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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

**Isaac Williams (1802-1865), the Oxford Movement and the High Churchmen:
A Study of his Theological and Devotional Writings.**

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Award date:
2009

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**Isaac Williams (1802-1865),
the Oxford Movement and the
High Churchmen:
A Study of his Theological and
Devotional Writings.**

By,

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Ph.D., Bangor University (2009)

Summary

Isaac Williams was one of the leading members of the Oxford Movement during the 1830-60s and made a valuable contribution to the movement through his published poetry, tracts, sermons and biblical commentaries which were written to help propagate Tractarian principles. Although he was active in Oxford as a tutor of Trinity College during the 1830s, Williams left Oxford in 1842 after failing to be elected to the university's chair of poetry. He served successively as perpetual curate of the Gloucestershire parishes of Bisley and Stinchcombe, where he died in 1865. It is perhaps because Williams withdrew from Oxford in 1842 and also because his contribution to the Oxford Movement centred on his literary works rather than on being directly involved in its more practical aspect, that he has tended to be overlooked by historians. This thesis will consider the significance of Isaac Williams' contribution to the Oxford Movement on the basis of his published works. Whereas previous works on Isaac Williams have examined his significance as a historical figure, this study will focus on his approach to the theological issues with which the Oxford Movement was concerned, specifically, the interpretation of scripture, the sacraments, aspects of High Church/Tractarian piety, the relationship between church and state, the authority of tradition and the apostolic succession. While considering Williams' approach to these issues, this thesis will also examine whether his theological thinking was at one with that of the Tractarians generally or whether it was more typical of that of the High Church tradition which preceded the Oxford Movement and continued to exist alongside it.

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Abbreviations

L.P.L.	Lambeth Palace Library
L.B.V.	Liddon Bound Volume
P.H.	Pusey House Library
N.L.W.	National Library of Wales
G.R.O.	Gloucestershire Records Office

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the loving memory of Emrys Davies, my late grandfather, and of Fr. Frank Maher S.J., a much valued priest and friend.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who has helped me during the course of my doctoral research and during the preparation of this thesis. I am especially indebted to the Arts and Humanities Research Council whose generous financial support has made it possible for me to carry out this research.

I am also grateful to the staff of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at Bangor University for their support and encouragement during the course of my studies, and in particular Professor Densil Morgan and Dr. Robert Pope who have supervised my thesis and offered helpful guidance and support. I would also like to thank Professor Donald Allchin for his continued interest, advice and enthusiasm in the subject of my research over the last year.

During the course of my research I have had to make a number of study visits to various libraries and archives and am grateful to the staff of St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, the National Library of Wales, the Lambeth Palace Library and Pusey House, Oxford, for their support and assistance. I am particularly grateful to Ms. Patsy Williams of St. Deiniol's, Dr. Huw Walters of the National Library of Wales, Dr. Barry Orford of Pusey House and Ms Clare Brown of Lambeth Palace for their help with various aspects of my research. I am also indebted to Fr. Conleth O'Hara, Fr. Daniel Donovan and the Passionist Fathers at St. Joseph's Retreat, Highgate, for providing me with a place to stay when I needed to make frequent research visits to London. For this I am very grateful. I would also like to thank Rev. Elfryn Jones and the North Wales Baptist College for providing accommodation during the course of my research and also during the writing-up period.

I would also like to thank Mrs Pat Jones who provided me with a translation of Isaac Williams' Latin poem *Ars Geologica* and Canon Dewi Thomas who assisted with some of the translations from the works of the Welsh-speaking Tractarians quoted in chapter ten.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my family Mum, Dad, Lisa and Mamgu, and my friends for their unwavering encouragement and support during the course of my research without which this work would never have been completed.

Author's Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed (candidate) Date

Statement 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction are clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Statement 2

I hereby give my consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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Introduction

Isaac Williams was born in 1802 in Cardiganshire and was brought into contact with the Oxford Movement through his friendship with John Keble, Hurrell Froude and John Henry Newman. Between 1833 and 1842 Williams served as Newman's curate at the university church of St. Mary's, Oxford, and contributed to the Tractarian cause as the author of *Tracts 80* and *87* on "Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge" and of *Tract 86* on the Prayer Book. Despite leaving Oxford in 1842 in order to assist as curate of the rural parish of Bisley in Gloucestershire, Williams continued to contribute to the movement as the author of voluminous works of poetry, biblical commentaries and published sermons, all of which sought to teach and propagate Tractarian principles.¹

Despite making a definite contribution to the Oxford Movement, Isaac Williams has been the subject of only three published volumes. The first of these was his own *Autobiography* which was published by his brother-in-law, Sir George Prevost, in 1892.² This is an important work since it was the first history of the Oxford Movement to be written from the perspective of someone who wished to portray John Keble, rather than Newman, as its main leader.³ The *Autobiography* does have to be treated with some caution, however, since it was not originally written for publication but for Williams' children in order to explain to them the importance of the religious movement in which their father had been involved.⁴

The most complete biography of Isaac Williams is O.W. Jones' *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, published in 1971.⁵ This work successfully demonstrates that Williams made a fundamental contribution to the Oxford Movement rather than merely being someone on its periphery.⁶ In the preface to his work Jones claimed that he wished to "correct the impression . . . that Isaac Williams was little more than a shy and retiring disciple of John Keble", and to demonstrate that he "played a distinctive

¹ Skinner S.A., "Williams, Isaac (1802-1865)", Matthew H.C.G. and Harrison B., *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (volume 59) (Oxford, 2004), 213-6

² Prevost G. (editor), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams B.D., Fellow and Tutor of Trinity College, Oxford* (London, 1892)

³ R.W. Church's classic account of the movement in *The Oxford Movement: Twelve Years, 1833-45*, for example, presents Newman as the only real leader of the Oxford Movement, claiming that his conversion effectively brought it to an end.

⁴ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, preface

⁵ Jones O.W., *Isaac Williams and his Circle* (London, 1971)

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-4

part” in the Tractarian Movement.⁷ An important element of Jones’ work is his frequent reference to manuscript evidence drawn from Williams’ correspondence which supplements the material found in the *Autobiography*. However, Jones’ work is open to criticism on a number of points. Although his references suggest that he was familiar with the manuscript material relating to Williams, it is not clear that he was equally familiar with all of Williams’ published volumes. The fact that a number of his later works are not frequently cited suggests that Jones may have missed some important material which could have added to the value of his study. His bibliography is also lacking in precision which can make it difficult for the reader to follow up references.

Most disappointing about Jones’ work, however, is the lack of space which is given to the discussion of Williams’ scriptural commentaries and poetry. Although references to both are made throughout the book, Jones confines his specific consideration of them to a relatively short chapter at the end of the book.⁸ This tends to suggest that Williams’ writings are treated by Jones as something of an afterthought rather than as essential sources to give account of the subject’s thought and considered theological position. Jones also failed to cite or quote from two important articles which Williams wrote for the Tractarian periodical *The British Critic* in 1839 and 1840, although his list of Williams’ published works makes it clear that he was aware of their existence.⁹ These two articles were book reviews of Charles Forster’s *The Apostolical Authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews* and John Keble’s, *The Psalter, or Psalms of David; in English Verse*. Although primarily reviews of works by other authors these articles do help to highlight important points about Williams’ view of the interpretation of the Bible, the Psalms and his understanding of the nature of poetry which could have enhanced Jones’ study.

The Doctrine of the Church in the Writings of Isaac Williams was initially written by Mary K. Williams, Isaac Williams’ great grand-daughter, as a Master’s dissertation for the University of London¹⁰ and published privately in 1983. Although her work does not make use of manuscript material as extensively as that of O.W. Jones, it does refer in a number of places to family tradition which helps to give a

⁷ Ibid., ix

⁸ Ibid., 145-162

⁹ Ibid., 171-2

¹⁰ Williams M.K., *The Doctrine of the Church in the Writings of Isaac Williams* (St. Albans, 1983)

clearer picture of Isaac Williams as an individual.¹¹ She also grappled with the theological implications of her great-grandfather's writings more than Jones did. Unfortunately the book is rather short and, although Mary Williams refers to a number of Isaac Williams' less popular works, its brevity means that its consideration of his work as a whole is somewhat limited.

Apart from these books, Isaac Williams has also been the subject of a number of articles and chapters within larger works. R.W. Church dedicated a section to him in his classic account *The Oxford Movement: Twelve Years, 1833-45*. While providing an outline of Williams' upbringing and involvement in the movement, Church's work clearly intended to emphasise Newman's leadership of the movement and therefore minimises the importance of other people's contribution to it. Church interpreted Williams' emphasis on reserve, for example, as making him little more than a traditional churchman who was "suspicious of excitement and "effect", suspicious of the loud-talking religious world".¹² While this was perhaps true to an extent, Church overstated the point by claiming that the spirit of reserve in Williams meant that his role in the movement was little more than an example of practical piety, and that,

he would have been quite content with [the Movement's] silent working and its apparent want of visible success. He would have been quite content with preaching simple homely sermons on the obvious but hard duties of daily life, and not seeing much come of them; with finding a slow abatement of the self-indulgent habits of university life, with keeping Fridays with less wine in common room.¹³

That such an impression of Isaac Williams has been perpetuated within Tractarian historiography is underlined by an essay on him published by *The Catholic Literature Association* to mark the centenary of the Oxford Movement. This claimed that Williams' main contribution to the movement lay in "the witness of a slow-moving common sense, coupled with an unsleeping concern for practical morality".¹⁴ This misleading impression of Isaac Williams as little more than a reserved and conservative churchman was challenged to some extent at the end of the nineteenth century in a review of his autobiography published in *The Church Quarterly Review*. This article made a more balanced assessment of Williams' role in the Oxford Movement, claiming that,

¹¹ Ibid., 81

¹² Church R.W., *The Oxford Movement: Twelve Years, 1833-1845* (London, 1932 edition), 70-1

¹³ Ibid., 74

The name of Mr. Isaac Williams may not have been so prominently before the public as that of some of those who worked with him, but his personal influence was very direct and important, whilst his writings both in prose and verse have been very widely read, and some of them still retain their position amongst the works of a devotional character that are valued.¹⁵

The most comprehensive article on Isaac Williams to have appeared in recent years is that by S.A. Skinner published in 2004 in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.¹⁶ This brings together a number of sources, including the manuscript sources employed by O.W. Jones, in order to provide an accurate outline of Williams' life and contribution to the Oxford Movement. Much less reliable is an article on Williams published in *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales* in 1998.¹⁷ Another article on Williams was written in Welsh by A. Tudno Williams and published in 1983 in *Taliesin*,¹⁸ though this adds little information to that contained in O.W. Jones' work.

