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## **"AN AMAZING WANT OF CHRISTIANITY": BISHOP SAMUEL WILBERFORCE & JOHN HENRY NEWMAN'S TENSE RELATIONSHIP**

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Abstract:	<p>This paper will examine the relationship between Samuel Wilberforce and John Henry Newman. The two priests had a common cause in their wish to see the Church of England rediscover its Catholic identity – which led them to work alongside one another at the beginning of the Oxford Movement – but quickly drifted apart because of their strong divergences on the nature of the Church and the place of Tradition, as well as Samuel Wilberforce's strong hostility to Rome. The paper also examines the place of Samuel Wilberforce's young brother in this relationship.</p>

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**“AN AMAZING WANT OF CHRISTIANITY”: BISHOP SAMUEL  
WILBERFORCE & JOHN HENRY NEWMAN’S TENSE  
RELATIONSHIP**

Jérôme Grosclaude

The aim of this article is to shed more light on Bishop Samuel Wilberforce and John Henry (later Cardinal) Newman through extensive references to their private and public writings, and to show how their relationship helps reaching a better understanding of this period and of these two great figures of Victorian Christianity.

To all intents and purposes, Samuel Wilberforce (1805-1878) was a peripheral figure in the life of John Henry Newman. The two men rarely met in person during the six years they were in Oxford together, and corresponded only intermittently for some eleven years (from 1834 to 1845)<sup>1</sup>. It is significant that in his very thorough 745-page biography of Cardinal Newman, Fr Ian Ker only made two references (amounting together to nine lines) to Samuel Wilberforce<sup>2</sup>.

However, John Henry Newman was to remain, maybe to the end, something like a bogeyman in S. Wilberforce’s mind and the symbol of the dreaded and hated Roman Catholic Church. One should not underestimate S. Wilberforce’s violent and extreme hatred of that Church, which he called the “evil schism” in his diary on 5/11/1854 concerning his brother Robert’s conversion<sup>3</sup>. He also wrote, after learning of his brother’s conversion:

I am debating whether contemporaneously with the announcement of your fall, I ought not to resign my bishopric, in order that without the reproach of remaining in the English Communion for the sake of my preferments, I may testify with what little

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<sup>1</sup> David Newsome, *The Parting of Friends: a study of the Wilberforces and Henry Manning* (London: Murray, 1966), 97 & 309

<sup>2</sup> Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman, A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 502 & 675.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Rawson Ashwell (†) & Reginald Garton Wilberforce, *Life of the Right Reverend Samuel Wilberforce, D. D., Lord Bishop of Oxford and afterwards of Winchester, with selections from his diaries and correspondence*, [hereafter *Life*] (London: John Murray, 1880-1882), 3 volumes, vol. II, 266.

strength is given me for the rest of my life against the cursed abominations of the Papacy<sup>4</sup>.

That the two men should not have known each other more may seem surprising since they began as virtual allies in the revival of Catholic ideas in the Church of England; and had in common the love and respect of Robert Isaac Wilberforce (1802-1857), Samuel's beloved older brother and a disciple of Newman.

However, I will show that, close as they were in their high view of the ministry (and particularly of the episcopate), Samuel Wilberforce and John Henry Newman parted ways over their conceptions of the Church, and of Tradition. We will first see how Samuel Wilberforce and John Henry Newman associated with the same people at Oxford in the 1820s and the 1830s (I); from the middle of the 1830s, Samuel Wilberforce's emphasis on the Protestant character of the Church of England, separated him more and more from John Henry Newman and his disciples (II); finally, we will look to the fundamental doctrinal differences which existed between John Henry Newman and (III).

## **I. MISSED OPPORTUNITIES?**

### **a) Similar influences**

It should first be noted that the two men were only a few years in Oxford (at Oriel College) at the same time. Samuel Wilberforce arrived at Oriel as an undergraduate in early 1823<sup>5</sup>; he graduated BA in the Michaelmas Term of 1826; the following year he left England to take an extended foreign tour of several months until November 1827<sup>6</sup>, he seems not to have come back to Oxford before December 1828 when he was ordained a deacon. Three months later he was in his first curacy, at Checkendon, 20 miles south from Oxford. He did come back to Oxford in the course of the next sixteen years, for specific

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<sup>4</sup> *Life*, vol. II, 261-262

<sup>5</sup> *Life*, vol. I, 26.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, 36.

reasons such as preaching sermons at Saint Mary's or to cast votes as a member of Convocation<sup>7</sup>. Significantly, he was not living in Oxford during the crucial years of 1833-1841 when the *Tracts for the Times* were published. He was dean of Westminster Abbey for six months before being appointed bishop of Oxford in November 1845.

By contrast, John Henry Newman, who was Samuel Wilberforce's senior by more than five years<sup>8</sup>, entered Trinity College in 1817 and was elected to an Oriel Fellowship in 1822. He was to remain in Oxford until 1843 when he resigned his position at Saint Mary's to live a quasi-monastic life at Littlemore. Two years later, Samuel Wilberforce was appointed bishop of Oxford, where he was to remain for the next 24 years. John Henry Newman himself did not come back to Oxford before 1876, and by that time, Samuel Wilberforce has been dead for two years.

During these few years, the two men do not seem to have met in any significant way: Samuel Wilberforce testified to this in 1834 when, then a young clergyman on the Isle of Wight, he wrote to Newman: "I wish that ... you would ... allow me to repair one of my great Oxford faults – that of neglecting the endeavor to obtain a more intimate acquaintance with you"<sup>9</sup>. He however invited John Henry Newman to "a few days' relaxation" on the Isle of Wight in July 1836<sup>10</sup> while his brother Robert was present (J. H. Newman declined<sup>11</sup>).

