, who, at the time of his response to Pusey, had considered identifying himself with the Oxford Movement, which appeared to be ready to welcome him. Unsurprisingly,

Pusey’s published writings on baptism resulted in a parting of the ways between Maurice and the Tractarians, and became a defining moment in Maurice’s life and theology.

Like any piece of writing, be it fiction or non-fiction, Pusey’s *Tracts on Baptism*33 were a metaphorical photograph of a particular mind-set at a particular point in time. Pusey himself was in his mid-thirties, and he and his young family were recently settled in Oxford. The second son of Philip Bouverie and Lucy Sherard Pusey, Pusey, like many second sons of a certain class, had chosen the Church as his profession. His privileged social position, coupled with his education, had earned him a place at Oxford, and it was there that he met John Henry Newman and John Keble. Pusey focused upon German, Hebrew, and other Semitic languages, and obtained a first class degree and a Fellowship at Oriel College. In 1828, Pusey was ordained, married, and appointed as Regius Professor of Hebrew, a position he would hold for the rest of his life.

In spite of the seeming ease at which Pusey had attained all of this by the age of twenty-eight, the ten years of Pusey’s education, ordination, and marriage, were years of emotional and physical upheaval. In short, he had, since the age of eighteen been in love with Maria Barker, who would eventually become his wife. Both his father and hers forbade the match, and Pusey’s subsequent despair led him to throw himself into his academic career with a devotion bordering on the self-destructive. When Pusey, with his first-class degree and his Oriel Fellowship, was finally permitted to marry, the marriage had to be postponed owing to the death of his father. The subsequent physical and emotional collapse, and the required convalescence, led to a series of letters between Pusey and his fiancée. The correspondence contained many discussions of

33 For brevity’s sake, the title “Tracts on Baptism” will be used to describe Tracts 67, 68, and 69.
religion and theology, and in them we have some sense of Pusey’s early intellectual processes. In particular, they show a man of flexible temperament, who was still developing both as a theologian, and as a person.

The seven years which passed between Pusey’s ordination and marriage and his public epistolary debate with F.D. Maurice would be formative. At the time of the publication of the *Tracts on Baptism*, one of Pusey’s two daughters had died, and his only son had been gravely ill, an illness from which he would never fully recover. These events would serve to influence certain aspects of Pusey’s personality, and would contribute to the serious theological style for which Pusey is more well-known. The Edward Bouverie Pusey with his morbid streak, and his preoccupation with sin and sinfulness, can be seen to have its advent here.

Pusey first mentioned his idea to write about the sacrament of baptism in a letter to Newman: ‘Men need to be taught that it is a Sacrament, and that a Sacrament is not merely an outward badge of a Christian man’s profession’, 34 a phrase and a position taken from the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion in the Church of England. Typically, Pusey neither knew, nor particularly cared, what the response to his baptismal theology would be. It was not what he said about baptism itself which became the difficulty, rather, it was what Pusey wrote about the direness of post-baptismal sin which would cause such upheaval:

> To those who have fallen, God holds out only ‘a light in a dark place’, sufficient for them to see their path, but not bright or cheering as they would have it: and so, in different ways, man

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would forestall the sentence of his Judge; the Romanist by the Sacrament of penance; a modern class of divines by the appropriation of the merits and righteousness of our Blessed Redeemer; the Methodists by sensible experience: our own, with the Ancient Church, preserves a reverent silence, not cutting off hope, and yet not nurturing an untimely confidence, or a presumptuous security.  

Considering the way in which Pusey would become an advocate for the sacrament of penance, the above passage might seem surprising. Years later, Pusey himself would state that, even then, he was aware that he ‘should have written on Christian repentance, on confession and absolution’, as well as the subject of baptism. At this early stage, however, Pusey had not yet developed the more complex concept of penance, which included a championship of auricular confession.

Henry Parry Liddon, and to a lesser extent, Pusey himself, would later attempt both to ascribe powerful motivations for Pusey to write his Tracts on Baptism, and to down-play the negative implications of Pusey’s early baptismal theology. Liddon had insisted that ‘faith in the grace of baptism had declined, so a sense of the grievousness of post-baptismal sin had been correspondingly lost’. In spite of Liddon’s insistence of the desperate pastoral need for a baptismal theology that considered the seriousness of post-baptismal sin, and the way in which

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35 Forrester, 189.


37 Liddon, 352.
Pusey was persecuted for his various sacramental statements, it cannot be denied that Pusey had focused on sin without addressing any way in which people might be cleansed from that sin.

Edward Bouverie Pusey often misjudged or underestimated the audiences for which he wrote, or to whom he preached. His views on the nature of the Eucharist resulted in his being banned from preaching at Oxford for two years, following the presentation of a sermon on that topic in 1843. When writing to Newman about baptism, Pusey had admitted ‘I know nothing or little as to the reception such a Tract would meet with’, nor was the reception of the Tracts Pusey’s primary concern. He had certainly intended to raise the ire of the Evangelical party, as well as of those who would take sinful behaviour lightly, but he had underestimated the response of many of his other Anglican contemporaries, especially F.D. Maurice.

John Frederick Denison Maurice was the son of a Unitarian minister. Michael Maurice was ‘much more conventional’ in his beliefs than some of his Unitarian colleagues, and ‘tended to be agnostic about Christ’s divinity’. Moreover, when Michael Maurice performed the office of baptism, he did it in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, as suggested by the words used in the Gospel of Matthew. The Maurice household was quite large, consisting of F.D. Maurice, his parents, his five sisters, and two cousins. F.D. Maurice’s childhood provided ample opportunity to observe the conflict between different denominations, for his mother and sisters, one by one, stated their intention to leave the Unitarians. Rather than discuss these intentions in person, the Maurices developed an interesting technique for personal

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38 Forrester, 187.

39 Morris, 5.
dialogue: they wrote letters to one another. The letters passed between the members of the same household, declaring the wrenching decision to abandon Michael Maurice’s denomination. F.D. Maurice would eventually follow his mother’s and sisters’ examples, and leave the Unitarians, in his case for Anglicanism. Before that time, however, Maurice lived in a household undergoing a great crisis. It is for this reason, Alec R. Vidler believes, that Maurice was so concerned with Christian unity.

Maurice originally read law at Cambridge, but following his eventual conversion, he went up to Oxford, and in the year 1831, was re-baptized as an Anglican, and wrote his second class examinations. In 1834, he was ordained as a Deacon, and then a Priest, and after a briefcuracy in Warwickshire, was appointed as Chaplain of Guy’s Hospital in London. It was a position that involved much contact with the poor, and, for him, a great deal of pastoral work among people who would never leave the hospital.

At the same time as the Oxford Movement was gaining momentum, Maurice, who held some of the same sensibilities as its founders, began to consider an allegiance to the Tractarian cause. Concurrently, the men of the Oxford Movement were considering the desirability of arranging Maurice’s appointment to the position of Professor of Political Economy, then vacant. Maurice was still undecided about his allegiance to the Tractarian way of thinking when Pusey’s *Tracts on Baptism* first appeared in 1835.

The story of F.D. Maurice’s first encounter with Pusey’s *Tracts on Baptism* is something of a legend. Maurice was in South London, attending a meeting of the Clapham sect, and had taken the Tracts with him. Whilst walking in the area, he read, and became increasingly troubled
by Pusey’s views on baptism in general, and on post-baptismal sin in particular. Many years later, his son and biographer, Frederick Maurice, would describe his father’s mind-set as he came to the end of the Tracts:

…as he went along it became more and more clear to him that it represented everything that he did not think and did not believe, till at last he sat down on a gate, in what were then the open fields of Clapham, and made up his mind that it represented the parting point between him and the Oxford school. He always spoke of it with a kind of shudder, as it were, of an escape from a charmed dungeon.⁴⁰

At that time, and years later, F.D. Maurice’s perception of Pusey’s argument was that a ‘baptised child was holy for a moment after its baptism, in committing sin it lost its purity’. That purity, Maurice stated ‘could [according to Pusey] only be recovered by acts of repentance and a system of ascetical discipline’⁴¹.