Since the 1970s a number of scholars have attempted to deal specifically with Isaac Williams as a poet. Barbara Dennis, for example, published an article entitled "Isaac Williams, Priest and Poet" in *The Anglo-Welsh Review* in 1979.¹⁹ This examines his relationship with John Keble and the influences on his poetry. It also quotes from his most popular works and points to the inspiration which the landscape of rural Cardiganshire gave to some of his verse. The connection between Williams' poetry and Wales was also the subject of a paper entitled "Isaac Williams of Cardiganshire – The Christian Poet – An Introduction to his Nature Poetry" published by Clare Taylor in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* in 1986.²⁰ Taylor considers how Williams made use of the imagery of nature through poetic reflections on the Welsh countryside and the sea as a means of reflecting upon theological themes.

¹⁴ Anon., "Isaac Williams" (London: The Catholic Literature Association, 1933), 1 quoted from *Project Canterbury Website* (<http://anglicanhistory.org/bios/iwilliams.html>, accessed 11/9/08)

¹⁵ Anon., "Article IV – Isaac Williams and the Oxford Movement", *The Church Quarterly Review* (Volume 34, July, 1892), 332 quoted from *Project Canterbury Website* (<http://anglicanhistory.org/williams/cqr1892.html>, accessed 11/9/08)

¹⁶ Skinner, "Williams, Isaac (1802-1865)", 213-6

¹⁷ Anon., "Williams, Isaac (1802-65)", Stephens M. (editor), *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales* (Cardiff, 1998), 794-5 - For example, the author of the article claims that, after leaving Oxford in 1842, Williams "took a curacy under Keble's brother at Bisley, Yorkshire". Bisley is, in fact, in Gloucestershire.

¹⁸ Williams A.T., "Isaac Williams", *Taliesin* (Volume 46, 1983), 57-64

¹⁹ Dennis B., "Isaac Williams, Priest and Poet", *The Anglo-Welsh Review* (No. 65, 1979), 80-89

²⁰ Taylor, "Isaac Williams of Cardiganshire – The Christian Poet", 115-126

The most thorough consideration of Williams' poetry is to be found in G.B. Tennyson's *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode* published in 1981. In his book on Tractarian poetics Tennyson considers the poetry of John Keble and John Henry Newman before devoting a chapter to that of Isaac Williams. This focuses on four of Williams' most popular volumes of poetry, *Thoughts in Past Years*, *The Cathedral*, *The Baptistery* and *The Altar* in order to demonstrate how his use of poetic analogy was developed in each,²¹ arguing that Williams' best poetry is that in which imagery of the natural world is used to evoke reflection on spiritual truth. In assessing Williams' poetry, Tennyson concluded that some of it was of the highest order, rivalling even that of John Keble in its ability to give the reader "a genuine aesthetic experience" of the presence of God in the created world.²²

Although each of these works helps to shed light on our understanding of Isaac Williams, none of them has provided a detailed examination of his understanding of the theological issues with which the Oxford Movement was involved. The primary aim of this thesis will be to fill this gap. After considering the significance of Williams' tracts on reserve, his poetry and biblical commentaries, an analytical consideration of his writings will be provided by drawing on evidence from his works in order to demonstrate how he understood the nature of the sacraments, traditional aspects of High Church/Tractarian piety, the relationship between church and state, the importance of tradition as a source of authority and the doctrine of the apostolic succession. While outlining how Isaac Williams approached each of these issues his understanding will also be put into context by examining whether his thinking was closer to that of his Tractarian colleagues or to the pre-Tractarian and contemporary High Churchmen. The last chapter of the thesis will consider Isaac Williams' contribution to the Oxford Movement in Wales.

The High Church tradition in the Church of England can be traced back to the 1650s when the label was first used by the Puritan Richard Baxter to describe Richard Hooker. Although the term can be seen as referring a number of different groups within the Church of England there was a general consensus among High Churchmen before the 1830s which distinguished them from other parties within the Church of England. Peter Nockles claimed that High Churchmen tended to emphasise the importance of the apostolic succession and episcopacy, valued tradition as reflected in

²¹ Tennyson G.B., *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode* (London, 1981), 148-172

²² *Ibid.*, 149

the Prayer Book, the creeds, the catechism and in the patristic writings as a means of interpreting scripture, and placed a great emphasis on baptism and the eucharist as means of sacramental grace. High Churchmen also upheld the importance of fasting and self-denial and believed in the importance of the established relationship between church and state.²³

This High Church tradition existed in different forms in the Church of England from the time of the Reformation and reflected a tendency to uphold the connection between the pre and post-Reformation Church of England by recognising its catholic heritage, though separated from the authority of the Papacy. According to Kenneth Hylson-Smith, during the sixteenth century individuals such as Richard Hooker, Anthony Corro, William Barrett, Peter Baro, John Overall, Matthew Parker, John Whitgift and Richard Bancroft “may be reckoned as representatives of a nascent sixteenth century High Church tradition”.²⁴ Other important High Church figures included William Laud, Lancelot Andrewes, Herbert Thorndike, John Cosin, William Forbes, William Beveridge, Thomas Wilson and Jeremy Taylor.²⁵ A rift was created in this tradition in 1688 when, following the abdication of James II and the accession of William of Orange, a number of High Church bishops including Archbishop William Sancroft of Canterbury and Thomas Ken of Bath and Wells, refused on point of conscience to swear an oath of allegiance to the new monarch since they were still bound by their previous oath to James II, who was still living. These bishops and their followers, who became known as ‘Nonjurors’, were subsequently ejected from their sees and formed what became in essence a schismatic sect claiming to be the true catholic church in England.²⁶ A number of the Nonjurors remained on close terms with the conformist High Churchmen in the Church of England who shared their theological and political sympathies.²⁷ An example is John Johnson, the vicar of

²³ Nockles P.B., “Church Parties in the pre-Tractarian Church of England, 1750-1833: the ‘Orthodox’ - some problems of definition and identity”, Walsh J., Haydon C. and Taylor S. (editors), *The Church of England c. 1689-1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism* (Cambridge, 1993), 334-7

²⁴ Hylson-Smith K., *High Churchmanship in the Church of England* (Edinburgh, 1993), 5

²⁵ *Ibid.*, ix; Brilioth Y., *The Anglican Revival: Studies in the Oxford Movement* (London, 1925), 16-28; Chadwick O., *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* (London, 1960), 14-30; Avis P., *Anglicanism and the Christian Church: Theological Resources in Historical Perspective* (Edinburgh, 1989), 139-54

²⁶ Goldie M., “The Nonjurors, Episcopacy, and the Origins of the Convocation Controversy”, Cruickshanks E. (editor), *Ideology and Conspiracy: Aspects of Jacobitism, 1689-1759* (Edinburgh, 1982), 19-20; Yates N., *Eighteenth-Century Britain: Religion and Politics, 1714-1815* (Harlow, 2008), 16-20

²⁷ Yates, *Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 18-9

Cranbrook in Kent, who remained in contact with the Nonjurors George Hickeys, Robert Nelson and Thomas Brett.²⁸

Although it was the broad church Latitudinarians who held the most power in the Church of England during the first half of the eighteenth century, from around 1760 clergy aligned to the High Church tradition began to be appointed to prominent positions in the church. F.C. Mather has noted that a number of High Churchmen were to be found among the bishops and cathedral preferments during the latter half of the century.²⁹ The vitality of the High Church tradition at around this time is underlined by the existence of two groups, namely the ‘Hutchinsonians’ and the ‘Hackney Phalanx’. The first of these became prominent in Oxford during the 1740s and 1750s and included individuals like William Jones, the perpetual curate of Nayland in Suffolk, George Horne the dean of Canterbury and later bishop of Norwich, the layman William Stevens and Samuel Glasse, the rector of Wanstead, who followed the ideas of John Hutchinson, an anti-Newtonian Hebraist who had emphasised the authority of divine revelation in opposition to human reason and scientific discovery.³⁰ The teaching of the Hutchinsonians was marked by an emphasis on political theology, the divine right of kings and the importance of the sacraments. Their emphasis on mysticism and anti-rationalism also had something in common with the leaders of the Evangelical revival.³¹

The Hackney Phalanx consisted of a large group of High Church clergy living in the London area. It took its name from the parish of one of its prominent figures Archdeacon John James Watson in Hackney, which was at that time a village north-east of the city. The real leader of the Phalanx, however, was Archdeacon Watson’s elder brother Joshua Watson who was editor of the High Church periodical *The British Critic* and had also been a close friend of the Hutchinsonians George Horne, William Stevens and William Jones. The Phalanx was particularly prominent during the years leading up to the start of the Oxford Movement between 1800 and 1830.³²

²⁸ Cornwall R.D., “Johnson, John (1662-1725)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (v. 30.), 276.