With more precision, John Henry Newman was to write in 1876 to Canon Arthur R. Ashwell who had written to ask him for any correspondence he

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<sup>7</sup> The Convocation is the legislative body of the University of Oxford, composed of "all the former student members of the University who have been admitted to a degree (other than an honorary degree) of the University" as well as current and retired office-holders of the University (cf. <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/organisation/history/oxford-glossary?wssl=1> (accessed 31.5.2019)).

<sup>8</sup> John Henry Newman was exactly 5 years, 6 months and two weeks older than Bishop Wilberforce.

<sup>9</sup> David Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 97.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Wilberforce to John Henry Newman, 26 July 1836, *LD* v, 332.

<sup>11</sup> John Henry Newman to Samuel Wilberforce, 4 August 1836, *ibid.*, v, 332.

might have had with the late Bishop of Oxford (of whom he was writing the biography):

As to any correspondence I have had in former years with Bishop Wilberforce, it never was much — but I will look out for you any letters of his I can find. He is the one out of the four brothers whom I never was intimate with. I knew him from the time he came up to Oxford in October (say) 1823, and we had friendly relations with each other from my affection for his brother Henry — but such kind interest as men so different in all respects might have in each other received a rude shock never recovered from on his preaching in the University Pulpit against Pusey's views of Baptism about 1836–38<sup>12</sup>.

However, Samuel Wilberforce, just like his brother Robert<sup>13</sup>, was quickly drawn towards the leaders of what was soon to be called Puseyism: as many of their contemporaries, the Wilberforce brothers had been seduced by John Keble's *Christian Year* (1827). Samuel Wilberforce remained all his life in awe of John Keble (1792-1866) whose word always had enormous weight with him – even when he had become a bishop. Samuel Wilberforce also deeply respected Pusey's learning and piety. In several letters, while lamenting what he saw as the Tractarian leaders' want of discretion, always took pains to observe that he respected their devotion and practice of Christianity<sup>14</sup>.

The Wilberforces came from an Evangelical household. It may be surprising that, out of William Wilberforce's four sons – of which three became clergymen –, three converted to Roman Catholicism and the only one who did not nonetheless side firmly with the High Church and was time and again accused of being a Papist in disguise. Until the end, Samuel continued to cherish the memory of his father, and did not see any contradiction in preaching

<sup>12</sup> John Henry Newman to Arthur Rawson Ashwell, 30 March 1876, *LD* xxviii, 46.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Wilberforce's younger brother, Robert Wilberforce, was a Fellow of Oriel College, and had been a tutor along with Newman and Hurrell Froude from 1826 to 1831. Originally closer to Pusey, Robert Wilberforce was drawn to Newman because of their common dedication to giving their Oriel tutorships a pastoral aspect (David Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 92 ff.).

<sup>14</sup> *Life*, vol. I, 217.

his father's Evangelical emphasis on private devotion and self-examination and *sola scriptura* – all elements often associated with Evangelicalism –, as well as adhering to a high view of the Church, of episcopacy and of the sacraments. In 1840, he noted in a lengthy letter to a fellow priest who had accused his latest collection of children's stories, *The Rocky Island*, of reflecting Tractarian beliefs, that his opinions has been moulded “in a far different school”: “they are those of my beloved father, as I could prove, were it needful, from many written records of his judgment as to the tenor of my ministry, of which, during his late years, he was a most kind, but a close observer<sup>15</sup>”.

John Henry Newman also came from an Evangelical background<sup>16</sup>, although he later identified his parents' Evangelicalism as merely “the national religion of England”, ‘Bible religion’, which ‘consists not in rites or creeds, but mainly in having the Bible read in Church, in the family, and in private<sup>17</sup>’; at fifteen, John Henry Newman had a conversion, in which he became acutely aware of the existence of God. He wrote that, before that, his general frame of mind had been a wish “to be virtuous, but not religious. There was something in the latter idea I did not like. Nor did I see the meaning of loving God<sup>18</sup>”. However, from the following year, he “fell under the influence of a definite creed, and received into [his] intellect impressions of dogma, which, through God's mercy, have never been effaced or obscured<sup>19</sup>”.

### **A lack of personal alchemy**

Despite these common elements (the love of Robert Wilberforce and Evangelical nurturing) Samuel Wilberforce never enjoyed nor seems to have actively sought being among the circle of disciples of John Henry Newman. It was not at the start because of any prejudice against John Henry Newman, but

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<sup>15</sup> *Life*, vol. I, 217.

<sup>16</sup> Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman*, 3-5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

probably because of a lack of personal alchemy, and also because of the conventions of the time which did not easily provide for circumstances in which an undergraduate would have been able to establish personal relationships with a Fellow and a College tutor. As a matter of fact, John Henry Newman dismissed Samuel Wilberforce in a private letter written in November 1838: “Samuel W[ilberforce] is so far from anything higher than a dish of skimmed milk that we can hope nothing from him<sup>20</sup>.” In another letter (written in September 1841), he dismisses him as the man “whom Froude and I have stigmatized as a humbug for many years<sup>21</sup>”.

Nonetheless, the two men could have been expected to be on the same side in the religious battles of the 1830s. On the general principles of the fight, they agreed on the importance of episcopacy. In his first published sermon, preached in 1833, Samuel Wilberforce urges priests to “prize at a higher rate that unbroken succession whereby those who ordained us are joined into Christ’s own Apostles”, as well as to avoid the “danger of quitting the high vantage ground of Apostolical authority to fight the battle out upon the doubtful level of Erastian principles<sup>22</sup>.”