It was the pastoral implications of Pusey’s Tract that particularly disturbed Maurice. That the Tract represented a parting of the ways between himself and the Tractarians was not in doubt, but Maurice was not content to recognize this without some kind of public response. It was a response not all that different from his family’s time-honoured method of letter-writing.

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The first edition of Maurice’s Letter on Baptism took into account the fact that

[t]he most earnest men I know, especially those who to diligent theological study add parochial duty among the poor, have expressed to me the great distress with Dr. Pusey’s Tracts on Baptism have cause them…

and coupled it with his own knowledge of the hardships encountered by those who lived a life of struggle and poverty. The very idea that anyone could imply that any who spend eighteen hours out the twenty-four in close factories and bitter toil, corrupting and being corrupted, that if they spend the remaining six in prayer – he need not add fasting – he may possibly be saved. How can we insult God and torment man with such mockery?

Maurice had immediately identified the ways in which Pusey’s concept of post-baptismal sin, as well as his theories on fasting and prayer, were utterly impractical for those whose lives were an unending tedium of back-breaking labour. The Tracts had been written for the clergy and those studying for the ministry, it is true, but how could those clergymen convey such concepts to the poorest of the poor without inducing great anxiety?

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44 Consider, for example, the novel *Agnes Grey* (1847) by Anne Brontë – herself the daughter of a clergyman – in which the heroine observes the differences between Mr. Hatfield, the rector of the parish (an Anglo-Catholic), and his curate, Mr. Weston (who is more Broad Church). In particular, the two clergymen interact in very different ways with a poor woman of the parish, who has great anxiety about her own salvation. Hatfield takes an impatient – and utterly theological – approach to the problem,
Did Pusey have any concept of the difficulties his *Tracts on Baptism* would raise amongst his fellow clergymen? It would seem not, and both his letters, and his future habit of mistaking his audience, would attest to that fact. Did Pusey wish to convey the importance of the sacrament of baptism? Yes, without question. Did he wish to stress the gravity of sin? Yes, he certainly did. Did he wish to imply that there was no remedy for sinful behaviour? It is likely that he did not. Pusey simply had not yet formulated the next part of the equation.

By mid-1836, mention was being made in the correspondence of Maurice’s general acquaintance that he was planning to write a public letter which addressed the *Tracts on Baptism*. Maurice’s response would take some time to appear, for he had decided to include his remarks on baptism - his “diatribe” against Oxford - within the context of his *Letters to a Quaker*, the work which would eventually become known as *The Kingdom of God*. The first edition of *The Kingdom of God* derided both Pusey’s concept of baptism, and the possible future consequences for the baptized:

…by representing Baptism as that which confers a portion of grace on each particular child, and not as that which brings him out of his selfish and individual condition, into the holy and perfect body, they do very much, as I think, to destroy the ideal of the church, and to introduce a Genevan, individualizing notion in place of it…they make [Baptism] something which happens at a particular instant or crisis to the child, and not the constant presence of a Friend, and Guide, and Teacher, to uphold the Spirit in its battles with the flesh, to train it in

which goes entirely over the uneducated parishioner’s head, whilst Weston’s response is purely pastoral. Both Agnes, and the author herself, plainly prefer the latter tactic.
the knowledge of itself and of God, to comfort it 
in its sorrows, to guide it into all truth and love, 
- the gift and blessing of Baptism.45

This concept of the purpose of baptism, as a rite of Christian initiation, the beginning of Christian life, and a constant guide and comfort corresponded with Maurice’s view of the function of confirmation:

…there comes a time, when the child becomes conscious of these spiritual powers, when it not only feels and thinks, but begins to know that it feels and thinks…The Church seizes this time of consciousness – this awful moment, when the mystery of our own personality first begins to scare and confound us – when there is a dim perception of responsibilities, and a struggling of the sinful nature,…when the hope of some connexion with an invisible being, who can solve the doubts and quiet the tumults within us, is awakened by the recollection of the words of the catechism, of the morning and evening prayer, of the stories of God’s holy word, all now beginning to lose something of their childish interest, and not yet having acquired a higher meaning, - then, I say, does the Church meet us with her service of confirmation, tell us that the duties may be discharged, the victory may be won; because the hope is not a dream, - because the Spirit who took the charge of us in childhood, who has been himself educating us to behold the light which now seems to rush in upon us with such blinding power, will be with us, - not as heretofore the watchful nurse over thoughts yet unborn,…but henceforth the awful friend and companion, and fellow-worker, the witness with our spirits that we are the sons of God.46

45 Maurice, Kingdom of Christ, 95-96.

For Maurice, therefore, the offices of baptism and confirmation were inseparable. Moreover, the very existence of confirmation itself indicated that ‘the idea of some operation performed and finished in the act of baptism’\(^{47}\) was a false one. Maurice believed ‘that all men are born into a race of which Christ is the Head and baptism is the sign that they are’\(^{48}\) members of that race.

In a sense, Pusey and Maurice had more in common than they realized. They both believed that baptism was of great importance as a sacrament of the Church. They both recognized the danger of sin, and the value of an ability to combat that sinfulness. Maurice had caught Pusey at a time when his theology was not yet firmly established. Five years later, they might have found a better kinship.

In all fairness, it must be acknowledged that Pusey was never one to show others the steep and thorny way to Heaven whilst treading the primrose path of dalliance. He spent the better part of his life considering and practicing the spiritual disciplines of fasting and prayer. Moreover, the period of Pusey’s life in which he wrote the *Tracts on Baptism* was one of great intellectual and spiritual transition. His view on the concepts of sin and penance were undergoing a volcanic change, fueled by the numerous personal tragedies that occurred in the 1830’s. Pusey had made statements about post-baptismal sin without stating the remedy for that sin, an oversight that he would correct in his later avocation of auricular confession. Finally, we cannot neglect the fact that Pusey was determined to regard sin with proper seriousness, as an

\(^{47}\) W. Merlin Davies, 33.

ultimate evil. He was horrified by those who treated sin lightly, even humourously, and he aspired to convey the extreme gravity of sin without repentance. If he went too far in expressing this aspiration, we cannot judge him too harshly, especially in the light of his later intellectual and theological development.

On the other hand, we cannot judge F.D. Maurice too harshly for his reaction to the *Tracts on Baptism*. In spite of the defenses of Liddon and others, Pusey’s statements on post-baptismal sin, as they existed in the first edition of the Tracts, could not have been interpreted in any other way. Maurice was understandably unaware of the transitional nature of Pusey’s theology, the personal difficulties in Pusey’s life, or the eventual development of Pusey’s concepts of sin and penance.

What we have seen played out in the debate between Pusey and Maurice on the topic of post-baptismal sin, can be seen as the effect of two different spiritual personalities. Pusey was the ascetic, whose otherworldly qualities coloured his scholarship and his theology. Maurice had observed the poor and downtrodden of London, and his practical and pastoral traits, and perhaps his own family background, led to his determination to portray the Christian faith as one of a welcoming, yet moral character. This was not to say that Pusey was not a compassionate man, and in later life he was frequently sought as a spiritual director and confessor.

For Edward Bouverie Pusey, the disagreement with Frederick Denison Maurice stemming from the *Tracts on Baptism* was of relatively minor consequence. Pusey was gradually coming to the idea that the deaths of those he loved were the direct result of his own sinfulness. In the same year as the publication of *The Kingdom of Christ*, it became apparent that
Pusey’s much beloved wife was dying. Maurice, on the other hand, would declare that ‘[n]othing I have written had so important an effect on my life’\textsuperscript{49} as his response to Pusey’s Tracts. For Pusey, however, who had lost brother, father, daughter, and wife – all within the space of twelve years – Maurice’s antagonism was another negative event in a series of negative events.

In the long run, it was F.D. Maurice’s interpretation of baptism as both a cleansing of sin, and as a mark of Christian Initiation, the beginning of life as a Christian, and the commencement of an eternal relationship with God, which has endured. The perception that baptism’s purpose and benefit are felt, both immediately, and for the candidate’s lifetime, is one which is widely accepted in the modern Anglican Communion.

In the remaining years of the nineteenth century however, the topic of baptism was far from closed. The dueling camps of High and Low Church continued to debate about the nature and purpose of baptism, bringing in existing evidence and positions, as well as taking into account new issues that would arise in the coming decades.