²⁹ Mather F.C., *High Church Prophet: Bishop Samuel Horsely (1733-1806) and the Caroline Tradition in the Later Georgian Church* (Oxford, 1992), 209-19

³⁰ Nockles P.B., *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship, 1760-1857* (Cambridge, 1994), 13-4; Varley E.A., *The Last of the Prince Bishops: William Van Mildert and the High Church Movement of the early nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1992), 7-10; Young B.W., *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth Century England: Theological Debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford, 1998), 136-8

³¹ Nockles, “Church Parties in the pre-Tractarian Church”, 345

³² Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 14-5; Varley, *The Last of the Prince Bishops*, 63-5

While these groups represented important High Church movements in the pre-Tractarian Church of England, it is important to note that there were also individuals such as John Oxlee, the rector of Scrawton in Yorkshire, who were regarded as High Churchmen but who did not align themselves directly with a particular group.³³

The beginning of the Oxford Movement, with its emphasis on the apostolic succession, the authority of tradition and its spiritual ethos can be seen as a development out of this longstanding High Church tradition.³⁴ Of those who would become the main Tractarian leaders John Keble, Hurrell Froude, Edward Pusey and Isaac Williams all came from High Church backgrounds. Newman was the exception, having been brought up as an Evangelical.³⁵ The movement began primarily for political reasons and was an attempt to defend the Church of England against the encroachments of the state which, since the passing of the reforming measures of the 1820-30s, was seen as having become increasingly secularised. In seeking to defend the status of the church and appealing increasingly to the writings of the church fathers and the sixteenth century Anglican divines, the Tractarians became responsible for inculcating a religious revival which emphasised a number of points which had also been held by the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen, such as the apostolic succession, the sacraments, the authority of the church and the appeal to tradition.³⁶ These issues were repeatedly discussed in the series of ninety *Tracts for the Times* which were published between 1833 and 1841 under Newman's editorship.³⁷

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that, while the Oxford Movement built upon the High Church tradition of the previous centuries, the mainstream of the movement was to develop beyond the pre-Tractarian High Church consensus in a number of ways. This is considered in Peter Nockles' *The Oxford Movement in Context*. Nockles has also challenged the assumption, put forward by Newman, Keble and Pusey, that the High Church tradition became defunct after the Glorious Revolution of 1688-9 and that the Tractarians themselves represented a true High

³³ *Ibid.*, 15

³⁴ Sharp R., "New Perspectives on the High Church Tradition: Historical Background, 1730-1780", Rowell G., (editor), *Tradition Renewed: The Oxford Movement Conference Papers* (London, 1983); Nockles P.B., "The Oxford Movement: Historical Background, 1780-1833", Rowell (ed.), *Tradition Renewed*, 24-50

³⁵ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 62; Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 42-3, 47-8

³⁶ Hylson-Smith, *High Churchmanship in the Church of England*, 123-9

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 152-4

Church revival in returning to the principles of the Caroline Divines and the Nonjurors.³⁸ Such a view-point effectively ignored the existence of High Church groups like the Hutchinsonians and the Hackney Palanx during the eighteenth century.³⁹ While the Tractarians claimed that their teachings had a precedent in the writings of High Church Anglican divines, as Nockles has pointed out, they tended to appeal to High Church figures of the seventeenth century and ignore those of the previous century.⁴⁰

Alongside the Tractarian developments brought about by the Oxford Movement, a group of High Churchmen continued to exist who claimed to be the legitimate inheritors of the pre-Tractarian High Church tradition and were nicknamed the 'Zs' by Hurrell Froude.⁴¹ These High Churchmen included individuals such as Hugh James Rose, William Patrick Palmer, Arthur Philip Perceval, Walter Farquhar Hook, Edward Churton, Benjamin Harrison, George Ayliffe Poole, William Gresley, William Sewell and Richard William Jelf.⁴² Bishop Henry Phillpotts of Exeter is also an example of a traditional High Churchman who did not fully accept all the developments of the Oxford Movement. Hylson-Smith claimed that, while the 'Z's' did not form a coherent movement like the Tractarians, they were not just isolated individuals and many were united by family ties as well as by friendship and personal allegiance.⁴³ The 'Z's' criticised the Tractarians for failing to acknowledge the importance of the eighteenth century High Church tradition and claiming that they alone were responsible for renewing a tradition which had laid dormant in the Church of England since the end of the seventeenth century. In a letter to William Gresley, Edward Churton claimed that,

Anglicanism, as it is now called, is not a new party, but has come down to us in regular descent from the Reformation, from Hooker to Andrewes, Andrewes to Laud, Bramhall and Hammond, thence to Pearson and Jeremy Taylor, thence to Bishop Bull, thence to Hicke and Robert Nelson, Leslie and other names . . . after the succession of George III these principles were again enquired for, and Horne and Jones answered the call. Horne and Jones have their disciples still living. Tell the world this.⁴⁴

³⁸Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 2 ff.

³⁹Pereiro J., *Ethos and the Oxford Movement: At the Heart of Tractarianism* (Oxford, 2008), 42-52

⁴⁰Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 2-4

⁴¹Ibid., 20

⁴²Ibid., 20-1

⁴³Hylson-Smith, *High Churchmanship in the Church of England*, 129-30

⁴⁴Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 22 quoting Churton E. to Gresley W. (25 May, 1846), P.H. Gresley Papers GRES 3/7/68

At first the Tractarians and the ‘Z’s co-existed happily side by side and Palmer, Rose and Harrison contributed to the *Tracts for the Times*. As time went on, however, developments in the Tractarian movement led to the two parties becoming increasingly estranged from each other. The ‘Z’s were particularly uncomfortable with the growing pro-Roman tendency in the movement as well as with Tractarian calls for the church to be disestablished from the state, their emphasis on tradition as a supplementary source of authority and their understanding of the real presence in the eucharist.⁴⁵ At the same time the Tractarians were eager to present themselves as being the true revival of the pre-Tractarian High Church tradition distinct from the ‘Z’s. By 1836 both Newman and Pusey had come to stress the fact that they formed a different movement to that of the contemporary High Churchmen.⁴⁶ It is also interesting to note that Samuel Wood’s essay on the origins of the Oxford Movement, which was written at Newman and Pusey’s request in 1840 and forms the earliest narrative of the movement,⁴⁷ was initially intended to have borne the title “High Church Doctrine”. As James Periero points out, the fact that Wood’s final essay was given the title “The Revival of Primitive Doctrine” highlights the Tractarians belief that their approach was fundamentally different to that of the ‘Z’s.⁴⁸ The extent of the theological precipice which separated the contemporary High Churchmen from the Tractarians by the 1850s is underlined by a letter from Charles Drury to G.A. Denison which claimed that, while the High Church cause had gained momentum over the previous decades, it had done so in spite of the Oxford Movement and had in no way been aided by it. According to Peter Nockles, this was a common view among such High Churchmen in the middle of the nineteenth century.⁴⁹

Although the terms ‘High Church’ and ‘Tractarian’ are not mutually exclusive and, in a sense, all the Tractarians were High Churchmen,⁵⁰ for the purposes of this

⁴⁵ Ibid., 274-306; Nockles P.B., “Survivals or New Arrivals? The Oxford Movement and the Nineteenth Century Historical Construction of Anglicanism”, Platten S., *Anglicanism and the Western Christian Tradition* (Norwich, 2003), 154-7, 170-2, 182-91 and passim; Pereiro, *Ethos and the Oxford Movement*, 71-8

⁴⁶ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 35 quoting Pusey E.B. to Keble J. (7 November, 1836), P.H. Pusey Papers (Liddon Bound Volume); Newman, “Home Thoughts from Abroad”, *British Magazine*, 9 (April, 1836), 358

⁴⁷ Periero, *Ethos and the Oxford Movement*, 30-4 – Wood’s essay, has never been published but a transcription has been provided by Father James Periero as an appendix to his book (pp. 252-65)

⁴⁸ Ibid., 81-2

⁴⁹ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 307 quoting Drury C. to Denison G.A. (26 May, 1852), Pusey House Denison Papers 2/24/12

⁵⁰ For a consideration of the meaning of these definitions see Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 33-43

thesis ‘Tractarian’ will be used to refer not specifically to those who contributed to the series of the *Tracts for the Times* but to those who shared the more developed High Church theology being advocated by the leaders and adherents of the Oxford Movement, most notably J.H. Newman, John Keble, E.B. Pusey and Hurrell Froude. The term ‘High Church’ will be used to define the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen and the ‘Z’s who claimed to remain closer to the consensus of the pre-Tractarian High Church tradition.

The issue of whether Isaac Williams’ theological outlook was more typically ‘High Church’ or ‘Tractarian’, is important in assessing his significance to the Oxford Movement and his approach to the various theological questions with which it became concerned. Although Williams contributed three of the *Tracts for the Times* and was on intimate terms with Newman, Pusey, Froude and John Keble, most scholars recognise that he was not totally at ease with some of the movement’s more radical developments. One of the issues which made the ‘Z’s draw back from their support of the Oxford Movement was the fact that it was becoming increasingly pro-Roman.⁵¹ This was also an aspect of the Oxford Movement with which Isaac Williams always felt deeply uncomfortable.⁵² Both R.W. Church and Kenneth Hylson-Smith described Williams as being an “old-fashioned High Churchman”⁵³ rather than agreeing wholeheartedly with all of the Tractarian developments. James Periero has claimed that Williams’ *Autobiography* reflected the view, typical of the High Churchmen, that the genesis of the Oxford Movement was not solely a reaction to the reforming measures of the 1820-30s, but that it was primarily a spiritual revival which had begun long before 1833.⁵⁴ Another point raised by Periero is that Williams believed that, even before 1841, Newman had come to hold theological views which were irreconcilable with High Church teaching, a view which was in line with that of William Patrick Palmer.⁵⁵ It is also interesting to note that, in a post-script to one of his letters written in 1851 Williams was content to describe himself as being a “Protestant”.⁵⁶ Although the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen had emphasised the Reformed status of the Church of England, by this time John Keble and Pusey tended

⁵¹ Ibid., 177-8, 180-3

⁵² Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 53-63

⁵³ Hylson-Smith, *High Churchmanship in the Church of England*, 147-8; Church, *The Oxford Movement*, 70

⁵⁴ Periero, *Ethos and the Oxford Movement*, 76-7

⁵⁵ Ibid., 206-7 citing Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 118-9

to emphasise the fact that it was predominantly ‘Catholic’ in ethos.⁵⁷ This post-script therefore suggests that Williams was aware that there was something of a rift between himself and the other Tractarians by the 1850s.