The very same year, in September, the first of the *Tracts for the Times*, written by John Henry Newman, was published, emphasizing as it did the episcopal ministry in its conclusion:

A notion has gone abroad, that they can take away your power. They think they have given and can take it away. (...) Enlighten them in this matter. Exalt our Holy Fathers, the Bishops, as the Representatives of the Apostles, and the Angels of the Churches; and magnify your office, as being ordained by them to take part in their Ministry<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> John Henry Newman to J. W. Bowden, 6 November 1838, *LD* vi, 337.

<sup>21</sup> John Henry Newman to H. A. Woodgate, 22 September 1841, *LD* viii, 277.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Wilberforce, “Sermon XXII: The Apostolical Ministry: its difficulties, strengths and duties” (1833) in *Sermons Preached and Published on Several Occasions*, London: John W. Parker & Son, 1854, 27

<sup>23</sup> [John Henry Newman], “Thoughts on the Ministerial Commission”, *Tracts for the Times*, n° 1, 9 septembre 1833, [n. p.]



Samuel Wilberforce himself was reading the Tracts. On Good Friday (17/4) 1835, we find him noting in his journal: “Read Pusey’s tract on Fasting<sup>24</sup> – am convinced by it, if not of the duty, yet certainly of the expediency of conforming to the Rules of the Church on this point. I think it likely to be especially useful to me (...)”<sup>25</sup>. He was also (probably) distributing them as evidenced by a letter of June 1836 where he asks Newman: “will there be a fresh supply of Tracts on July 1? I wish to know that I may order”<sup>26</sup>.

However, when one turns to the practical aspects of the fight, one sees distance getting more and more obvious. The first skirmish was the Hampden affair, which started in late January 1836, when King William IV, acting on the recommendation of the Prime Minister, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount Melbourne, appointed Renn Dickson Hampden (1793-1868) to the vacant Regius Professorship of Divinity at Oxford University. Dr Hampden’s orthodoxy was questioned, mainly on the basis of his Bampton Lecture of 1832, and of his *Observations on Religious Dissent* (1834). For Owen Chadwick, Hampden’s writing was “dull” and his statements “often vague and obscure”<sup>27</sup>. Certainly, Samuel Wilberforce agreed with this, who observed jocularly in a 12/2/1836 letter to his brother Robert: “could we not pass a vote that Hampden should always preach in *Hebrew*?<sup>28</sup>”.

John Henry Newman, for his part, was scandalised at Hampden’s alleged latitudinarianism which led the prospective Professor, notably, to draw a distinction between the original text of Scriptures and the various dogmatic formulas introduced (or should one say “forced”?) into it over time<sup>29</sup>. John Henry Newman observed in a private letter written at the time: “there is no doctrine, however sacred, which he does not scoff at – and in his Moral

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<sup>24</sup> Probably Tract LXVI (13/4/1835).

<sup>25</sup> *Life*, vol. I, 83.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Standish Meacham, *Lord Bishop*, 67.

<sup>27</sup> Owen Chadwick *The Victorian Church, Part I: 1829-1859* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 116.

<sup>28</sup> *Life*, vol. I, 93.

<sup>29</sup> Owen Chadwick *The Victorian Church, Part I*, 116.

Philosophy he adopts the lowest and most grovelling utilitarianism as the basis of Morals – he considers it is a sacred duty to live to this world – and that religion by itself injuriously absorbs the mind<sup>30</sup>.”

Seventy-three residential fellows and tutors on the one hand, and nine heads of houses on the other signed petitions of protest. After many articles, petitions and angry letters, Hampden’s appointment was duly gazetted on 20 February, twelve days after it had unofficially become public knowledge<sup>31</sup>. Convocation then moved to limit as much as possible Hampden’s prerogatives: a motion of no confidence in Hampden passed by the Board of Heads was passed on 2 May (by 474 to 94)<sup>32</sup>. Samuel Wilberforce, who had pronounced Hampden’s rumored appointment in the same 12 February letter “disgusting<sup>33</sup>”, convened some of his colleagues in his rural deanery to draw up some sort of protest (however nothing seems to have come out of it)<sup>34</sup>. He was evidently present at Convocation in March to vote against Hampden and seized the opportunity to have some very long conversations with Newman upon several of the most mysterious parts of the Christian Revelation, the Trinity, &c., as well as upon some of the greatest practical difficulties to faith arising from the present torn state of Christendom; and it was really most sublime as an exhibition of human intellect when in parts of our discussions Newman kindled, and poured forth a sort of magisterial announcement in which Scripture, Christian antiquity deeply studied and thoroughly imbibed, humility, veneration, love of truth, and the highest glow of poetical feelings, all impressed their own pictures upon his conversation<sup>35</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, Samuel Wilberforce pronounced himself “delighted” at the meeting. John Henry Newman and Samuel Wilberforce found themselves

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<sup>30</sup> John Henry Newman to Simeon Lloyd Pope, 3 March 1836, *LD* v, 251.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 118.

<sup>32</sup> *Life.*, vol. I, 93.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, 93.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, 93.

<sup>35</sup> Samuel Wilberforce to Louisa Noel, 1 April 1836, *ibid.*, vol. I, 93.

allied in this fight, even though it was not only High Churchmen, but also Evangelicals<sup>36</sup>, who opposed Hampden's appointment. The Archbishop of Canterbury himself, William Howley, noted publicly in the House of Lords on 21/12/1837 that Hampden's appointment was the only Crown appointment he had ever objected to<sup>37</sup>.