\textsuperscript{49} Maurice, \textit{Life}, 238.
Chapter 4: *Changeable Weather*

CHASUBLE: But surely, Mr Worthing, you have been christened already?

JACK: I don’t remember anything about it.

CHASUBLE: But have you any grave doubts on the subject?

JACK: I certainly intend to have. Of course, I don’t know if the thing would bother you in any way, or if you think I am a little too old now.

CHASUBLE: Not at all. The sprinkling, and, indeed, the immersion of adults is a perfectly canonical practice.

JACK: Immersion!

CHASUBLE: You need have no apprehensions. Sprinkling is all that is necessary, or indeed I think advisable. Our weather is so changeable.

- Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*[^50]

In August of 1848, the Bishop of Exeter, Henry Phillpotts, wrote to a friend about an issue which had been occupying him:

You may have heard of my collision with Mr Gorham, whom I have refused to institute to a benefice to which he is presented by the Crown…It is a case which is creating great interest…because my refusal to institute is founded on Mr G.’s statements respecting baptism. The Puritans are, I believe, furious – and do not think themselves fortunate, I suspect, in their champion – a clever, but rash man.[^51]


The Mr. Gorham to whom the Bishop was referring was a clergyman named Charles Cornelius Gorham, whose confirmation of a position at Brampford Speke relied upon Phillpotts’ approval and consent. Gorham had attended Cambridge, and was elected a Fellow of Queens’ College in 1810. His Ordination the following year occurred only after the Bishop of Ely had privately examined him on the subject of baptismal regeneration. The next thirty-five years passed with little incident, but in 1846, several occurrences happened which caused him difficulty. He was censured for his use of the term “the National Establishment”, rather than “the Church”.

Next, Gorham advertised for a curate who was ‘free from all tendency to what is well understood by the term Tractarian error’. At that point, Phillpotts chose to intervene, and in a letter refused Gorham’s nominees for the post of curate, declared himself obliged to examine any of the curacy candidates on their baptismal theology, and signed himself ‘your grieved and offended Overseer in the Lord.’

Matters came to a head in 1847, when Gorham was offered the living of Brampford Speke. A testimonial was required for Gorham to obtain the position, and Phillpotts refused to countersign it, declaring Gorham to hold opinions which contradicted those of the Church of England. Neither Gorham, nor Phillpotts, would back down, Gorham applying to higher and higher authorities to have his living confirmed, Phillpotts refusing to acquiesce.

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53 G.C.B. Davies, 231.
54 G.C.B. Davies, 231.
In November 1847, Phillpotts informed Gorham that he felt obliged to examine him on his points of doctrine. The examination lasted for six days before Gorham protested that his orthodoxy had been adequately questioned, and proved. Nevertheless, the examination resumed the following year in March, for three more days, and the record transcribed from the questioning was later published by Gorham himself.

There were one hundred and forty-nine questions in all, and Gorham refused to answer a small number of them ‘on the ground of what he considered their irrelevancy or inquisitorial character’. The crux of the matter could be seen in three questions in particular:

v. Does our Church hold, and do you hold, that every infant baptized by a lawful minister with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is made by God, in such baptism, a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven?

vi. Does our Church hold, and do you hold, that such children, by the laver of regeneration in Baptism, are received into the number of the children of God, and heirs of everlasting life?

vii. Does our Church hold, and do you hold, that all infants so baptized are born again of water and of the Holy Ghost?56

To which Gorham answered:

As these questions all imply the same description of answer, I will discuss them together; and, generally,


56 G.C.B. Davies, 232.
I reply that these propositions, being stated in the precise words of the Ritual Services, or of the Catechism, undoubtedly must be held, by every earnest member of the Church. 57

As R.R. Osborn would later put it:

Had Gorham been able to answer to this question [of the nature of baptism] with a clear, unqualified yes, there would have been no controversy. But this he felt unable to do. His own way of stating his dilemma was that he could not accept this interpretation of the Baptism service…He could accept the possibility of Baptismal Regeneration only when the sacrament was received “rightly, worthily, and with faith.” 58

Gorham’s responses to Phillpotts’ questions were strongly, almost exclusively, rooted in the Book of Common Prayer in general, and in the Thirty-Nine Articles in particular. For example, he gave several examples found in the Prayer Book of instances when regeneration is requested of God, after baptism has taken place. From these instances, Gorham deduced that ‘Regeneration therefore in Baptism is affirmed absolutely in words, but conditionally in meaning’ and for this reason, regeneration itself ‘may not have taken place, and is, therefore to be implored in after years.’ 59


58 Osborn, 25.

Following this second set of examinations in March of 1848, Gorham was once again informed that he was declined the living of Brampford Speke, due to unsoundness of doctrine. Gorham issued a complaint to the Archbishop of the Province, which led to a monition from the Dean of the Arches, Sir Herbert Jenner Fust, stating that Phillpotts must either institute Gorham to his living, or prove that Gorham’s doctrine was unsound. This was to occur within fifteen days, or the Dean of the Arches would install Gorham himself. Following the presentation of the case, Fust ruled that Gorham ‘does maintain opinions opposed to that of Church of which he professes himself a member and minister.’

Gorham responded by appealing to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, and proceedings were opened on December 11, 1849. Gorham’s counsel focused upon the idea ‘that the Articles are the code of doctrine of the Church of England, the Prayer Book being the code of devotion.’ Phillpotts’ counsel focused on the question of doctrine, and the fact that the Church taught that all benefits of baptism were given to infants indiscriminately, they being fit recipients because of their innocency.

By early 1850, it became apparent to most of the parties involved that the judgment of the Court of Arches would be reversed and that the Bishop of Exeter would lose. Phillpotts

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60 G.C.B. Davies, 237.
62 G.C.B. Davies, 239.
therefore chose to put his energies into writing a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had already shown himself to be more of Gorham’s opinion than Phillpotts’.

On March 8th, the Court decreed that, whilst Gorham’s opinions might run contrary to those of some members of the Church, they did not however run contrary to those of the Church of England itself. The Bishop of Exeter had not shown to their satisfaction why Gorham should be deprived of his living. Therefore George Cornelius Gorham, after three years of debate and exertion, was finally permitted to settle in Brampford Speke. Gorham held the post for just over seven years, before his death in 1857.

These were the bare events of the Gorham case, but of course these events did not occur within a vacuum. The High and Low Church parties had never fully recovered from the upheaval of the previous decade. Although Newman had already left Anglicanism for the Roman Catholic Church by the time of the Gorham case, John Keble and Edward Bouverie Pusey were very much involved in what was to occur, and were joined by allies such as Henry Manning and Robert Wilberforce. The Evangelical party, evidently realizing that the living of more than one clergyman rested on the decision made in the Gorham case, joined forces, even though they did not unanimously hold all of Gorham’s opinions. They were ‘deeply indebted to the learning of William Goode’, and to the counsel for Gorham before the Judicial Committee, who successfully argued on Gorham’s behalf.

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63 G.C.B. Davies, 239.
Phillpotts relied particularly upon the scholarship of Pusey, and an extensive correspondence began between the two. Pusey’s place as the writer of the *Tracts on Baptism* made him a natural choice for Phillpotts’ trust. There was evidently some reluctance on Pusey’s part to protest so vehemently against Gorham’s appointment. ‘He [Pusey] thought that Mr. Gorham might possibly have been won by kindness, but that he would only be exasperated by law’, 64 and likely by a confrontational attitude as well. By the time that Pusey became personally involved, however, it was far too late for the gentle approach.

If Pusey was not overly alarmed by the possible results of a ruling in Gorham’s favour, and felt confident that the case was not a life-or-death affair in the history of the Church of England, he did acknowledge that a ‘doctrine of the Church was in question; and the constitution of a civil court gave no security for an adequate spiritual judgment’. Moreover, a Bishop of the Church had asked for his assistance, during the case, and in writing a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury afterwards, and Pusey would not have declined the request, regardless of Pusey’s personal opinions on the matter.

Nor was Pusey the only one to address the issue of the Judicial Committee’s judgment. Robert Wilberforce published a work entitled *The Doctrine of Holy Baptism*, which discussed the points on baptism that had been at issue during the case, as well as addressing the opinions of William Goode. Henry Manning continued, both publicly and privately, to address the issues that had so disturbed him. Manning, like Newman before him, would leave Anglicanism for the Roman Catholic Church a year after the judgment, and Robert Wilberforce would soon follow.