In attempting to define the nature of Isaac Williams’ churchmanship, it is significant that historians have noted that he belonged to what came to be known as the ‘Bisley School’ within the Oxford Movement. This group included John Keble’s brother Thomas and took its name from his parish of Bisley in rural Gloucestershire. The other members of the group were George Prevost (Isaac Williams’ brother-in-law), Hubert Cornish, Charles Cornish, Robert Gregory, H.A. Jeffreys, Raymond Barker, Errol Hill and Richard Champerowne.⁵⁸ The fact that the term ‘Bisley School’ was first used by Isaac Williams to emphasise the distinction between this group and the Tractarians at Oxford in itself suggests that he was aware of a growing distinction between the two groups.⁵⁹ His letters to Thomas Keble also reflect his concern that the Bisley School and the Oxford Tractarians were moving apart from each other.⁶⁰

The ‘Bisley School’ has been described as a conservative branch of the Oxford Movement which, as the Oxford Tractarians became increasingly sympathetic towards Roman Catholicism, stressed the importance of loyalty to the Church of England and its Prayer Book.⁶¹ Unlike their Oxford counterparts the theological views of the Bisley men underwent little change over the course of time and they maintained a closer friendship with the ‘Z’s.⁶² With the exception of O.W. Jones’ book on Isaac Williams, remarkably little has been written about how the ‘Bisley School’ related to the Oxford Tractarians. Peter Nockles, while acknowledging their affinity to the ‘Z’s, mentions them only in passing.⁶³

Throughout the course of this thesis frequent reference will be made to Isaac Williams’ published works as well as to manuscript material relating to him. An invaluable source has been the ‘Isaac Williams Papers’ held at the Lambeth Palace

⁵⁶ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (19 December 1851), P.H. M.S. (L.B.V. of letters from Isaac Williams to E.B. Pusey, no. 27)

⁵⁷ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 154, 178-80

⁵⁸ Withey D.A., *John Henry Newman: The Liturgy and the Breviary* (London, 1992), 160

⁵⁹ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 13

⁶⁰ Williams I. to Keble T. (no date), L.P.L. Keble Deposit 9/34; Williams I. to Keble T. (no date), Lambeth Palace Library Box 779, “Letters from Rev. Isaac Williams to Thomas Keble and his Family”, [these letters are not numbered]

⁶¹ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 14

⁶² Greenfield R.H., “The Attitude of the Tractarians to the Roman Catholic Church” (unpublished D.Phil. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1956: MSS D.Phil. d. 1726-7) (volume 1), 239-40

⁶³ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 39

Library (MS 4473-9) which were in the possession of Williams' great-grand-daughter and placed in the library in 1971. These papers include numerous letters from correspondents including J.H. Newman, John Keble, E.B. Pusey, W.J. Copeland, George Prevost and many others. Also included in the papers is an original manuscript of Williams' autobiography and fifty-two handwritten sermons, some of which were never published. Also extant is a collection of seventy-seven letters from Isaac Williams to Thomas Keble (Keble Deposit 9). These were in the possession of Edward Keble and placed in the library in the 1960s. Another collection of ninety letters from Williams to Thomas Keble have been preserved on microfilm at the Lambeth Palace Library (Box 779). Sixteen letters from Williams to Newman are also held at the Birmingham Oratory. Unfortunately it was not possible to consult these papers as, at the time of writing, the Oratory archive is temporarily closed to scholars. Given the fairly consistent stance taken by Williams in his correspondence, it seems fair to conclude that it is unlikely that these letters would in any way contradict the findings of this thesis. Another important collection of thirty letters, mainly from Williams to E.B. Pusey is also extant at Pusey House in a bound volume. There are also three letters relating to Williams, from J.H. Newman and E.B. Pusey and one from Williams to his son (D2962/31-3), extant at the Gloucestershire Records Office among the papers of Sir George Prevost.

These manuscript sources, together with Williams' published works, will help to shed further light on his significance as a leader of the Oxford Movement and give a clearer indication of how his theological perspective compared with that of his contemporaries. Central to the argument of this thesis is the claim that Isaac Williams played a more significant role in the Oxford Movement than has hitherto been admitted. It is regrettable that much Tractarian historiography has been so concerned with role of Newman in the movement that it has failed to provide a balanced picture of what other individuals contributed to it. This thesis will further attempt to challenge such assessments of Tractarian historiography by examining the importance of Isaac Williams' contribution to the Oxford Movement. The attempt to assess whether Isaac Williams' theological approach was more typically 'Tractarian' or 'High Church' will also help to further our understanding of the Oxford Movement by better appreciating the relationship between the different individuals and groups which existed within it.

Chapter One: Isaac Williams' Life and Works

1. Upbringing and Early Influences

Isaac Williams was born at Cwmcynfelin, the holiday estate of his parents Isaac Lloyd and Anne Williams, a short distance from Aberystwyth in west Wales, on 19 December 1802. The Williams family was clearly an affluent and influential one since Isaac Lloyd was a chancery barrister while his wife was the eldest daughter of a former high sheriff of Cardiganshire.¹ Although much of Isaac Williams' later poetry paid tribute to the beauty of the Ceredigion countryside in which he was born, he was to be brought up at the family home in Bloomsbury Square, London.² In his *Autobiography* Williams pointed out that his family lived close to where the young John Henry Newman was brought up, though neither of them was aware of this at the time.³

Williams was educated at Guildford by a tutor named Polehampton before entering public school at Harrow. Although he received from Polehampton a great aptitude for Latin verse, Williams was shocked by the behaviour of some of the other boys at the school and claimed that, for the first time in his life, he was made to confront what the Bible and the church catechism termed 'wickedness'. So strong was this impression on Williams that he resolved never to send his own children to a private school. On entering Harrow Williams was able to perfect his ability in Latin as well as his prowess as a cricketer.⁴ Latin became the young man's favourite subject in school and he later claimed that he was so fluent in the language that it was sometimes necessary for him to translate his ideas from Latin when writing in English.⁵

Although Williams enjoyed much academic success at Harrow, he claimed in his *Autobiography* that his years there were something of a spiritual void since he "was surrounded with alluring temptations and flattered, with no one in that little opening world to guide [him] or speak of Christianity".⁶ At the most, this statement can be seen to suggest that, as a young man, Williams did not possess the religious seriousness which was to mark his later years. It is difficult to accept that he came

¹ Skinner, "Williams, Isaac (1802-1865)", 213

² Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 1

³ *Ibid.*, 1-2

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6-10

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5

under no religious influence at all during his childhood since Christian observance was an integral part of middle to upper-class life in nineteenth century England and his paternal grandfather had been a clergyman.⁷ The author Owain Jones, writing in 1971, assumed that the young Isaac Williams was raised in a fundamentally Christian environment where he would have been brought up to read the Bible and the church catechism⁸ Williams' own writings confirm this since, in one of his later works of poetry, he claimed that the Christian religion had been the "great reality" of his youth.⁹ It also seems unlikely that Williams would have been so morally repulsed by the immorality which he experienced at Polehampton's school if his upbringing had been devoid of any Christian influence. It may be that Williams' claim that his early years were marked by little religious fervour arose from his distaste for the evangelical nature of the school at Harrow.¹⁰ In his *Autobiography* Williams claimed that he received very little spiritual teaching there and that the position where he sat when attending services at the parish church made it impossible for him to hear parts of the service.¹¹

In 1821, Williams completed his education at Harrow and entered Trinity College, Oxford. Although a Trinity student, he was to spend much time at Oriel, the college of a former school-friend named Robert Dallas.¹² It was as a result of these visits to Oriel that Williams became associated with a number of individuals who would remain life-long friends and who would also become involved in the Oxford Movement, included Henry Ryder, George Prevost and Hubert Cornish.¹³ At Oriel Williams also became associated with Samuel Wilberforce, a High Churchman who was later to become bishop of Oxford, but they did not remain close friends.¹⁴

Isaac Williams received his BA in 1826 but failed to gain an Oriel fellowship in 1829. He was subsequently ordained deacon by the bishop of Gloucester in the same year and began to serve a two-year curacy at Sherbourne-cwm-Windrush, under the vicar James Davies, during which time he was able to study biblical Hebrew and

⁶ Ibid., 10

⁷ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 4-5

⁸ Ibid., 3

⁹ See Williams I., *The Seven Days, or The Old and New Creation* (Oxford, 1850), 42; see also Davies J. to Swayne G. (6 January, 1852), L.P.L. M.S. 4474, ff. 8-11

¹⁰ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 3, 6-7

¹¹ Prevost (ed.), *Autobiography*, 7

¹² Ibid., 5-6

¹³ Ibid., 23-4

¹⁴ Unpublished manuscript of Isaac Williams' autobiography, L. P. L., M.S. 4477, p. 20

compose much poetry.¹⁵ Davies was a traditional High Churchman who must have done much to confirm Williams' own churchmanship.¹⁶ The two men remained close friends, and Davies' letters reveal a deep respect for the younger man. Writing to George Swayne in 1852, for example, he described Williams as "a Scholar – a learned man, especially in *Patristic lore* and ancient authorities – and from boyhood treading the regenerated path of the church".¹⁷ Clearly Davies believed that Williams played an important part in the Oxford Movement.

In May 1831 Isaac Williams succeeded in winning a fellowship to his former college of Trinity and, after being ordained priest by the bishop of Oxford, he became college tutor in 1832. Over the next twenty years he served his college as philosophy lecturer (1832), dean (1833), rhetoric lecturer (1834-1840) and as vice-president (1841-42). During this time Williams' academic precision and moral integrity made a profound impression upon many members of Trinity.¹⁸ One individual over whom Williams clearly had a deep influence was Henry James Coleridge, the son of Sir John Taylor Coleridge, who entered Trinity college in 1840 and confided in Williams regarding his religious doubts. Writing to his father in 1843, H.J. Coleridge claimed that,

Whenever I consider the mere chance, as it then appeared, which brought me to Trinity, and the unspeakable blessings to which it introduced me, I cannot but feel that I have mercies of no common magnitude to be grateful for. But I cannot help also thinking . . . that Isaac Williams is in a marked manner given me as a guide.¹⁹

The importance of Williams' influence over the young man was also highlighted by his father's reply:

Nothing, I assure you was farther from my mind than any thought of reproach, or disrespect of Isaac Williams. I agree in all you say of your obligations to that good & most amiable man; and what you feel about him for yourself, I have often expressed and still feel about him for you also. He has laid me under infinite obligations - & I would go far to shew him my grateful sense of them.²⁰

¹⁵ Skinner, "Williams, Isaac (1802-1865)", 214

¹⁶ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 75

¹⁷ Davies J. to Swayne G. (6 January, 1852), L.P.L., M.S. 4474, f. 12

¹⁸ Skinner, "Williams, Isaac (1802-1865)", 214

¹⁹ Coleridge H.J. to Coleridge J.T. (10 November, 1843)

²⁰ Coleridge J.T. to Coleridge H.J. (12 November, 1843), this and the previous quotation are taken from the British Library Coleridge Family Papers which are currently being catalogued and therefore, at the time of writing, have no shelf-marks. I am very grateful to Dr. Arnold Hunt for drawing my attention to them.