That was really the high water mark of Samuel Wilberforce's opinion of John Henry Newman. Of this honeymoon between the two men, Samuel Wilberforce's Lent sermon of 1837 before the University bears testimony. Taking as its text Second Corinthians VI, 1<sup>38</sup>, exposed a view of Justification and Sanctification deeply tributary to John Henry Newman's *Lectures on Justification* published this very same year. Emphasizing the gifts of Baptism (in a manner perfectly consistent with the XXXIX Articles), he pointed the fearful dangers of sin after baptism by observing: "you may reclaim the sinner from open vice; you cannot renew him to holiness<sup>39</sup>".

However, as soon as 1838, the two men parted way, quite radically so.

So the two men, whose upbringing and intellectual itineraries and preoccupations should have brought them together however quickly drifted apart, mainly because of a lack of personal alchemy, but maybe more than that, because of a fundamental difference on doctrinal questions.

## II. SAMUEL WILBERFORCE: THE TRACTARIAN THAT WASN'T

### a) Doctrinal proximity

As many High Churchmen, Samuel Wilberforce was regularly – almost routinely – accused of being a Tractarian, or a Papist, or both, in disguise.

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<sup>36</sup> John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864), David J. DeLaura (ed.), London & New York City, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 1968, 61.

<sup>37</sup> *Parliamentary Debates. House of Lords Debates*, 21 December 1837, vol 39, c. 1402.

<sup>38</sup> "As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain" (NRSV).

<sup>39</sup> Samuel Wilberforce, "Sermon I: The Moral Consequences of Permitted Sin" in *Sermons preached before the University of Oxford in St Mary's Church in the years MDCCCXXXVII, MDCCCXXXVIII & MDCCCXXXIX* (London: James Burn, 1839), 10

However, even to the casual observer, it is striking how quickly Samuel Wilberforce parted ways with John Henry Newman (and the Tractarians in general). Take almost all the controversies that erupted in Oxford or nationally, and in which the Tractarians displayed their (for the time) peculiar churchmanship, and one will find Samuel Wilberforce taking the opposite side.

The decisive year was 1838: in a letter written to his friend Dr Walter Farquhar Hook on 29/1, Samuel Wilberforce clarified his stance on the Tractarians:

You do not, I hope, [think] that I belong to the school of the “Tracts for the Times”. I admire most highly the talents of some of those men: I revere far more their high and self-denying holiness and singleness of purpose: but I cannot agree with them in all their leading views of doctrine (e. g. Pusey’s, as far as I understand it, view of Sin after Baptism), and I often find in practical matters that I differ from them, on points, and in ways, (...) in which, as it seems to me, they are for enforcing an ancient practice at the expense of a still more ancient principle<sup>40</sup>.

The following month, in a belated reaction to Pusey’s Tracts on Baptism, Samuel Wilberforce preached on 18 February 1838 his first sermon as select preacher before the University<sup>41</sup>. The sermon was entitled “The Penal consequences of Sin” and was clearly intent on balancing the harsh view expressed in the sermon I mentioned previously and that he had preached barely a year before. In the published version of 1839, where they represent the first two sermons, Samuel Wilberforce took care to make clear that both texts “should be read together: for some expressions of the first, taken by itself, might seem to favour that view which the second is specifically intended to counteract<sup>42</sup>”. The second sermon, indeed, took as its text the conclusion of the parable of the prodigal son in which, he said, “all still speaks it the description

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<sup>40</sup> *Life*, vol. I, 115-116.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, 116.

<sup>42</sup> Samuel Wilberforce, *Sermons...*, v.

of the recovery of a fallen son of the Most High<sup>43</sup>”. He argued that, however great may be one man’s sin, the Heavenly Father’s love would still be greater<sup>44</sup>.

And even to the first acts of a sincere penitence, surely there are here promised some gracious marks of acceptance, as what shall be given to the returning sinner. Baptised, indeed, he cannot be afresh: but does he lose by that? No, truly; (...). [A]nd now, if he comes in sincerity and faith, the seal is still sure, and is for him ; his baptism is on him, fresh as when its waters glistened upon his infant brow ; he is received into his Father's house; and there the words of gracious promise, the blessed seals of holy eucharists, and the fresh-springing fountain of the Saviour's blood, these are sure and for him; and they are meant to carry to his soul the same certain consolation which the holy waters of baptism would be the outward means of bringing, if he came as a catechumen, instead of coming as a penitent<sup>45</sup>.

Such words were widely seen as rebuking Tract LXVII’s stringent view of sin after baptism, in which Pusey notably wrote (my emphasis):

For our modern system, founded, as it is, on the virtual rejection of Baptism as a Sacrament, confounds the distinction of grievous sin before and after Baptism, and applies to repentance, after falling from Baptismal grace, all the promises which, in Scripture, are pledged, not as the fruit of repentance simply, but as God's free gift in Baptism. Yet our reformers thought differently; for had their theology been like ours, there had been no occasion for an article on “Sin after Baptism” (Art. XVI), or for denying that “every such sin is sin against the Holy Ghost, and unpardonable”. It had been a matter of course. **The possibility or efficacy of such repentance I have not denied; God forbid: but that such repentance is likely, especially after a relapse, or that men, who have fallen, can be as assured of the adequacy of their**

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 40.

repentance, as they might have been of God's free grace in Baptism, daily experience, as well as the probable meaning of Scripture, forbid us to hope<sup>46</sup>.