64 Liddon, 203.
The Evangelical party regarded the judgment in Gorham’s favour ‘as a great success for their cause’, and a sure sign that the more Calvinist viewpoints had a place and recognition in the Church of England. The eventual reality was that the ‘restrictionist view of the efficacy of Baptism became a tolerated minority opinion’, but the majority opinion on baptismal regeneration would continue to be held.

The issues of the case had begun as doctrinal, but other repercussions were to transpire in the coming decades. The most obvious of these was the aforementioned agitation of the already troubled relationship between the High and Low Church parties, themselves in evolution. Wedges driven in the previous decade only served to weaken the structure of Anglican solidarity. The immediate results were not as disastrous as some believed they would be. There was another consequence, however, which could not immediately be foreseen.

The very fact that there could be two different (permitted) views on the purpose and nature of the sacrament of baptism indicated a lack of certainty in, and authority of, the doctrines of the Church of England. This was exacerbated by the fact that a civil court had made the final judgment in the case. If a civil court held sway over the Church, which had become a house divided against itself, how could it stand as a spiritual and moral body over its people? R.R. Osborn has suggested that the ultimate result of the Gorham case was a ‘loss of the force’ of

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65 Osborn, 27.
baptism as a ‘spiritual instrument…for the conversion and spiritual comfort’ of Anglicans. This was ‘the last result which the Evangelicals would have wanted, or expected.’

The issue had begun on a small scale, as a disagreement between a Bishop and a clergyman in his diocese. Neither Phillpotts, nor Gorham, was the sort of man to back down from a matter when their personal convictions were being questioned. Phillpotts was a man who preferred to rule by fear rather than love, and the harsh and stinging letters by which he browbeat his unfortunate opponents reveal an impatience and lack of charity deplorable in a leading ecclesiastic.

This was oddly coupled with a remarkable warmth and compassion towards those whom he regarded as his allies. Nevertheless, Phillpotts was often seen as something of a bully, and even Queen Victoria referred to him as ‘that fiend, the Bishop of Exeter’.

If Phillpotts thought that he could intimidate Charles Gorham, he was greatly mistaken. Gorham was no young, green, newly graduated student, unsure of his own position, and easily cowed by the belligerent Bishop. He was a long-established clergyman, less than ten years Phillpotts’ junior, who had the backing of the Evangelical party, and the surety of his own beliefs. He had already published a distinguished scholarly work. Gorham was principled enough not to lie about his views when questioned, nor did he see any reason to do so. In a

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66 Osborn, 27.
67 G.C.B. Davies, 391.
sense, Gorham’s logic regarding regeneration is sound – there are instances in the Prayer Book that imply that baptismal regeneration is not permanent, and instances where assertions are made “optimistically”, as in the Office of the Burial of the Dead. That being said, Gorham did not take scriptural sources into account, nor did he consider tradition. Pastoral implications were of little or no concern in the face of Gorham’s doctrinal belief. In this way, he was a strange fellow-traveller of Pusey and his early baptismal theology. In this way, also, he had parted from the theologians of early Anglicanism, who had tempered references of the impermanence of baptismal regeneration, with concepts of God’s grace and mercy.

If the Gorham case caused some to become more partisan, it caused others to become less so. Just as his own family history had caused F.D. Maurice to become concerned with Christian unity, there were members of the High and Low Church parties who observed the spiteful words and actions on both sides, and adjusted their own views.

James Mozley was a Tractarian, and the brother-in-law of John Henry Newman. In matters of baptismal regeneration, however, his theological sympathies lay with Gorham. Moreover, he was alarmed by the repercussions of further conflict within the Church. His work *A Review of the Baptismal Controversy*, published more than ten years after the ruling of the Gorham case, detailed the doctrinal and theological issues in question. It also addressed those who wished to continue the conflict, and those who were inclined to make the question of baptismal regeneration a vital matter:

[O]n the part of those who maintain such a Protest, a certain responsibility is incurred; such a responsibility as may induce them, from time to
time, not to object to reconsidering the ground of
their Protest, and reviewing the facts of the case.
For it should be borne in mind that such a standing
Protest as this is a serious disadvantage to the Church
in this respect, that it represents the Church as
unable to prevent a particular doctrine...[and] in a
state of doctrinal slavery and subjugation to an external
and heterodox power; and that, representing the Church
in this character, it lays her under a stigma which is
injurious to her, and affects her credit.\textsuperscript{59}

Mozley was cautioning his readers against inflexible or partisan attitudes towards those who
were members of the Church of England, who still managed to forget that fact when confronted
with a difference of opinion.

On the positive side, the conflicts and debates of the nineteenth century encouraged those
such as F.D. Maurice or James Mozley to encourage solidarity amongst the clergy and people of
the Church of England, a solidarity which could exist in spite of the multitude of differences.
For Maurice, the quarrel fed into his \textit{Tracts on Christian Socialism}. There was also a growing
concept of inclusiveness and permissiveness, which would only increase in the following
century.

On the negative side, every quarrel, every niggling issue which received attention in the
presses, only served to show that the Anglican Church was not the be-all and end-all of doctrine,
thology, belief, or morality. In the words of the novelist Anthony Trollope, the Anglican
Church had allowed differences ‘on subjects of divine origin to produce…antipathies and
enmities’ which were ‘anything but divine’, and which allowed Anglicans to ‘triumph over each

\textsuperscript{59} J.B. Mozley, \textit{A Review of the Baptismal Controversy}. (London: Longmans and Green, 1895), 363.
other with human frailty’. The ways in which the developing knowledge of Anglicanism’s fallibility, coupled with the increasing interest in inclusiveness, would affect the perceptions of, and attitudes towards, baptism in the next century.

Chapter 5: The Implications of the Original

The slight shock of hearing a familiar statement rephrased quickens one to the implications of the original…

- Dorothy L. Sayers

Both life and liturgy were affected by the shocks of the early twentieth century and the historical literature on these social changes abounds. A multitude of studies, pamphlets, papers, articles, and books have been written about the ways in which the events of the twentieth century affected political, social, and religious history. Two World Wars, and numerous smaller, but no less devastating conflicts, movements in feminism, civil rights, and the rights of those who had been discriminated against because of class, physical or mental disabilities, or sexual orientation, had a profound effect on human history. These events must also be coupled with the changing demographics in countries previously known for their homogeneous populations, which were growing increasingly multi-cultural.

By the middle of the twentieth century, it was becoming evident that the Church of England was undergoing yet another great change. Historians were probably still too close to the Second World War to fully judge its impact, but it was plain that the First World War had created some kind of historical division between one era and another. World War I, into which the nations of Europe had entered with such gallantry and good intentions, had proven to be a horror of cruelty and bloodshed, and had, for many, ‘demolished for ever the myth of the Christian West’ and ‘rendered ridiculous the claims to moral superiority in which the Western nations had been inclined to indulge.’

The Anglican Communion, like the myriad of countries in which it could be found, certainly ‘felt the shock of change’ following the Great War, and it soon became apparent that it ‘was not so much that the war actually changed things as that it brought to light realities that had been hidden by appearance.’ In the decades after World War I, statistics showed that regular attendance at Church services was declining. Military Chaplains reported a general ignorance about Christianity and its beliefs amongst the soldiers under their care. In 1955, the Convocations of Canterbury and York concluded that of one hundred infant baptisms, sixty-one children were never confirmed, and of one hundred children who were confirmed, sixty-five never became communicants. In 1958, Stephen Neill wrote of an increase in the general

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71 Neill, 388.

72 Neill, 388.

population, but a decrease in the number of clergy, a clergy which was aging, and not being adequately replaced by a younger generation. All the above observations and statistics could just as easily be found in the Anglican Churches of the early twenty-first century – fifty years have made little difference in the difficulties facing the Church of England.

As has happened so many times in human history, events and circumstances were changing faster than it was in the power of the people involved to adapt to them. Nevertheless, some writers and theologians attempted to analyze the contemporary situation from the eye of the hurricane, using the current events of that era just after the Great War, to address the issues of the Christian Church.