Williams' honesty and strength of character is also suggested by his claim in the manuscript of his autobiography that, during his time at Trinity, he had to oppose certain "pecuniary corruptions in the management of the college".²¹

2. John Keble, Hurrell Froude and the Bisley School

Isaac Williams' relationship with John Keble was crucial to his involvement in the Oxford Movement. He was first introduced to Keble at Aberystwyth during the summer of 1822 by John Richards, an elderly clergyman who knew Williams' father and had also served as curate to Keble's father at Fairford.²² Williams' *Autobiography* portrays his first meeting with Keble as a providential life-changing experience. Whereas during his undergraduate days he claimed to have been "utterly lost" and with "ruin within",²³ his introduction to Keble was to prove a significant milestone in his spiritual development:

It was this . . . short walk of a few yards and a few words spoken, that were the turning-point of my life. If a merciful God had miraculously interposed to arrest my course, I could not have had a stronger assurance of His Presence, than I have always had in looking back to that day.²⁴

The friendship between the two men began to deepen a year later when Keble offered to help Williams correct his poem *Ars Geologica* which was to win him the Oxford University Chancellor's Prize for Latin Verse in 1823.²⁵ Williams was greatly impressed by Keble's poetic ability, and Keble also came to discern a great degree of potential in the younger man.²⁶ As a result of this he invited Williams to spend the summer of 1823 with him at a reading party at Southrop, together with Richard Hurrell Froude and Robert Isaac Wilberforce, who would also come to play a prominent part in the Oxford Movement.²⁷

It is clear from his *Autobiography* that, during the Southrop reading party, Williams was touched by Keble's humility and charity, and saw him as a person for whom Christianity was something real rather than merely a social convention or an outward façade:

²¹ Unpublished manuscript of Isaac Williams' autobiography, L.P.L., M.S. 4477, p. 23

²² Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 12; Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 95

²³ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 11-2

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15-6

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13-4

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14

²⁷ Skinner, "Williams, Isaac (1802-1865)", 214

. . . one so overflowing with real genuine love in thought, word and action, was quite new to me, I could scarcely understand it . . . to find a person always endeavouring to do one good, as it were, unknown to one's self, and in secret, and even avoiding that his kindness should be felt and acknowledged as such, this opened upon me quite a new world.²⁸

Impressed as Williams may have been by Keble's example, R.W. Church's claim that it was Keble's influence which made him "an old-fashioned High Churchman"²⁹ would seem to be misleading. In his *Autobiography* Williams never claimed that Keble introduced him to that tradition and he hinted that all the men who attended the reading party were High Churchmen apart from Wilberforce, who had been brought up under the influence of the Evangelicalism of his father William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect.³⁰ Owain Jones has suggested that the Williams' family tradition was High Church in belief. His friendship with Keble, then, far from introducing him to the High Church tradition, provided him with an example of pragmatic sanctity which challenged him to pursue the practice of his faith with greater sincerity and zeal.³¹ This helps to explain the claim in his *Autobiography* that his youth was marked with little religious fervour, even if this is a subsequent revision of history.

Isaac Williams' friendship with Keble continued after the reading party at Southrop. Keble was a tutor of Oriel at this time and he continued to offer Williams academic support as he had previously assisted him with the publication of *Ars Geologica*.³² In letters to friends Keble frequently enquired after Williams and he also assisted him by correcting some of his poetry in 1825.³³ During the summer of 1824 Williams stayed with Keble again, this time at Hursley where he met George Prevost who would marry Williams' sister Jane in 1828.³⁴ He also remained on intimate terms with Hurrell Froude and stayed with his family at Dartington in 1825 and 1827.³⁵

It was Williams' association with Hurrell Froude which led to him being introduced, in August 1825, to Caroline Champerowne, whose family lived near the Froudes. Williams proposed to her in 1827, but the engagement was at this point

²⁸ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 19

²⁹ Church R.W., *The Oxford Movement: Twelve Years, 1833-1845* (London, 1892), 70-1

³⁰ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 28-30; cf. Newsome D., "Wilberforce, Robert Isaac (1802-1857)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (v. 58) (Oxford, 2004), 870

³¹ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 93-6

³² Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 31-2

³³ Keble J. to Prevost G. (12 October, 1825; 10 March, 1826; 4 June, 1826; 3 July, 1827; 19 September, 1835), Gloucestershire Records Office D 2962/ 2, 5, 6, 8, 10

³⁴ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 10

³⁵ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 30 -4

unsuccessful. While Williams recognised at the time that their youth may have been an objection to their getting married, in the original manuscript of his autobiography he stated that Froude's father, the Archdeacon of Devon and guardian of the Champerowne family, objected to the marriage:

I made proposals at Dartington about Easter 1827 and there appeared to be no objection but youth in us both; but some time afterward Froude wrote to me by his father's wish, to say that there were objections to it, and I must relinquish the thought of it. This I attributed to be on the part of some of my wife's family and therefore could only acquiesce, nor was it till on renewing the engagement nearly twenty years after, and subsequent to our marriage, that I ascertained for the first time that the objection had been merely that of Archdeacon Froude himself, and one which in him was grounded on high and honourable considerations. For in the position in which he was placed as guardian of the family he had objected to one of his own sons in another case, and therefore on like grounds about myself also as their and his own intimate friend. Had I been aware of this things would have been different, and indeed Mrs Champerowne's brother, Mr James Buller, had been my father's most intimate friend all his life, and therefore my connection with the family was not merely one formed through the Froudes. But for this accident it might have been otherwise, and I should have lost that Windrush and subsequent time at Oxford which seems to have been so wonderfully ordered for good.³⁶

Jones believed that it was possible that Hurrell Froude may have manipulated his father's objection to the marriage so that Williams might continue to lead a celibate life.³⁷ A letter from Froude to Williams written in 1828 suggests that this may have been the case. Froude wrote that,

I think you are a very good natured fellow not to cut me for the view I have taken on another matter respecting which Keble has been rather provoked at me, though I think he has now excused me quite. I believe that my own notions are peculiar, but I cannot force myself into any notion but that you have a great gain by its termination.³⁸

Froude's belief in clerical celibacy and dislike for clergymen marrying are well documented.³⁹ Although he did not explain the subject of his letter, it is likely that Froude would have felt that the failure of Williams' engagement was an issue which ought to be treated with a degree of tact. The fact that, a few years previously, John

³⁶ Unpublished manuscript of Isaac Williams' autobiography, L.P.L. M.S. 4477, p. 13

³⁷ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 10-11

³⁸ Froude R.H. to Williams I. (14 June, 1828), L.P.L., M.S.4474, f. 91

³⁹ Cf. Newman J.H., *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (London, 1945 edition), 16; Fraught C.B., *The Oxford Movement: A Thematic History of the Tractarians and their Times* (Pensylvannia, 2003), 78-9; Brendon P., *Hurrell Froude and the Oxford Movement* (London, 1974), 164-5

Keble's offer of marriage to Cornelia Cornish had been rejected,⁴⁰ could explain why he was so angry with Froude on this occasion. Among the advantages which Froude believed were associated with Williams' engagement having failed would probably have been the fact that he could give more time and energy to the Oxford Movement and the fact that marrying would have prevented him from gaining a university fellowship.

Isaac Williams also became a close friend of Thomas Keble, John Keble's brother and the vicar of Bisley, Gloucestershire. The two men first met at George Prevost and Jane Williams' wedding which was held at Bisley. The fact that Williams was already on intimate terms with John Keble did much to cement this new friendship.⁴¹ A collection of letters from Williams to Thomas Keble extant in the Lambeth Palace Library archives reflects the extent of their friendship over successive years. Throughout the course of the Oxford Movement Williams corresponded with Thomas Keble and asked his advice on a number of issues relating to the course of the Oxford Movement.⁴² In his *Autobiography* Williams claimed that Thomas Keble had a profound influence on both his poetry and sermons.⁴³

It was with Thomas Keble's encouragement that Isaac Williams was ordained and began his ministry as curate to James Davies.⁴⁴ Williams always maintained a deep reverence for Thomas Keble and, together with George Prevost, the three men were the most prominent members of the 'Bisley School'.⁴⁵ It was the conservative outlook of this group which typified Williams' theological approach and contribution to the Oxford Movement throughout his life.

3. John Henry Newman

Isaac Williams first met John Henry Newman on one of his visits to Oriel college as an undergraduate⁴⁶ and the friendship between the two men was to develop further through their association with Hurrell Froude.⁴⁷ Whereas Williams, Froude and

⁴⁰ Cf. Gelpi B.C., "John Keble and Hurrell Froude in Pastoral Dialogue", *Victorian Poetry*, v. 44, no. 1, (Spring 2006), 16

⁴¹ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 34-5

⁴² See L.P.L., Keble Deposit 9/3, 11, 18, 19, 23, 24, 39, 42, 45, 56 and L.P.L. Box 779, "Letters from Isaac Williams to Rev. Thomas Keble and his Family, c. 1829-1865"

⁴³ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 36-8

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 35-6

⁴⁵ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 13-20

⁴⁶ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 25

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 46-7

Keble, had all been brought up within the High Church tradition, Newman had come under the influence of Evangelicalism and it was not until the mid-1820s, largely under Froude's influence, that he became a High Churchman.⁴⁸ Williams' friendship with Newman did not really commence until he had come to sympathise with the High Church cause. By the late 1820s Williams was on intimate terms with both Newman and Froude and the three men were in frequent contact with each other.⁴⁹