John Henry Newman very rightly considered Samuel Wilberforce's sermon as directly aimed at Pusey's (and the Tractarians') conception of Justification. Five months later, on July 18<sup>th</sup>, John Henry Newman wrote to Samuel Wilberforce to decline any further contribution from him to the *British Critic*<sup>47</sup>:

To say frankly what I feel – I am not confident enough in your general approval of the body of opinions which Pusey and myself hold, to consider it advisable that we should cooperate very closely. (...) [A]nd though I feel we ought to bear differences of opinion in matters of detail, and work together in spite of them, it does not seem to me possible at once to oppose and to cooperate; and the less intentional your opposition to Pusey on a late occasion, the more impracticable does co-operation appear<sup>48</sup>.

Strangely enough, Samuel Wilberforce appeared very disappointed by the letter, and saw this refusal as a manifestation of petty party spirit<sup>49</sup>.

### **b) The Roads that don't lead to Rome**

Pusey's tract on Baptism appears to have been a decisive factor in S. Wilberforce's deserting the Tractarian cause. However, another important element appears to have been the publication, in January 1838, of Hurrell Froude's *Remains*, edited by J. H. Newman and J. Keble. S. Wilberforce had known Froude well, even though the latter was his senior by two and a half years: they had been undergraduates at Oriel together for a year in 1823-1824. S. Wilberforce appears to have been seeking Froude's company during his

<sup>46</sup> *Tract for the Times* n° 67 : *Scriptural views of Holy Baptism* (24/8/1835), § xiii

<sup>47</sup> He had previously written some reviews for them (Standish Meacham, *Lord Bishop*, 66).

<sup>48</sup> *Life*, vol. I, 125-126.

<sup>49</sup> Standish Meacham, *Lord Bishop*, 67.

time at Oxford, and it seems that Froude was the first person to whom he mentioned his desire to seek orders<sup>50</sup>. S. Wilberforce was all the more astounded by the book when it came out. His letters and diary come back again and again on the *Remains* which clearly startled him and deeply repelled him: in his diary, at the date of 25 March 1838, he writes thus: “Evening, read a little of Froude’s ‘Journals’. They are most instructive to me. Will exceedingly discredit Church principles, and show an *amazing* want of Christianity, so far. They are Henry Martin *unchristianized*<sup>51</sup>.”

The publication of Froude’s mostly private papers, in which he made remarks such as “The Reformation was a limb badly set—it must be broken again in order to be righted<sup>52</sup>” or “I believe I have a want of reverence, else I should not have got to hate them [the Reformers] so soon as I did<sup>53</sup>”, came as a shock to S. Wilberforce, and seems to have acted as an eye-opener for him.

We can probably date from this moment S. Wilberforce’s cutting himself off from the Tractarians, in whom he seems to have discerned a dangerous Rome-ward trend.

Starting from here, S. Wilberforce’s break with the Tractarians further materialized itself in the debate surrounding the building, in the Winter of 1838-9, of Oxford’s Martyr’s Memorial. The endeavor had been specifically contrived to embarrass the Tractarians: if they contributed, they would be seen as turning their backs on their beliefs; if they refused (as they ultimately did), they could be denounced as enemies of the Reformation and Papists in disguise. S. Wilberforce pronounced himself in favor of contributing in a letter to his brother Henry dated 29 November 1838.

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<sup>50</sup> *Life*, vol. I, 35-36.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, 120. This strange reference to the missionary priest Henry Martyn (1781-1812), who had died of fever in present-day Northern Turkey seems to indicate the vanity of human suffering offered in vain and for no purpose.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Hurrell Froude, *Remains of the Late Reverend Richard Hurrell Froude, M.A., Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford* (London: J. G. & F. Rivington, 1838), vol. II, 433.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, 435.

There is no doubt that the Memorial was indeed a party project (even though his main promoter, C. P. Golightly, was a traditional High Churchman), and his remark that the Tractarians should have contributed to a project implicitly intended at embarrassing them seems, as best, naive. S. Wilberforce's main argument in favor of such a move, however, was the need of showing unity in the defence of the Church – always a very potent argument in view.

Three years later (in the Autumn 1841), John Keble was to retire from the University's Chair of Poetry, and the vote by Convocation to choose his successor was scheduled for January 1842. Isaac Williams (1802-1865) was widely considered as being due to succeed him; however, his long association with the Tractarian leaders could hardly be passed over in the deeply polarized Oxford of the time: he had published many times in the *British Magazine* and the *British Critic* (the latter an obvious vehicle for Tractarian ideas), had been a curate to Newman and had contributed three Tracts between 1837 and 1840. Thus, an opponent was quickly found in the person of the Evangelical James Garbett (1802-1869); although he had published no poetry, contrary to Williams. Garbett's candidacy was helped by what some saw as the necessity of checking the Tractarians' progress. A letter by Pusey injudiciously attacking Garbett and explicitly supporting Williams turned the election into a referendum on Tractarianism in which the poetry credentials of the two candidates were becoming irrelevant.

This episode found Keble clearly differentiating himself from the Tractarians: he had at first intended to vote for Williams, on the basis of his poetry credentials and of "old friendship"<sup>54</sup>. In a letter to a friend of his written in November 1841 he curiously states that he had at least intended not to vote against him<sup>55</sup>. However, in his view, Pusey's letter had "altered the circumstances of the case": "I cannot hide from myself that now it *must* be,

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<sup>54</sup> *Life*, vol. I, 205.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, 205.