Norman Powell Williams was born in 1883. He was the son of a Welsh clergyman, and was one of five children, all of whom, with the exception of Williams himself, died before their seventh birthday. His childhood was, according to his wife, an unhappy one, and he was plagued by ill-health for all of his life, but he had nevertheless managed to develop a sense of humour, most evident in the whimsical sketches found in his letters.

As a young man, he became interested in liturgy, and especially Church history, and would eventually go up to Oxford, to Christ Church. He also traveled extensively in Europe, particularly in France and Germany, where he studied both Roman Catholic and Protestant scholarship. In September of 1908, he was ordained a Deacon, and was made a Priest the following March.

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Rejected for military service because of his health, Williams divided his time during the First World War between Exeter, where he was Chaplain, and Oxford as a whole, a practice he maintained after 1918. In 1919, he gave a four-lecture series on the topic of Redemption, which may have led to his interest in the topic of Original Sin, and his application for the Bampton Lectures.

The Bampton Lectures themselves were the legacy of the estate of John Bampton, Canon of Salisbury. Bampton's will had stated that

> upon the first Tuesday in Easter Term, a Lecturer be yearly chosen...to preach eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, the year following, at St. Mary's in Oxford, between the commencement of the last month in Lent Term and the end of the third week in Act Term.\(^{75}\)

These lectures had accordingly taken place since 1780, at first every year, then every other year. Past lecturers had included Samuel Wilberforce,\(^{76}\) J.B Mozley, and Henry Parry Liddon. N.P. Williams was granted the Bampton Lectures in May 1923, and began studying his chosen subject of Original Sin, as well as beginning to learn Hebrew.\(^{77}\)

In the spring and summer of 1924, Williams delivered his eight lectures under the title “Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin”. During that period, his biographer reports, Williams was

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\(^{75}\) N.P. Williams, *Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*. (London: Longmans, Green, 1927), v.

\(^{76}\) Bishop Samuel Wilberforce was the brother of Robert Wilberforce, who played such a prominent part in the events of the last chapter. Both Samuel and Robert were the sons of William Wilberforce, the abolitionist.

\(^{77}\) Kemp, 42.
'exceedingly pressed for time', 78 and, on at least one occasion handed in his lecture manuscript on the morning of its delivery. Williams' tendency to prepare comprehensively, and then extensively revise, his own work is evident both in the last-minute submission of his manuscripts, and the fact that the lectures were not published until 1927.

The first six lectures were historical in focus. In Lectures I and II, Williams discussed concepts of Original Sin and Original Righteousness in both the Old Testament, and in Judaism. He observed that the opinions on the source of sinfulness differed, some authors and narratives indicating that it lay in sexual concupiscence, while others - namely the Jahwist author - believed that sinfulness originated with the desire for knowledge. In Lecture III, Williams addressed the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, who neglected to mention the topic of Adam’s Sin, unlike Paul. Williams also introduced the hypothesis that, although Jesus did not mention Original Sin, His silence on the subject indicated that He 'tacitly acquiesced' to the beliefs of His followers on the issue. Lectures IV and V covered the first four centuries of Church history, and Augustine's influence upon the development of Church theology and doctrine. Lecture VI focused upon how the concept of Original Sin evolved in the Middle Ages, and later as Protestant and Anglican theologians developed their own interpretations. The final two lectures attempted to retrieve a more catholic definition of Original Sin and Original Righteousness.

Williams' historical survey had been meticulously researched, and later revised. Beyond this, however, was the limitation that Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin contained elements of the time in which it was written, as do all works of scholarship and literature. This was a work

78 Kemp, 42.
which was conceived of, and written, less than a decade after the end of the First World War, and its influence, when ‘the innate corruption of man’s heart…broke through the veneer of civilization’, is plainly felt. This was also an era in which the science of psychiatry was gaining wide-spread interest, and Williams had both become interested in the discipline, and later, personally availed himself of psychoanalysis.

At the same time, Williams found that he himself had been affected by his research. In contrast to E.B. Pusey in the previous century, whose theology had been influenced by his personal life, Williams’ personal life was altered by his changing viewpoints on theology. His copious research on Augustine had evidently

led him to think that much of the current Roman and Anglo-Catholic teaching about marriage and sexual relationships was influenced by strains of Manichaeism which had come into Christian theology through St. Augustine.

This realization led Williams to reconsider his stance on the celibacy of clergy. Reassured that there was no theological or doctrinal reason for a member of the clergy not to marry, Williams spoke to several friends about the topic. To one friend in particular, Williams postulated that people might be reluctant to confide in, or confess to, a married Priest, fearing that he would repeat such personal information to his wife. The friend replied that such a concern had never

79 Kemp, 124.
80 Kemp, 44.
81 Kemp, 43.
crossed his mind. The friend then guessed (correctly) that, for Williams, the question of the marriage of clergy had ceased to become academic. Williams married Muriel Cazenove in 1927, the same year that Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin was published.82

An examination of the historical development of the doctrine of Original Sin led Williams to conclude that more than the issue of a celibate clergy might be interpreted differently. The personal changes which Williams' research had caused aside, Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin was a work which radically considered the issue of Original Sin (and therefore baptism) from a theological perspective, in a way which could have pastoral implications. Williams' Preface to Ideas of the Fall, written in January of 1927 began, not with an academic, theological discourse on the issue, but rather with a discussion of a pastoral difficulty:

Perhaps the gravest of the intellectual difficulties which restrain men of thoughtfulness and goodwill from giving their allegiance to the Christian Faith is that which inheres – not in any one article or detail of our religion, not in its doctrines of the Triune being of God or of the two natures of Christ, not in Atonement, miracles, sacraments, or eschatology - but in its fundamental assertion that 'God is love.' 83

This concept of the difficulty in reconciling the just and loving God of scripture and belief, with the evil deeds recorded throughout history is not new. That being said, Williams' assertion that it

82 Kemp, 44.
83 Williams, vii.
was this concept, 'God is love', which was the greatest impasse, beyond any thorny issues of the Trinity, the humanity of Christ, Salvation, or seemingly impossible occurrences, might seem remarkable, not least to those who have considered these topics to be vital.

Beyond the fact that Williams had acknowledged the world, and the nature of those who live in it, the First World War and its immediate aftermath were still fresh in the minds of Williams himself, and his readers. Millions had died in the conflict – both soldiers and civilians – and millions more had perished in the outbreak of influenza which occurred afterward. Literature, art, and poetry had reflected the disbelief which many felt in God's mercy, and Williams conceded that there were a great number of people of intelligence and compassion who could not conceive of a world in which 'the senseless waste, the sordid ferocity with which organic nature...is deeply marked' could co-exist with 'that inconceivably glorious and blissful Being of whom Christian theology speaks'. Moreover, Williams would observe that it was of fundamental interest to 'the religious man whether these root assumptions of Christianity...[could be] justified in the light of modern anthropology and psychology'. For this reason, Williams had determined not to limit himself to an historical analysis of the concept of Original Sin, but also to 'seek to determine the extent of its acceptance by orthodox Christianity, if any, which it may claim before the bar of reason.'

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84 Williams, vii.
85 Williams, 120.
86 Williams, ix.
The end result was Williams' conclusion that the concept of that cataclysmic act of disobedience was 'essentially an inference from the facts of human weakness and sin, considered in the light of the infinite holiness of God'. He nevertheless asserted

I do not mean to imply that the idea of the Fall ought to be discarded, or that it does not correspond to any reality – I am only concerned to point out that, in view of its inferential character, it must for the future be conceived not as a column which supports the Christian Faith, but rather has a pinnacle which is supported by it...But because the idea of the Fall is a pinnacle and not a column, it does not follow that it is of no structural importance.

In other words, Williams would not - and could not – dismiss the concept of the Fall completely, but he did suggest that its importance should be reconsidered.

Williams' reasons for this stance on the Fall and on Original Sin can be seen in his consideration of the evidence; historical, philosophical, scientific, even psychological. His consideration of the historical development of a Fall narrative, and the way in which different religions and cultures had affected that development led Williams to reappraise the validity of that narrative. His studies in Germany, and in that country's religious and philosophical development, were evident in his discussion of Kant and Hegel 'to salve what seemed to them the permanent essence of religion' from the Biblical criticism and rationalism of the

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87 Williams, 492.