Newman's offer, and Williams' acceptance, of the curacy of his church of St. Mary's Oxford, in 1832⁵⁰ reflects the friendship and mutual respect which united the two men at this time. This is also reflected in their correspondence. For example, Williams sought Newman's advice about publishing a translation of the Latin hymns of the Paris breviary, as well as regarding the scriptural commentaries which he was writing.⁵¹ Williams also supported Newman's plan of starting the daily service at St. Mary's, a practice which had been introduced at Bisley by Thomas Keble in 1827,⁵² and he encouraged him to stand as a candidate for the university's chair of logic.⁵³ At the same time, Williams' *Autobiography* suggests that, as time went on, his friendship with Newman became marred by an element of suspicion. Although Williams clearly respected Newman, he was also somewhat wary of his intellect.⁵⁴ Whereas the influence of John and Thomas Keble had taught him "to do one's duty in faith, and leave the effect to God", Williams believed that Newman was always in the habit "of looking for . . . what was sensibly effective".⁵⁵ In the early 1820s, Newman had been associated with the Oriel Noetics (a group of liberal academics who included Edward Copleston and Richard Whately) and, in 1827, he had voted for Edward Hawkins rather than for John Keble to be elected to the vacant position of provost of Oriel. It is likely that these two factors would also have fuelled Williams' suspicions⁵⁶ since in

⁴⁸ Fraught, *The Oxford Movement*, 9; cf. Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, 17

⁴⁹ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 46-9

⁵⁰ Cf. Church, *The Oxford Movement*, 73

⁵¹ Williams I. to Newman J.H. (29 July, 1833) in Ker I. and Gornall T. (editors), *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* (v. 4) (Oxford, 1980), 13; Newman J.H. to Williams I. (26 July, 1838) in Tracey G. (ed.), *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* (v. 6) (Oxford, 1984), 271-2

⁵² Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 14

⁵³ Williams I. to Newman J.H. (2 July 1834), in Ker and Gornall (ed.), *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* (v. 4), 290; Williams I. to Newman J.H. (20 May 1839) in Tracey G. (editor), *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* (v. 7) (Oxford, 1995), 81

⁵⁴ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 53-4

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 54

⁵⁶ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 54

his *Autobiography* he claimed that Newman had been “infected” by the liberalism of the Noetics.⁵⁷

Despite the differences of character between Newman and Williams the two men co-operated with each other in the Tractarian cause. This is reflected in two published works, the *Lyra Apostolica* and *Plain Sermons by Contributors to the Tracts for the Times*. The first of these was a volume of poetry, published in 1836 under Newman’s editorship, which attempted to expound the principles of the movement and to which Williams contributed nine poems.⁵⁸ Newman clearly held Williams in high regard as a poet and wished that he had contributed more of his poetry to the *Lyra*.⁵⁹

The *Plain Sermons* was a ten-volume collection of sermons written by Isaac Williams, W.J. Copeland, John and Thomas Keble, E.B. Pusey, R.F. Wilson (the vicar of Rownham), George Prevost and Newman. Williams edited the work together with Copeland and its first volume was published in 1839.⁶⁰ Williams hoped that the publication of sermons by adherents of the Oxford Movement would help to expound Tractarian principles on a wider scale.⁶¹ In a letter to Williams, Thomas Keble claimed that the *Plain Sermons* ought to demonstrate that Tractarian principles were not “un-practical” but directly related to Christian living,⁶² while Williams’ fellow-editor claimed that they “were originally intended to work quite indirectly, conveying church principles not explicitly but implicitly, so yet more should they convey instruction of the soul”.⁶³ Like Thomas Keble, Copeland believed that the *Plain Sermons* were fundamental in pointing out that the principles of the Oxford Movement were not a “matter only of sentiment, or part, or idle speculation, but are rather urged as truths of immediate and essential importance, bearing more or less directly on our every day behaviour, means of continual resource and consolation in life, and of calm sure hope in death”.⁶⁴ The *Plain Sermons* seem to have been popular

⁵⁷ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 45

⁵⁸ The contributions were anonymous, but Isaac Williams’ contributions were marked by the letter ζ ; see, Martin B.M., *John Keble: Priest, Professor and Poet* (London, 1976), 163

⁵⁹ Froude R.H. to Williams I. (21 September, 1835), L.P.L., M.S. 4474, f. 99

⁶⁰ The contributions to the *Plain Sermons*, like those to *Lyra Apostolica*, were anonymous. However, a table at the end of volume 10 gives a table outlining the contributions of specific authors who are identified by letters. ‘B’ referred to Isaac Williams [Brilioth Y., *The Anglican Revival: Studies in the Oxford Movement* (London, 1925), 213]

⁶¹ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 99

⁶² Keble T. to Williams I. (no date), L.P.L., M.S. 4474, ff. 185-6

⁶³ Copeland W. to Williams I. (13 March, 1848), L.P.L., M.S. 4473, f. 201

⁶⁴ Copeland W. to Williams I. (26 December, 1836), L.P.L., M.S. 4473, f.f 116-7

and, according to a letter to Williams from the publishers F. and J. Rivington, around 2,000 copies of the first four parts of the work had been sold by October 1840.⁶⁵

In his *Autobiography*, Williams claimed that part of his intention in editing the *Plain Sermons* was to help counter the effect of Newman's intellectualism over the movement:

I remember C. Cornish coming to me and saying, as we walked in Trinity Gardens, "People are a little afraid of being carried away by Newman's brilliancy; they want more of the steady sobriety of the Kebles infused into the movement to keep us safe. We have so much sail, we want ballast" And the effect of the "Plain Sermons" was at the time very quieting; they soothed the alarms of many.⁶⁶

While Williams clearly had reservations about the influence which Newman was having over the movement, it is unlikely that he would have served as Newman's curate, let alone allowed him to include his sermons in the *Plain Sermons*, or himself have contributed to the *Lyra Apostolica*, unless he had been convinced of Newman's theological orthodoxy at the time.

A number of issues underline the differences between Newman and Williams during the course of the Oxford Movement. Apart from Williams and Thomas Keble's suspicion of Newman's plan to provide an English translation of the Latin Breviary,⁶⁷ the appearance of Hurrell Froude's *Remains* in 1838 was to cause much friction. Following Froude's death from tuberculosis in 1836,⁶⁸ Newman and Keble were given a copy of his private journal by his father and resolved to publish a selection of Froude's writings (including parts of his journal) as a memorial to his life and contribution to the Oxford Movement.⁶⁹

The Remains of the late Reverend Richard Hurrell Froude M.A., which appeared in 1838, was to prove highly contentious. Apart from the fact that it contained a number of Froude's deeply anti-Protestant sentiments which made society in general view the Tractarian movement as being crypto Roman Catholic,⁷⁰ it soon became evident that the publication of Froude's personal diary as part of the *Remains* was not a wise decision. The fact that the journal included what can only be described

⁶⁵ Rivington F. and J. to Williams I. (5 October, 1840), L.P.L., M.S. 4476, f. 1

⁶⁶ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 96-7

⁶⁷ Wither, *John Henry Newman: The Liturgy and the Breviary*, 33-7

⁶⁸ Cf. Brendon, *Hurrell Froude and the Oxford Movement*, 107; Brendon P. "Froude, Richard Hurrell (1803-1836)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (volume 21) (Oxford, 2004), 73

⁶⁹ Herring G., *What was the Oxford Movement?* (London, 2002), 58

as an overly introspective analysis of Froude's spiritual struggles and attempts at self-denial led many to perceive the movement as being spiritually dangerous and seriously lacking in balance.⁷¹

The publication of the *Remains* also shocked Isaac Williams and the 'Bisley School'. Although in a letter written to Thomas Keble in March 1838 Williams spoke positively about them,⁷² just over a year later he suggested that he had become much less comfortable with the *Remains*. It would appear that Williams felt uneasy with the more radical, pro-Roman element within the movement which, influenced by Froude's *Remains*, was attempting to propagate Tractarian principles in an unbalanced way: "What one is very much afraid of", he wrote to Thomas Keble, "is for people to be made High Churchmen in a very great hurry, as high as steeples, and be no better for it".⁷³ Clearly he believed it was essential that the inculcation of the movement's principles should be accompanied by real spiritual growth and not just by excessive devotional practices.

Williams was particularly uncomfortable with Newman's claim that it was he (Williams) who had initially come up with the idea of publishing Froude's *Remains*.⁷⁴ He refuted this claim in his *Autobiography* claiming that he had merely told Newman that,

if persons could have so much brought before them that they could thoroughly understand Froude's character, then they might enter into his sayings, but unless they knew him as we did, they could not understand them.⁷⁵

As far as the actual *publication* of Froude's remains was concerned Williams claimed that he "never sanctioned the publication or [took] part in it".⁷⁶ It may be that, before their publication in 1838, Williams was unaware of the extent of the anti-Protestant content of Froude's writings, and that, once they were published and he saw the effect of the work on the more radical members of the movement, he sought to distance himself from a book which was seen as being deeply pro-Roman. The fact that Williams expressed deep respect for Froude and actually quoted from the *Remains* in

⁷⁰ Cf. Keble J. and Newman J.H. (editors), *The Remains of the late Reverend Richard Hurrell Froude M.A.* (volume 1) (London, 1838), 389, 435

⁷¹ Fraught, *The Oxford Movement*, 88

⁷² Williams I. to Keble T. (no date, post-mark 4 March 1838), L.P.L., Keble Dep. 9/18

⁷³ Williams I. to Keble T. (21 May, 1839), L.P.L., Keble Dep. 9/19

⁷⁴ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 84-5

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 84

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 85

one of his works,⁷⁷ would seem to suggest that it was not the publication of the *Remains per se* which he objected to, but rather the fact that the editors had included contentious private passages which it would have been more judicious to omit. This underlines the increasing tension in the friendship between Williams and Newman.

As the Oxford Movement progressed, Isaac Williams became increasingly concerned not just by Newman's intellectualism, but also by his attraction towards the Roman Catholic Church. Williams' suspicion of Newman's intentions had been growing for some time, but it was on one occasion (Owain Jones suggested that it was during 1841), that Newman actually confided to him that he was beginning to believe that the Roman Church might in fact be the only authentic Christian communion.⁷⁸ Williams was deeply shocked by Newman's confession and immediately decided that they could no longer continue to be close friends as they had in the past, because he felt that he had "no right to put [himself] into temptation".⁷⁹ Williams' fear that he himself might be swayed by Newman would seem to suggest that he felt a great respect for him even if he did not always agree with his views.