whatever one means, simply expressing publicly, aye or no, one's approbation of, or dissent from, the most *peculiar* features of the teaching of the Tract writers. With them, as you well know, I have never agreed<sup>56</sup>. The following month, he declined<sup>57</sup> to join the endeavor of 257 members of Convocation (including his friend Gladstone, Bishop Phillpotts of Exeter and Bishop Bagot of Oxford)<sup>58</sup> calling on both candidates to desist, as unjust to Garbett (whom he assessed as being most likely to win the election anyway). As a matter of fact, on 20/1/1842, an estimate of pledged votes was made which indicated that Garbett would indeed be elected (921-621), whereupon Williams retired from the contest and the former was elected unopposed one week later<sup>59</sup>. This debate led to strongly condemn the Tractarians in the various letters which he wrote at the time. Thus in his already quoted letter: "their views on many points (specially the Tract on Reserve) have appeared to me so dangerous, that, at all costs, I felt I must bear my feeble testimony against them in my Oxford sermons &c. &c. of late, also, they have seemed to me to advance at immense speed<sup>60</sup>". then went on to list his grievances against the Tractarians:

Newman's view of Justification; the language of Tract 90, the "British Critic" &c., as to Rome; the craving after unity through *some* visible centre; the saying that old Rome was that centre (...); the fearful doctrine of Sin after baptism, the whole tone about the Reformers, &c. &c.—all this has pained me and grieved me so entirely, that I have felt daily obliged more and more, from love of the truth as I saw it, from love to our Church, whose principles and very life I believe this teaching threatens, (...) to take on all occasions a position of more direct opposition to the School than I had of old thought necessary<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., vol. I, 205.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., vol. I, 207.

<sup>58</sup> Owen Chadwick *The Victorian Church, Part I*, 204.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>60</sup> *Life*, vol. I, 205.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., vol. I, 205.

From 1838, was thus affirming himself as a representative of a new High Church, distinct from the traditional High Church of, say, Bishop Henry Phillpotts of Exeter (1778-1869) (with its strong association with the Tory party) as it valued involving oneself in the work of the Commonwealth, while valuing the ordained ministry, and particularly the episcopate, and at the same time keeping jealously one's distance with Rome. was also quietly but staunchly attached to the Protestant identity of the Church of England.

Apart from the possible question of purely personal alchemy (or lack of it) between John Henry Newman and , I previously noted that the differences between the two men was due to doctrinal differences. I think we can trace the root of these differences of viewpoints to the two men's visions of the Church.

### III. WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

#### a) The Episcopate

I will not enter here in a detailed dissertation on what the Tractarians stood for or against; others have done it much more brilliantly than I could. Let me however remind the reader, if it were necessary, that the Tractarians put much emphasis on the Episcopal ministry and the apostolic succession. Even before the first Tract was published, William Palmer of Worcester College wrote:

The bishops who rule the churches of these realms were validly ordained by others, who by means of an unbroken spiritual descent of ordinations derived their mission from the apostles, and from our Lord. (...) Our ordinations descend in an unbroken line from Peter and Paul, the apostles of the circumcision of the Gentiles. (...) The true and orthodox bishops and pastors teach those doctrines which the catholic church has taught in all ages from the beginning<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> William Palmer, *Origines Liturgicae, or Antiquities of the English Ritual* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1832), vol. II, 249 & 253.

Palmer would make the exact same claim in the only tract he authored, Tract 15 (13/12/1833), entitled *On the Apostolical Succession in the English Church*<sup>63</sup>.

The first tract, authored by John Henry Newman, explicitly addressed to priests of the Church of England, adopted an energetic tone to remind them of what the apostolic succession was, as well as the fact that the doctrine was explicitly professed by the Church of England:

[E]very one of us believes this. I know that some will at first deny they do; still they do believe it. Only, it is not sufficiently practically impressed on their minds. They *do* believe it; for it is the doctrine of the Ordination Service, which they have recognised as truth in the most solemn season of their lives<sup>64</sup>.

John Henry Newman, for one, had an exalted view of the Episcopal office. In his pamphlet, *The Restoration of Suffragan Bishops* (1835), he argued that the clergy were not “mere instruments and adjuncts of the State<sup>65</sup>” but “those who are by office guides of conduct, arbiters in moral questions, patterns of holiness and wisdom, and not the mere executive (sic) of a system which is ordered by prescribed rules, and can go on without them<sup>66</sup>”. He adds that the bishop was really “the centre and emblem of Christian unity, the bond of many minds, and the memento of Him that is unseen<sup>67</sup>”.

Later on, John Henry Newman developed the “*Branch theory*”:

The Catholic Church in all lands had been one from the first for many centuries; then, various portions had followed their own way to the injury, but not to the destruction, whether of truth or of vanity. These portions or branches were mainly three : - Greek,

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<sup>63</sup> [William Palmer], “On the Apostolical Succession in the English Church”, *Tracts for the Times*, n° 15, 13/12/1833, § 2.

<sup>64</sup> [John Henry Newman], “Thoughts on the Ministerial Commission”, *Tracts for the Times*, n° 1, 9/9/1833, [n. p.]

<sup>65</sup> John Henry Newman, *The Restoration of Suffragan Bishops Recommended* (London: J. G. & F. Rivington, 1835), 26.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

Latin, and Anglican. Each of these inherited the early undivided Church *in solido* [that is to say: as an undivided block]<sup>68</sup>.

The three branches had kept the faith handed down by the Apostles, and particularly the apostolic succession, which warranted the validity of the sacraments. For him, as he was to develop in March 1837 in *Lectures on the Prophetical Office of the Church viewed relatively to Romanism and Popular Protestantism*, the position of the Church of England was unique because it was mid-way between the extremes of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, both poles containing in themselves elements of truth (the Trinity, for example) and of corruption (the place of the pope for one, the negation of apostolic succession for the other). This theory would be developed further by William Palmer of Worcester College in *A Treatise on the Church of Christ* (1838).

with such a high view of the episcopate, of apostolic succession and of monarchical episcopate. He always asserted the legitimacy of the Church of England against all those – Protestants and Catholics alike – who saw it as only one confession among many and/or an Erastian creature of the Tudors' Caesaropapism. He insisted, on the contrary, on the uninterrupted continuity between the Apostles' Church and the then Church of England: as I noted, one of his first sermons had included a call to his fellow priests to “prize at a higher rate that unbroken succession Whereby those who ordained us are joined into Christ's own Apostles”.