88 Williams, 493.
Enlightenment. Nor was Williams willing to discount the scientific evidence of evolution, finding no difficulty in reconciling a belief in evolution with his belief in God.

Williams’ preoccupation with pastoral matters, as seen in his introduction to the published version of *Ideas of the Fall*, could be seen in his observation that

> It may be further urged against this theory [of Original Sin] that it involves a view of human life and conditions of existence on this planet so profoundly pessimistic as to make us doubt whether the hypothesis of pre-natal falls has not already tumbled into that abyss of Manicheism, on the edge of which, as we have already seen, the doctrine of original sin is perpetually trembling.  

As Williams would continue, it was rather difficult to understand how any parent could take joy in the birth of a child, 'a small culprit who had just been banished from the intelligible sphere in consequence of some gross defiance of the majesty of God.'

In a sermon preached on the Sunday after Easter, at the time when he was completing the published version of *Ideas of the Fall*, Williams would tie together themes of baptism in the early Church, the observation of Easter and the Easter season (historically and in the present day), and the topic of the Fall and of Original Sin – a miniature version of the larger, more academic work soon to be printed. In that sermon, we can see even more clearly the fact that

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89 Williams, 496.
90 Williams, 512.
91 Williams, 512.
Williams was very much aware of the difficulties which the modern layperson had in comprehending these points of theology and doctrine. Taking the role of one of his listeners, Williams proposed several questions which might be asked in response to his statements on these difficult issues:

Doubtless this sequence of ideas, in which the fall and original sin form the pre-suppositions of redemption and sanctification effected through a God-man who perfects his own humanity by means of a Passion and Resurrection, is a perfectly clear and intelligible one; but have its root assumptions any basis in fact? Do they not belong to a world of obsolete science, of antiquated thought-forms, a world in which man’s view of his own nature was coloured by monkish asceticism and morbidity? and are they not based upon Semitic folk-tales embodied in the Hebrew Scriptures, with no more claim to be taken as records of historical fact than the mythology of the Red Indians? ⁹²

Williams was considered an excellent preacher, not simply because his sermons were learned, but also because ‘his thoughts about the past were so woven into his views about present problems and man’s duties’, ⁹³ and so he appealed both to the academic, and the non-academic listener. He was also a man of wide-ranging interests, and so the analogies in his sermons and writings often included indications of his enjoyment of music, reading plays (which he preferred

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⁹² Kemp, 121. The modern reader may well find Williams’ latter analogy somewhat politically incorrect. His intention, however, would seem to be a desire to equate the origins of the Fall narrative with a culture which – to his listeners at that time – was geographically, historically, and culturally distant.

⁹³ Kemp, 46.
to viewing in person), and architecture. If the preparation of sermons ‘was torture to him’, his listeners were not aware of it, and Williams considered himself both a theologian, and a pastor.

It is interesting to note that, whilst the first six lectures (later chapters), which focused upon the historical analysis of the Fall and of Original Sin, were met with evident acclamation, the last two, which showed Williams’ interest in psychology, and his abilities as an apologist, ‘won less approval’. It is true that the last two sections of *Ideas of the Fall* are quite different from the first six chapters. In tone, they are not unlike the introduction, with its preoccupation with the modern perception of the doctrine of Original Sin, and of the Church and God in general. That being said, Williams himself was torn between his belief that the concept of Original Sin should be ‘a pinnacle and not a column’, and the fact that it could not be so easily done away with as a logical cause for evil in the world.

In his appendix to *Ideas of the Fall*, Williams would also weigh in on the topic of infant baptism, which had been a peripheral subject in his reasearch

> we neither affirm nor deny the legitimacy of infant baptism, which is a collateral development from the original idea and institution of baptism, and which depends for its authority not upon any credal or conciliar formula, but upon the actual practice of the Church and the semi-articulate instincts of the general body of Christendom.

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94 Kemp, 74.
95 Kemp, 43.
96 Williams, 554.
Here we see the idea that infant baptism, having developed – as he thought - from the concept of Original Sin, is not lacking in validity, was – and is - still instinctively followed by the Anglican Church. Williams himself had eloquently discussed the early Church practice of baptism on Easter Eve, speaking to the great meaningfulness of that ancient, believer’s baptism, but he was evidently reluctant to dismiss a custom (infant baptism), which had been the norm in the Church for over a millennium, regardless of its origins.

N.P. Williams had recognized the tenacity of the concept of Original Sin in a denomination which had consciously dismissed many of its precepts, yet maintained unconsciously some of its coexisting practices – namely infant baptism. Williams’ historical analysis of the development of Christian concepts of the Fall and Original Sin had shown, first his listeners, and later his readers, the way in which the theories based upon logical reasoning had resulted in theological reality. Finally, he had acknowledged, as a theologian who also considered himself a pastor, that pastoral need had a great - possibly the greatest - influence on baptismal practice.

This issue of infant baptism versus believer’s baptism would be of great importance in the remaining decades of the twentieth century, and beyond, as a greater number of persons were not baptized as infants. Was there a decline in the number of baptisms? Or was the sacrament of baptism returning to its early Christian beginnings?

97 Kemp, 115-119.
Chapter 6: *No Mere Mundane Society*

The Church, moreover, into which we are baptized, is no mere mundane society...it is in the context of such an entire system of Christian belief that the theology of baptism as a sacrament of the Christian Church needs to be understood.

- The Convocations of Canterbury and York, 1955

Those who were attempting to defend and define the sacrament of baptism in the latter half of the twentieth century were forced to take a number of social, political, and religious factors into account.

World War I had first caused the ‘shock of change’, and the Second World War followed with alarming swiftness upon that shock, when the Great War had not yet faded from living memory. The social changes which occurred during the mid- to late twentieth century have been amply described elsewhere, but they encompassed issues of class, race, gender, and sexuality, among others. Nor could people in the Church be unaware of the statistics they had gathered regarding Church attendance, both of adults, and of children. In 1958, Stephen Neill would observe that

> The clergy found themselves perplexed and uncertain, conscious of the need for a great religious revival, uncertain as to the means by which it ought to be brought about...The first of these facts [to be faced]

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98 *Baptism and Confirmation Today*, 32.

is the very rapid decline in Church attendance. A century ago [1858] the English people could be described as a church-going people...The English people today is not a church-going people. Every study, and every set of statistics, confirms what must be painfully evident to anyone who has occasion to travel widely through the country.100

As far back as 1937, when the Canterbury Convocation appointed a Joint Committee to consider the topic of baptism, the Church of England had been reflecting upon both the meaning, and the administration of the sacrament. From 1939 (when the Report on the 1937 Committee’s findings was published), throughout the early years of the War, through to the mid-fifties, much data was collected, mulled over, and discussed. In particular, the various Committees studied both the reports garnered from the various Dioceses, and specific case studies. Although the statistics gathered covered less than twenty years, they show what was occurring at that time, even if they cannot be compared and contrasted with information collected over a long time period. The focus widened to include the sacrament of confirmation, and data was compiled which included both baptism and confirmation in the lives of younger Christians.

In 1944, a report stated that, of every one hundred children born, sixty-seven were baptized as members of the Church of England, twenty-six were confirmed, and only nine ‘remain[ed] faithful even to the extent of making their Communion once a year at Easter.’101 A

100 Neill, 388–389.

101 Baptism To-day: Being the Schedule Attached to the Second Interim Reports of the Joint Committees on Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion, as Presented to the Convocations of Canterbury and York in October, 1949 (2nd ed.).
survey which took place between 1954 and 1960 at St. Martin’s in Hull, recorded four hundred and thirty-eight confirmations, of which only 46% remained regular members of the parish. It was also observed (over, admittedly, a short period of six years), that the younger a candidate was for confirmation (the minimum age being twelve years old), the more regular the attendance afterward.  

Parish Priests were polled about their experiences. Thus appealed to, the clergy responded with repeated requests for a more accessible baptismal liturgy, a more, or less, rigorous catechumenal process, and a liturgy specifically designed for the baptism, and – in some cases – immediate confirmation of adults, modeled on the practice of the Early Church. It was also evident that, in many cases decisions, from the practical to the pastoral, were being made by parish Priests which, though not heretical or even illegal, indicated a tendency to respond to each situation (and person) differently.