In Williams' view, Newman's journey towards Roman Catholicism was not a true spiritual development but the effect of his over-reliance on his own intellect. Newman's conversion, he claimed, was the result of the same restlessness and over-reliance on the intellect which had led his brother Francis Newman towards scepticism:

. . . time has since shown the same basis of constitutional character in both, [i.e. John and Francis Newman] so much so, that while pursuing opposite courses, they seem as if two ships were started on a voyage round the world in opposite directions and both split at last upon the same rock.⁸⁰

Williams believed that Newman's later religious position which depended upon the principle of the development of doctrine was a combination of the High Church principles taught by Keble and the rationalism of Whately and the Oriel Noetics. It was this mixture of principles which inevitably led to his conversion to Roman Catholicism and, by the 1850s, according to Williams, had "in him, united German rationalism with the Church of Rome in their full developments".⁸¹ As time went on

⁷⁷ Williams I., "On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge (no. 80)", *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford* (volume 4) (London, 1838), foot-note to page 51

⁷⁸ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 109-111

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 111

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 60

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 46

Williams became concerned that Newman's intellectual stature had begun to lead others, including John Keble, to become too sympathetic towards the Church of Rome. In a frank letter dated September 1843 Williams was critical of the extent of Newman's influence over Keble:

And as for yourself you must excuse me for saying your admiration for talent such as Newman's is, and the circumstances connected with him, if it were possible for him to have doubts about being a Mahometan I think you would partake of the same. We are quick enough at spying out each others' weak points and I should have thought yours was that of losing your own judgment in that of those whom you much referred from thinking more highly of them than they deserve.⁸²

Williams' letters suggest that, as the Oxford Movement progressed, the rift between the 'Bisley School' and the Oxford Tractarians became greater. A letter from the 'Z' High Churchman H.J. Rose, dated March 1838, which claimed that "at this moment it seems to me most desirable that they who agree on all great and vital points should act together with complete concert",⁸³ would seem to suggest that some degree of division was evident in the movement even at this time. R.H. Greenfield has also claimed that a clear division between the 'Bisley School' and the leading Tractarians was evident from 1838.⁸⁴ A letter from George Prevost to Thomas Keble dated 25 November, 1838, also confirms this point. Prevost's letter was highly critical of one of Newman's tracts, probably *Tract 85* entitled "Letters on the Scripture Proof of the Doctrine of the Church", where he had argued that Christian doctrine was not taught in scripture alone but in scripture and tradition, and his *Letter to Faussett*, in which he had sought to defend the publication of Froude's *Remains*.⁸⁵ Prevost claimed that both of these works gave the impression of having been written in "great haste" and reflected "a want of tenderness – a kind of coarseness and boldness". The letter went on to suggest that Prevost had become uncomfortable with Newman's control over the movement as he claimed that "it were earnestly to be wished that some one who had influence over him, if there be any, would induce him determinedly, to give up controversy for a year, or else I quite agree with you in apprehending that harm will come of it". In Prevost's view, Newman's writings had begun to reflect a tone of "free thinking" which might remove the "wholesome restraints" which had hitherto helped

⁸² Williams I. to Keble J. (20 September, 1843), L.P.L., M.S. 4474, ff. 148-9

⁸³ Rose H.J. to Williams I. (10 March, 1838), L.P.L., M.S. 4476, ff. 8-9

⁸⁴ Greenfield, "The Attitude of the Tractarians to the Roman Catholic Church", 253-4

⁸⁵ Cf. Dulles A., *Newman* (London, 2002), 65; Blehl V.F., *Pilgrim Journey: John Henry Newman, 1801-1845* (London, 2001), 219-222

to keep the movement in check.⁸⁶ The Bisley School's dislike of the way in which the Oxford Movement was beginning to develop seems to have been reflected in Prevost's concern that Isaac Williams might also have been led astray by Newman's influence. He suggested to Thomas Keble that perhaps Williams should become curate of Bisley since "under existing circumstances I should be glad to get him away from Oxford". The fact that Williams had not for some time written to him with any news of the movement, in Prevost's opinion, proved that Williams was afraid to inform his friend of the latest developments at Oxford.⁸⁷

This tension between the Oxford and Bisley Tractarians was also reflected in Williams' letters to Thomas Keble, the majority of which are, unfortunately, undated. In a letter, which probably dates from around 1838, Williams wrote to Thomas Keble regarding the publication of the *Plain Sermons*. Both he and Copeland hoped that the series could begin with a number of Thomas Keble's sermons, but Williams was aware that he might have reservations about contributing to the series, as he no longer wished to be associated with the *Tracts for the Times*. Williams' letter made it clear that, while he shared Thomas Keble's reservation about the tone of some of the *Tracts*, he believed that it was important to publish the *Plain Sermons* in order to correct the excesses of others within the movement:

The only objection which it occurs to one you may make is that you do not like to be so connected with the Tracts from your distrust of them, for the same reason that you do not like to write another. I shall not at all quarrel with or dispute this ground, but then I think this should be known both by Newman and all friends who now are induced to look to us, and the cause of truth & charity would perhaps be best answered in doing so, but if we do not give up the cause then I think we should make every effort in supporting each other by correcting in individuals their own wrong tendencies and also in doing what we think most needed for the cause itself.⁸⁸

Another of Williams' letters reflected the growing rift within the movement, claiming that, "I trust people will be no worse but better friends than they have been, if only country people [i.e. the Bisley Tractarians] will move a little faster and Oxford people a little slower to accommodate each other".⁸⁹ While this suggests that Williams found himself caught between the more radical views of Newman and the Oxford Tractarians and the more conservative views of his friends in Gloucestershire, other

⁸⁶ Prevost G. to Keble T. (25 November, 1838), G.R.O. D 2962/ 26

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Williams I. to Keble T. (c. 1838), L.P.L. Keble Dep. 9/56

letters suggest that he was also becoming increasingly disillusioned with the direction in which the movement in Oxford was heading. In a letter which must date from around 1841, he wrote to Thomas Keble that he was uncomfortable with the pro-Roman element in the movement.⁹⁰ Another letter suggests that he disliked the tone of *The British Critic*,⁹¹ which under Newman's editorship had been transformed from being a High Church periodical associated with the 'Z's to a Tractarian journal.⁹²

Although Williams and Newman's relationship revealed a distinct tension throughout the course of the Oxford Movement the two men did remain in contact by letter after Newman's secession in 1845. While Newman lost contact with many old friends after his conversion, Williams was one of the few people who, Newman claimed, "by letters or messages or inquiries had ever kept up the memory of past and happy days".⁹³ In a letter to John Keble, Williams claimed that Newman remained someone whom "one must love and honour exceedingly".⁹⁴ The two men were not in fact to see each other again until 1865, shortly before Williams' death.⁹⁵ On this occasion Newman had visited Williams at Stinchcombe and since at the end of the visit Williams, who was at this time in serious ill-health, insisted on driving him back to the station so that they could talk further, Newman came to believe that he was partly responsible for his death. In a letter to George Prevost he claimed that Williams' death had made him "a victim of his old love for me".⁹⁶ Whatever differences of theological opinion may have marked the relationship between the two men, this episode reflects the depth of their friendship, as does Newman's comment that "If ever I knew a saint, it was Isaac Williams".⁹⁷

⁸⁹ Williams I. to Keble T. (no date), L.P.L., Box 779, "Letters from Isaac Williams to Rev. Thomas Keble and his family"

⁹⁰ Williams I. to Keble T. (c. 1841), L.P.L., Box 779, "Letters from Isaac Williams to Rev. Thomas Keble and his family"

⁹¹ Williams I. to Keble T. (no date), L.P.L., Box 779, "Letters from Isaac Williams to Rev. Thomas Keble and his family"

⁹² Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 277-81

⁹³ Newman J.H. to Williams I. (31 March, 1865) in Dessain C. (editor), *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* (v. 21) (Birmingham, 1971), 441-2

⁹⁴ Williams I. to Keble J. (20 September, 1843), L.P.L., M.S. 4474, f. 148

⁹⁵ Skinner, "Isaac Williams (1802-1865)", 216

⁹⁶ Prevost (ed.) *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 133-6, quoting a letter from J.H. Newman to G. Prevost (4 May, 1865)

4. Isaac Williams' contribution to the Oxford Movement

In his classic account of the Oxford Movement R.W. Church claimed that Isaac Williams,

would have been quite content with [the Movement's] silent working and its apparent want of visible success. He would have been quite content with preaching simple homely sermons on the obvious but hard duties of daily life, and not seeing much come of them; with finding a slow abatement of the self-indulgent habits of university life, with keeping Fridays with less wine in common room.⁹⁸

Although this fails to acknowledge the important contribution which Williams made to the movement through his published writings, it does underline the fact that, because of his innate conservatism and tendency to draw back from the public gaze, his role in the movement has tended to be underestimated. In contrast to those who saw the movement as a radical attempt to transform the Church of England, Williams was always chiefly concerned that Tractarian principles should be taught in a way that would help to improve peoples' spiritual lives. This is highlighted by a conversation which Williams had with Hurrell Froude during the early years of the movement. Whereas Froude, being by nature a radical, believed that the movement ought to "make a row in the world", Williams challenged him with the following questions:

I have no doubt we can make a noise, and may get people to join us, but shall we make them really better Christians? If they take up our principles in a hollow way . . . what good shall we do?⁹⁹

Williams' sense of balance and common sense provided a marked contrast to the more radical element of the movement and it may be that, had Williams' approach pervaded the movement, then it would have attracted less opposition.