Even before being himself a bishop, saw the episcopate as the fundamental ministry, as the cornerstone of the Church. On the subject of the colonial expansion of the Church, he immediately and constantly supported the creation of Colonial bishoprics. For him, as he argued, in a sermon in May 1837, the Church had the power to appoint and to ordain bishops without a

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<sup>68</sup> *Apo.*, 65-66.

royal mandate for lands outside the British Isles<sup>69</sup>. According to Standish Meacham, “Wilberforce grew to believe that without power to appoint missionary bishops of its own, the Church would be bound in an unseemly – and indeed an unholy – way to the State<sup>70</sup>”. In 1853, he piloted through the House of Lords a (Church) Missionary Bishops Bill ostensibly drafted by the Archbishop of Canterbury John Bird Sumner, but in reality prepared by himself<sup>71</sup>, which would have allowed the Church to launch missions to the heathens with English bishops consecrated in England but without the royal mandate. The Bill was adopted by the Upper Chamber but was thrown out in the Commons because of Low Church fears that S. ’s hidden agenda was to take over Evangelical missions to force High Church bishops and ideas upon them and their flocks<sup>72</sup>.

In his enthusiasm for the Episcopal institution, S. Wilberforce even initially supported the Jerusalem Bishopric in October 1841: King Frederick William IV of Prussia and Queen Victoria jointly decided, on the advice of Baron von Bunsen (the Prussian ambassador to the UK from 1840 to 1854 and a close friend to the Prussian King) to establish a Protestant Bishopric in Jerusalem, in order for Protestantism to stand its ground in the Holy City in front of the Latin and Greek Orthodox Patriarchs. This was a way for England (and to a lesser extent Prussia, which was not a colonial power) to gain a foothold in a region, still under Ottoman control, which was at the center of the attention of the European powers. The bishop of Jerusalem was supposed to be nominated in turn by each of the two countries, and to adhere to the XXXIX Articles and to the Augsburg Confession. The scheme caused alarm among the Tractarians, by appearing to dissolve the sanctity of the Episcopal office in an official marriage with non-episcopal Lutheranism. It also looked as an affront to the Catholic Churches which were already present in the Holy

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<sup>69</sup> Standish Meacham, *Lord Bishop*, 252.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 252; and *Life*, vol. II, 202-203.

City<sup>73</sup>. John Henry Newman wrote privately that the plan was “to collect a communion out of Protestants, Jews, Druses and Monophysites, conforming under the influence of our war-steamers, to counterbalance the Russian influence through Greeks, and the French through Latins<sup>74</sup>”. S. Wilberforce was quietly but certainly welcoming, for Baron Bunsen (whom he saw frequently when at Court) had assured him that the aim of the scheme was to make Prussians accustomed to episcopacy, prior to its introduction in the Lutheran Church: this is how he described it to his brother Robert: “a truly noble plan by which, I trust, on a back current, Episcopacy will flow into Prussia<sup>75</sup>”.

So shared with the Tractarians an exalted view of the episcopate, which clearly was part of the *esse* of the Church Catholick. However, clearly differentiated himself from the Tractarians by his vision of what the Church was, and his belief that they transferred to the Church the adoration due to Christ himself.

#### **b) The Church instead of Christ**

I’ve already mentioned ’s debt to his beloved father’s Evangelicalism. Indeed, sermons were often intended to reminding his hearers of the main tenets of Evangelical religion: the believer’s closeness to God, the importance of personal holiness and a call to private conscience<sup>76</sup>. The believer was to aim at reaching or comforting a personal and loving relationship with his God who had given his only son in sacrifice for the remission of the sinner’s faults. So to follow Christ was not merely a philosophical or intellectual choice but a thorough personal commitment involving every aspect of one’s life.

While emphasizing these traditionally Evangelical themes, put forward the necessity – also insisted on by High Churchpeople – of putting this spiritual

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<sup>73</sup> David Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, 289.

<sup>74</sup> Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman*, 235.

<sup>75</sup> *Life*, vol. I, 198.

<sup>76</sup> Standish Meacham, *Lord Bishop*, 80.

journey and this personal union with God inside the greater framework of the visible Church. As mentioned earlier, the apostolic succession he saw as a gift from God bringing, without any doubt, the power of the Holy Spirit to the Christian Community endowed with such a ministry: inside this community, led by a clergy whose origins could be traced back to the Apostles themselves, the believer could and would find God present. For , the believer could not safely be his own guide, nor simply rely on his sole conscience, without running the risk of falling into what called in 1831 “*self-idolizing*”<sup>77</sup>. Self-idolizing would also be thwarted by the believer’s diligent reading of the Bible, which he must acknowledge as the only rule of faith.