The theological aspects of baptism (and confirmation) were still being discussed, and the topic of Original Sin was still bandied about, N.P. Williams being frequently quoted as the authority on the subject, even forty years after his lectures at Oxford. That being said, there was a marked rise in the pastoral concerns involved in the sacrament of baptism, and as the 1960s gave way to the 1970s, these concerns came to the fore.

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103 *Baptism To-day*, 12-14 and *Baptism and Confirmation Today*, 25.
Many were divided between what has been called ‘the Scylla of rigourism…[and] the Charybdis of laxity’. In other words, there were some who advocated a more arduous catechumenal process, involving months, even years, of preparation, and others who championed so general a baptism that there were no restrictions on who might be baptized.

These two extremes had not been conceived inside a vacuum. Those who argued for a more inclusive approach, a General baptism, had observed the way in which outsiders might interpret a long process of entrance into the Christian Community – as a long, arduous progress in order to enter some special, secret club. Those who advocated a careful observation of study and prayer had the earliest days of Christian Initiation as their model. Some felt that parents or guardians could undertake this catechumenal process on behalf of an infant or small child, whilst others believed that baptism could be delayed until the candidate was able to speak for him- or herself.

This concept of delaying baptism until the child was older opened another proverbial can of worms, for it had several theological consequences. Firstly, it would indicate, once and (optimistically) for all, that the belief that a child was not saved until it had been baptized, was a principle which the Church of England would no longer hold. Secondly, it would delay, or even negate the need for, the “sacrament” of confirmation. Finally, it would change the structure of Christian life in a way to which many Anglicans might fail to adapt.

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104 Baptism and Confirmation Today, 22.
Of these three consequences, the first was perhaps the easiest to do away with. The idea of the faultiness of the doctrine of Original Sin, as it was initially conceived was, in theory, not a difficult one for most Anglicans to accept. Instead of the concept of baptism as ‘a rescue operation’ for each person, this other interpretation of baptism is of ‘an elixir of hope for humanity’.\(^\text{105}\) The latter interpretation implies that baptism is what makes it possible for human beings to enter into a proper relationship with God. This also allows baptism to become an act of initiation, the first step of a person becoming a member of the Christian community.

Moreover, the concept of doing away with confirmation is not a new one, Reformation theologians both in England, and on the Continent, argued about whether it should be included, both as a sacrament, and as an act of initiation. Delaying baptism would seem, in many cases, to make confirmation redundant. The consequence of removing confirmation from the process of Christian Initiation can also be tied to the final consequence – the development of a new structure of Christian life.

For more than a thousand years, the majority of new Christians have been infants rather than adults. The doctrine of Original Sin was partially responsible for this, but some accountability must be given to the structure of Christian initiation, and Christian life, which had been put into place. An infant was baptized, then instructed in various points of doctrine and belief, to be followed by First Communion and confirmation, by the Bishops if possible. Even after the Reformation in England, some version of this process remained in effect. How would a change in this process affect the concept which many Anglicans had of the linear progress of the

\(^{105}\) Osborn, 123.
life of a Christian? Was it not possible to adapt to the idea of baptizing both older children and adults?

In 1972, R.R. Osborn summed up the difference between infant and adult baptism in this way:

What has been learnt in the course of administering Infant Baptism over many centuries now constitutes a complex of many spiritual and social values, which are obscured by the treatment of the Baptism of adults as if it were the norm…If ever there has been from the supersession of Believers’ Baptism as the unvarying practice of the Church, which supposition is being increasingly questioned to have ever been, in any absolute sense, the case, it has been “looked after” as the expression goes, in the deferment of Confirmation, at the time of the Reformation, until it became a “necessary profession of faith after due instruction”. Believer’s Confirmation then supplied whatever might have been lost in the disappearance of Believers’ Baptism, whilst the link with Baptism was sedulously maintained; as George Every says, “We in the West have no need to deplore the separation of baptism from confirmation…so long as the unity of the whole rite is made plain”, as it can be…Parish priest, parents, godparents, and the Christian community act together as godparent to the child in differing degrees; the child responds with a faith which is both “proleptic”…and sacramental, and the final result of the process is that he is enabled to appropriate the benefits of Baptism, which are the salvation of the child, and the upbuilding of the kingdom…Wordsworth put the whole thing far more simply, when he stated that “The Child is the father of the Man”.\(^\text{106}\)

\(^{106}\) Osborn, 130-132.
In short, an infant may not be able to make the believer’s baptism so meaningful to many, but they may make a believer’s confirmation. The child, already made a member of Christ’s flock, may be raised by a community of believers, until they, as F.D. Maurice described, become conscious of their place in the Kingdom. Osborn would claim that baptism was the most important function in the vocation of a Priest.\textsuperscript{107}

The above quotation is an eloquent defense of infant baptism, describing the way in which the baptized child is raised in the midst of a Christian community, until that age when they might complete what was begun at their baptism, by being confirmed. The statistics gathered in the latter half of the twentieth century, however, could not be ignored. People still brought infants to be baptized. That these children would be raised in that Christian community of ‘Parish priest, parents, godparents’, and congregation was not so certain.

In the penultimate year of the twentieth century, Donald Bridge and David Phypers, a Baptist Minister and an Anglican Priest, respectively, chose to revise \textit{The Water That Divides}, a work which they originally published in 1977. Twenty years of parish ministry resulted in the extensive rewriting which Bridge and Phypers felt was necessary. In the end, ‘only four historical chapters remain almost unaltered’, the authors remarked.\textsuperscript{108} Here in a work published at the end of the century, were the pastoral issues which were evident over fifty years before in the findings of the committees formed in the 1940s and 1950s.

\textsuperscript{107} Osborn, 138.

\textsuperscript{108} Bridge and Phypers, 10.
Questions regarding private baptisms, and the baptisms of a sick or dying child were discussed, both in theory, and in practice. Neither author could be in favour of private baptisms, when this practice – in many cases – physically removed that sacrament away from the community of the Church. Although Bridge and Phypers could not support the notion that baptism was spiritually necessary in extremis, Phypers, the Anglican Priest, could not in good conscience refuse to baptize the child of any distraught parent. Indeed, Phypers could not bring himself to refuse baptism to anyone, not least of all because of the pastoral implications. How could any Priest, Minister, or Pastor know the pastoral implications, even if he or she might never become aware of the outcome? What right did anyone have to determine whether any couple, or any one parent was “Christian enough” to deserve baptism for their child? Phypers, in the original version of The Water that Divides, had advocated restrictions to infant baptism, but years of parish ministry had convinced him that the ‘pastoral approach to the situation is the only practical one in the Church of England today’.

Bridge, being a Baptist, needed no convincing regarding a believers’ baptism, and Phypers had little difficulty in acknowledging the validity of both infant and adult Baptism.

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109 The late Kenneth Stevenson described an incident which occurred when he was still a Deacon. He was called, very early one morning in February, to come to a hospital to baptize a child who had just been born prematurely and who was dangerously ill. The mother was still in recovery, and the father had not yet arrived, and so the only person present at the baptism were Stevenson himself, and the nurse who had called him. ‘On these occasions,’ Stevenson wrote, ‘one is not in the mood for being liturgically creative.’ The service was therefore simply performed, and, as Stevenson reached into the incubator to dab the baby’s head with water, he thought that ‘[t]he signing of the cross had a particular significance on that occasion which [he] would never forget.’ The child in question survived, but the baptism itself comforted the mother, the nurse, and – indeed – the person who had performed it. Did any of the people involved think about whether the child would be damned without baptism? Or did the sacrament of baptism become almost a form of blessing, or even extreme unction? Stevenson, 86-87.

110 Bridge and Phypers, 144-145.
The 1998 edition of *The Water that Divides* was an opportunity for inter-denominational discussion of the topic of baptism, both theologically, and pastorally. It was indicative of the increasing interest in ecumenism, and the ways in which various denominations might benefit from the knowledge and experiences gained by different people. In Bridge and Phypers’ work, the steadily increasing focus on the pastoral consequences of certain actions and policies may again be seen.