However, while holding a high view of the Church, he differed from the Tractarians’ view of the Church on two points: Tradition, and what he saw as their deification of the Church. Both points he mentions briefly in a letter to his brother Robert dated 2/2/1842 (my emphasis):

The two leading errors seem to me to be (i) **the authority as to teaching with which they invest the early Fathers**, which implies the greater *purity* of celibacy, that fearful lie which has destroyed the sanctity of married life and polluted every female mind in Italy, to say nothing of other consequences; (2) their craving after a visible centre of unity, from **a belief that the Church is to us instead of an absent Christ, instead of a means of His true presence**<sup>78</sup>.

was not actually hostile to Tradition, even though the main authorities he regularly quoted (apart from the Bible) were Hooker and Andrewes<sup>79</sup> whom he seems to have seen more as excellent exegetes than as original thinkers. In a letter dated 18/5/1842, he writes:

I believe the Bible, and the Bible only, to be the rule of faith; and I believe, that to bring this strongly and sharply out is a matter of the greatest moment. I think the *whole*

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<sup>77</sup> *Life*, vol. I, 83.

<sup>78</sup> *Life*, I, 213.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 69.

school of the Tract writers fail here: that they speak, and seem to love to speak, ambiguously of the necessity of Tradition, &c. &c. – the tendency of all which (even if they do *not* mean what is positively erroneous) must be, I think, and is, (1) to lead men to undervalue God's word (...); (2) to lead men to regard the Romish view of Tradition without suspicion and dread<sup>80</sup>.

John Henry Newman of course laid down an entirely different vision of the place of Tradition. In *Lectures on the Prophetical office of the Church*, he wrote: "We agree with the sectaries around us so far as this, (...) to believe that our creed can be proved entirely, and to be willing to prove it solely from the Bible; but we take this ground only in controversy, not in teaching our own people or in our private studies<sup>81</sup>". "We [Anglo-Catholics] rely on Antiquity to strengthen such intimations of doctrine as are but faintly, though really, given in Scripture<sup>82</sup>", contrary to Protestantism, which "considers it a hardship to have anything clearly and distinctly told it in elucidation of Scripture doctrine, an infringement of its right of doubting, and mistaking and labouring in vain<sup>83</sup>". Elsewhere in the same book, Newman asserts: "Catholicity, Antiquity, and consent of Fathers, is the proper evidence of the fidelity or Apostolicity of a professed Tradition<sup>84</sup>."

As for the deification of the Church, a reproach already introduced in his 2/2/1842 letter to his brother, he was to come back to it in another letter to his brother Robert (dated 18/12/1843):

I do not agree with you as to the – in fact – impossibility of substituting the Church for Christ. Indeed as I speak of it, I believe it to be *the* prominent danger, amongst the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., I, 214.

<sup>81</sup> John Henry Newman, *Lectures on the Prophetical office of the Church, viewed relatively to Romanism and Popular Protestantism*, (London: J. G. & F. Rivington, 1838), 36.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 63.



many, of the Tract system. The Church, I say, separated from the head is substituted for Him!<sup>85</sup>

Three years later, in December 1845, observed, about John Henry Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*:

Newman's book is wonderfully clever and full of Ecclesiastical history, but the most deeply sceptical book I ever read. It is in fact an assertion from beginning to end that all religion is so uncertain except the *fact* of there being the Church that we can only go to its living authority to convince us there is a God at all<sup>86</sup>.

Of course, by the time wrote this, John Henry Newman had joined the Roman Catholic Church and an actual gulf now existed between them.

In fact, on both counts, and under the harshness of the denunciation, we have the impression that lamented that the Tractarians should go too far in what he believed to be the right direction. This is how I, for one, reads 's mixed description of the Oxford movement in July 1869, when reviewing Sir John Taylor Coleridge's biography of John Keble: "a great religious movement, which is still more than any other affecting for good, or for evil, or for both, the present and future tone of the Church of England<sup>87</sup>".

## CONCLUSION

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century biographers of Samuel Wilberforce have tended to interpret life as a struggle for true High Church principles against the Romanizing tendencies of the Tractarians and their heirs. This is basically the thesis of George William Daniell's *Bishop Wilberforce* (1891) who presents the Bishop as "the remodeller of the episcopate", a man aware

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<sup>85</sup> Standish Meacham, *Lord Bishop*, 90.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-91.

<sup>87</sup> "Keble's Biography", 231.

that “Rome is kept afar off by the development, and not by the terror-stricken suppression, of the true Catholic idea<sup>88</sup>”. The third biography of the Bishop of Oxford, John Charlton Hardwick’s *Lawn Sleeves: A Short Life of Samuel Wilberforce* (1933), is full of bitter attacks against the Oxford Movement which, in 1933, was then exactly 100-year old.

And indeed S. Wilberforce’s bitterness against the Tractarians was clearly influenced by his dismay at seeing honorable men promoting much-needed forgotten truths about the Church while (in his view) mixing them up with Romanizing tendencies.

But wasn’t there something else at play when it comes to his actual relationship with John Henry Newman? Wasn’t there something like jealousy in seeing his dear brother getting so close to John Henry Newman? At any rate, the year 1851 saw an actual struggle by proxy between Newman and S. Wilberforce, whose object was the soul of Robert Wilberforce. On 12/9/1854, writes to his brother (replying to the letter in which he had announced his conversion): “I see that originally J. Newman obtained a great power over your mind; that since, through your great humility, Manning, by his great subtlety of intellect, and Henry by his unceasing repetition of argument, have overmastered your own far superior understanding<sup>89</sup>”.

Was there, at the bottom of all of this, bitterness at not having fully understood Robert, whom he called in a letter written to him some time before his conversion: “my brother and friend, -- my friend, guide and aid since boyhood<sup>90</sup>”? It is difficult to judge, of course, but there may well have been, at the bottom, of this strained relationship between John Henry Newman and , the unhappy love of a disappointed brother.

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<sup>88</sup> George William Daniell, *Bishop Wilberforce* (London: Methuen & Co., 1891), 28.

<sup>89</sup> *Life*, II, 262.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 253.