As the twentieth century came to a close, it was plain that the issues which had been discussed by theologians and parish Priests had not yet been resolved. The resolution that the doctrine of Original Sin was no longer official Church of England policy did not prevent some people from seeking baptism for their infants with an almost superstitious fervour. The Church of England had recognized an increase in child and adult baptisms, but infant baptisms were still considered the norm, and there was little training for clergy, or relevant literature to address the issue available. Although the theological aspects of the sacrament of baptism were still being discussed – particularly between different denominations – an increase in the pastoral questions involved led to an increased focus on the pastoral rather than the theological.

Did considering the perceptions of an increasingly un-Churched laity dilute the purpose and meaning of baptism? Or was baptism gaining a greater relevancy as its focus became less theological? What effect did the events and trends of the twentieth century have upon baptism in the first decade of the twenty-first century?
Epilogue: The Uncontrollable Process and the Unknowable Outcome

At the heart of Christian initiation is the picture of the life of faith as a journey. It is a powerful picture both in common human experience and in the great sweep of the story of God’s people. When the Church begins to take seriously the calling and identity implied in baptism it finds itself committed to a process that it cannot completely control and whose outcome it cannot know.

- The General Synod of the Church of England, 1995

What, then, was the effect of four hundred years of theological development within the Church of England on the sacrament of baptism? At the beginning of its development, the Church of England was the inheritor of nearly fifteen hundred years of Christian doctrine, theology, and practice. The earliest Anglicans chose to implement many aspects of both Medieval Latin, and Continental Protestant Christianity, but even in its initial years, the theologians, and the ordinary parish Priests of the fledgling Church of England rejected that which they found impractical and unpalatable.

It was in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, that the Church of England saw its greatest changes. The group of Anglo-Catholics who became known as Tractarians, including Edward Bouverie Pusey, held a position on baptism which incensed other Anglican figures such

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as Frederick Denison Maurice. The public epistolary debate between Pusey and Maurice in the 1830s was indicative of the deliberations between the High, and Broad or Low Church movements, and their emphasis on the theological and the pastoral approach respectively, although Maurice himself is hard to characterize as either High, or Broad, or Low. The infamous Gorham case of the next decade showed how deeply entrenched were the High and Low Church factions, the High Church now reinforced with a new rhetoric from the Tractarians. The controversy also encouraged some to attempt the promotion of Anglican unity, long before such similar efforts in the twentieth century.

If the nineteenth century saw great internal conflict in the Church of England, the twentieth century saw even greater external conflict. Two World Wars and numerous smaller conflicts, coupled with a variety of social changes, affected public perception of organized religion as much as an awareness of the Church of England’s internal discontent had done in the previous century.

There still remain differences of opinion. Some would argue about the meaning and validity of sprinkling as opposed to full immersion. An even greater number debate whether infant baptism is still desirable, as the exaggerated doctrine of Original Sin slowly loosens its hold on the consciousness - though perhaps not the unconscious - of Christians.

A practice of nearly two thousand years duration is a difficult one to overthrow, not least of all because the Church of England specifically, and the Anglican Communion in general, cannot fully agree upon what baptism affects. Indeed, this is the greatest impasse, not only
amongst Anglicans, but amongst other Christians as well, in a common understanding of the sacrament of baptism.

From the earliest days of its implementation, baptism was seen as a mark of the repentance of sins, and a sign of a renewed commitment to God. The mass-baptism which occurred on the day of Pentecost was also an act of initiation into a new reality. Neither scripture, nor early Christian documents, decisively tell modern scholars whether infants or young children were included in the initial Christian baptisms, and yet it seems strange that baptism was denied to the youngest Christians, and not their parents or families, especially when it was considered so imperative to the life of a Christian. It is possible that baptism was withheld until the candidate could at least speak for themselves, but by the time of Tertullian, it is certain that infants were included in the rite. The reasoning behind this inclusion supported the development of the distinctive doctrine of Original Sin in Latin Christianity, and when that doctrine was rejected, the practice continued out of habit, for lack of a better term.

In what direction, then, does the sacrament of baptism appear to be heading in this second decade of the twenty-first century? Whose opinions and practices are being retained, and whose discarded? Infants are still being baptized, both because of tradition, and based on a belief that the Christian life should be started as early as possible. As in the earliest days of the Christian Church, however, adults are also being baptized, both as converts to Christianity, and because their baptisms were delayed. It would seem that the practice of infant baptism will continue in conjunction with the baptism of older candidates.
Moreover, it appears that, as the inherited theological meaning of baptism recedes, a pastoral focus on baptism as an act of initiation, which brings new Christians into a relationship with God, has gained prominence. It may be argued that baptism has lost something by being influenced by a concern with the perceptions of new and previously un-Churched persons. That being said, a less theological focus, in which the effects of the act, rather that the act itself as a static moment in time, has a greater kinship with the attitudes of the earliest Christians, and may indeed be more culturally relevant to modern Christians as well.

Other religions, and other social groups as well, have acts of initiation, but there is no civil or secular equivalent to the sacrament of baptism. The baptismal service has grown increasingly public, and is increasingly performed for the benefit of both the Churched, and the un-Churched alike – very much like weddings or funerals. Clergy undertake marriage preparation for couples, but no such stipulation exists for funerals, which are not a sacrament, but rather a pastoral office. With a greater emphasis on the effects and future Christian life of a candidate, it would seem that baptism is coming to be regarded as both a sacrament and a pastoral office.

These pastoral offices are also occasions for education and evangelism, an opportunity for the un-Churched to observe the Christian life, and a chance for the Churched to contemplate their own Christian commitment. In a time where there exists great anxiety about declining attendance in an increasingly secular society, it might be argued that the Christian Church in general, and the Church of England specifically, as institutions under metaphorical siege, resemble more closely the early Christian Church, with its pressures and struggles, than it has in
centuries. If this is so, then a baptism which is open to people of all ages, as it seems to have been in the first few centuries of Church history, is what is needed, rather than a restricted, selective ceremony, to demonstrate the importance of the sacrament of baptism in the context of the Christian life. Pastoral need and theological development are irretrievably entwined, and those who have detailed method, and sought meaning in this act of Christian initiation have looked both to the recent, and to the distant past for inspiration.

The study of the development of baptism is doubly intriguing, as an examination of its progression, and as an observation of the way in which method and underlying theology have been repeated, both intentionally, and unintentionally, throughout history. Trends in method and development may be studied, even predicted, but the fact remains that, regardless of prediction or study, the meaning and effects of baptism can only be guessed at, being an act, and a process which welcomes the baptized into a Universal Church which, as yet cannot, and may never fully, agree upon a universal meaning for the sacrament and act of initiation.

For over a millennium, the study of baptism had been the study of the juxtaposition between Augustinian theology, and pastoral reality. Although many figures in Christian history, and in the present day, have focused on liturgical details such as immersion as opposed to dipping, or the employment of the sign of the cross, the issue of infant versusbeliever’s baptism is the matter which best represents the true impasse in the definition of the sacrament of baptism itself.

What is baptism, and what does it instigate in the life of a Christian? If Augustinian theology is slowly loosening its hold on Anglican concepts of Christian initiation, and fear for
the immortal soul of a child, or an adult is no longer the dominating motivation for the implementation of the baptismal rite, then what does baptism accomplish?

Historical evidence suggests that the Christian Church in general, and the Anglican Churches specifically, are coming full circle in baptismal theology and practice. If the earliest Christians considered baptism to be an act of initiation, and a door into the Christian life - as it seems they did, but without the Augustinian belief in a primeval Sin - then the earliest Christians, people of different ages, and different experiences in theistic beliefs, greatly resemble many modern baptismal candidates.

The Church of England, the inheritors of over a thousand years of baptismal theology, developed a stance on the sacrament which took scripture, tradition, and pastoral practice into account. The theological and social effects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries resulted in a self-awareness and an acknowledgement of the influence of public perception and congregational reality in the life of the Church. It cannot be denied that, as the concept of Original Sin and its implications fades from Anglican spirituality, a greater emphasis has been placed on baptism as an act of initiation, and the first step in the Christian life, rather than as a rescue mission, or an act undertaken in desperation and fear. In this way, baptism has ceased to become a one-time occurrence, but rather a unique and ongoing state, which the baptized carries into the future.
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