Isaac Williams made an important contribution to the Oxford Movement in the three tracts which he composed for the *Tracts for the Times*. Williams' most well known tracts, which will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, were numbers 80 and 87 "On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge", published in 1838 and 1840. The first of these was described by R.W. Church as "a beautiful and suggestive essay, full of deep and original thoughts", and written by "one of the gentlest and most refined of scholars".¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Williams, *The Doctrine of the Church in the Writings of Isaac Williams*, 97, quoting a note by Lord Acton, Cambridge University Library Additional MSS, 4989/175

⁹⁸ Church, *The Oxford Movement*, 74

⁹⁹ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 63

¹⁰⁰ Church, *The Oxford Movement*, 264-5

Williams also wrote *Tract 86* entitled “On Indications of a Superintending Providence in the Preservation of the Prayer Book and in the Changes which it has Undergone”. This was published in 1839 and argued that the liturgy of the Church of England’s Prayer Book had developed from the pre-Reformation liturgy under the guidance and inspiration of God.¹⁰¹ The tract reflects Williams’ fidelity to the Church of England and was a reaction against the negative attitude to the Reformation reflected in Froude’s *Remains*.¹⁰²

One episode which did involve Williams in the more political aspect of the Oxford Movement was the contest for the university’s poetry professorship. While this was a conflict which was ostensibly about university procedure, it soon became a clear struggle between different theological parties within the established church. In 1841 John Keble resigned from the Oxford chair of poetry and it was widely felt that Isaac Williams was the most suitable person to succeed him.¹⁰³ Although he did not initially wish to be considered for the post, the belief of many people that his Tractarian principles rendered him unelectable made him all the more determined to stand.¹⁰⁴ He was opposed by James Garbett of Brasenose College, who was widely known for his anti-Tractarian sentiments,¹⁰⁵ but whose poetic ability was regarded as being inferior to that of Williams. It therefore appeared a distinct possibility that Williams would be elected to the vacant post.¹⁰⁶

In a relatively short time this academic affair became embroiled in theological controversy. Historians of the movement have tended to lay the blame for this on E.B. Pusey who, in November 1842, composed a circular supporting Isaac Williams and claiming that, in putting forward Garbett as its candidate, Brasenose College was attempting to oppose him on purely theological grounds. Pusey claimed that Williams had proven his ability as a poet by his published poetic works and argued that he should not be disadvantaged in the competition on the basis of his churchmanship:

. . . it is earnestly hoped that the University will not, by the rejection of such a candidate as Mr. Williams, commit itself to the principle of making all its elections matters of party strife, or declaring ineligible to any of its offices

¹⁰¹ Williams I., “Indications of a Superintending Providence in the Preservation of the Prayer Book and in the Changes which it has Undergone (no. 86)”, *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford* (volume 5) (London, 1840), 3

¹⁰² Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 92-3

¹⁰³ Battiscombe G., *John Keble: A Study in Limitations* (London, 1963), 228

¹⁰⁴ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 137-8

¹⁰⁵ Palmer R. to Williams I. (1 January, 1842), L.P.L., M.S. 4475, f.114: Palmer described Garbett as “a kind of concrete impersonation of ‘Anti-Tractarianism’”.

¹⁰⁶ Skinner, “Williams, Isaac (1802-1865)”, 215; Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 51

(however qualified) persons whose earnest desire and aim, it has . . . been to promote the sound principles of our church¹⁰⁷

In his reply to Pusey's letter, A. T. Gilbert, the principal of Brasenose claimed that Garbett had been put forward as a candidate not specifically to oppose Williams, but rather because of his wide knowledge of the poetry of different periods and countries. While expressing regret for the fact that the competition had inevitably become involved in theological controversy, Gilbert claimed that Brasenose College was not responsible for this:

. . . it may unfortunately be true that what was begun in general rivalry may be assuming, more or less, the character of religious division. But we deny that we are responsible for this, either generally, or now in particular. We have not sought such an issue – we have encouraged no step towards it. We only advocate the just pretensions of a Gentleman well qualified for the office which he is seeking.¹⁰⁸

Despite Gilbert's claim, another response to Pusey's circular by W. Simcox Bricknell, the vicar of Grove near Wantage, accused the Tractarians of being merely concerned with furthering their own theological interests by supporting Isaac Williams.¹⁰⁹ Writing to Pusey in 1842, Williams claimed that he had read a letter from a fellow of Wadham claiming that he should not be elected to the chair of poetry because of his authorship of *Tract 80*. Some of Williams' friends had claimed that, despite their personal support, loyalty to their respective colleges prevented them from voting for him.¹¹⁰ This strongly suggests that, whether because of Pusey's circular or Williams' own notoriety as a supporter of the Oxford Movement, opposition to his election was based predominantly on theological grounds. An article published in *The Times* in December 1841 implied that Isaac Williams was opposed in the competition because of his association with the Oxford Movement,¹¹¹ while a protest signed by three of the 'Z's, namely John Miller, W.F. Hook and Edward Churton condemned "the irregular and . . . inexcusable complexion which has been

¹⁰⁷ Pusey E.B., a circular dated 17 November 1841, "The Professorship of Poetry at Oxford", *The Times*, 23 November 1841, Issue 17835, page 3

¹⁰⁸ A.T. Gilbert to E.B. Pusey (19 November, 1841), Pusey House Library, M.S. PUS 12/3

¹⁰⁹ Bricknell W.S., "*Is there not a cause?*" – *A Letter to the Rev. E.B. Pusey, D.D. . . . Occasioned by his Circular in support of The Rev. Isaac Williams . . . as a Candidate for the Poetry Professorship* (Oxford, 1841), passim and especially 20-4

¹¹⁰ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (No date, 1842), P.H. M.S. (L.B.V., no. 8)

¹¹¹ "Poetry Professorship at Oxford", *The Times*, 7 December 1841, issue 17847, page 3

forced upon a contest of neutral character, having no necessary or direct bearing upon the province of theology”.¹¹²

As a result of the controversy which ensued a large party emerged which wished to see both Williams and Garbett stand down from the contest. This included bishop Richard Bagot of Oxford and the M.P. William Ewart Gladstone. Together with Keble, Williams wrote a letter stating both his reasons for standing and also for believing that he stood a good chance of being elected to the professorship, but agreeing to stand down out of obedience to his bishop.¹¹³ Some of Williams’ associates were appalled by Bagot’s use of his episcopal authority to influence the internal affairs of the university and both Thomas Keble and Newman tried to discourage him from standing down.¹¹⁴ Williams initially decided to continue to stand for the professorship. However, when a comparison of promised votes demonstrated that Garbett had gained the majority, he withdrew from the contest.¹¹⁵

Although this episode must have been deeply disappointing for Williams, O.W. Jones’ claim that it was the main reason for him leaving Oxford in 1842¹¹⁶ ought to be treated with some caution. There appears to be some sincerity in Williams’ belief, reflected in a number of his letters to Pusey, that opposition would always be the result of standing firm for the truth.¹¹⁷ This, taken together with his frequent references in his letters post-1842 to the guilt which he felt that he could enjoy the security of Bisley while his “friends [had] to endure so much in Oxford”,¹¹⁸ would also seem to suggest that his departure was not merely the result of disappointment. In another letter to Pusey dated December 1843, Williams also suggested that the developing pro-Roman tendencies of the movement in Oxford had been a contributing factor in his decision to leave the city in 1842.¹¹⁹ The fact that Williams married Caroline Champerowne in 1842¹²⁰ may also have played a significant part in his decision to leave Oxford, since after marrying he would have

¹¹² Miller J., Hook W.F., Churton E., “Oxford Poetry Professorship”, L.P.L., M.S. 4476, f. 197

¹¹³ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 144-5

¹¹⁴ Williams I. to Newman J.H. (11 January 1842); Newman J.H. to Williams I. (12 January, 1842) in Tracey G. (editor), *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* (v. 8) (Oxford, 1999), 419-20

¹¹⁵ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 144-7

¹¹⁶ Jones, *Isaac Williams*, 53

¹¹⁷ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (1 July 1843), (19 October 1844?), (19 December, 1851), P.H., M.S. (L.B.V., nos. 11, 18 and 27)

¹¹⁸ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (14 June 1843), P.H., M.S. (L.B.V., no. 9)

¹¹⁹ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (15 December 1843), P.H., M.S. (L.B.V., no. 20)

¹²⁰ Skinner, “Williams, Isaac (1802-1865)”, , 214

had to resign his fellowship and would have needed the regular income of a clergy stipend in order to support his new wife and family financially.

Whatever the main reason for Williams' departure from Oxford he continued to play an important role in the Oxford Movement after 1842. Despite his failing health which prevented him from holding a parish of his own, he served as a curate to Thomas Keble at Bisley from 1842 to 1848 and to George Prevost at Stinchcombe from 1848 until his death in 1865.¹²¹ His letters to Pusey suggest that he was a conscientious pastor and that his duties in his parishes often prevented much desired trips to Oxford to visit his old friends.¹²² Despite his poor health Williams continued to contribute to the Tractarian cause by writing voluminously and by the end of his life had produced an extensive amount of poetry, sermons and prose devotional writings.¹²³ In what was largely an academic movement centred on Oxford, Williams' writings were devotional in tone and it is likely that they would have appealed to a greater audience than the theological treatises written by the other leaders of the movement. They therefore made an important contribution to the Oxford Movement by attempting to circulate its teaching outside Oxford and among ordinary parish clergy and laity.

Isaac Williams' first published poem was his *Ars Geologia*, the Latin poem which won the Oxford University Chancellor's Prize for Latin Verse in 1823.¹²⁴ As well as being assisted by John Keble, Williams also sought the advice of his former headmaster at Harrow, George Butler, who provided detailed comments on a draft of the poem and recommended that Williams read the geological works of William Buckland in order to help him with his composition.¹²⁵ Written in the metre of hexameters used by Virgil in the *Aeniad*, the work seeks to provide a complete geological analysis of the earth and of the rocks and minerals of which it is composed, claiming that the structure of the earth points to God its creator.¹²⁶ The poetic language used by Williams echoes the style of Virgil and Lucretius and the reflects Williams' competence in the composition of Latin verse and his familiarity with the classical writings.

¹²¹ Ibid. , 214-5

¹²² Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (Palm Sunday, 1844), Pusey House M.S. (L.B.V., no. 16)

¹²³ Skinner, "Williams, Isaac (1802-1865)", 215-6

¹²⁴ Ibid., 214

¹²⁵ Butler G. to Williams I. (15 February 1823), Butler G. to Williams I. (no date), L.P.L., M.S. 4473, ff. 84-7

¹²⁶ Williams I., *Thoughts in Past Years* (London, 1838), 397-405; translated by P.M. Jones (2007)

Williams' first published volume of poetry, *The Cathedral*, aimed to expound the principles of the Oxford Movement through verse. Published in 1838 under the influence of John Keble,¹²⁷ the work consists of a series of poems on the different parts of a cathedral building, each part of the architecture relating to a different theological theme.¹²⁸ So, for example, the 'Chapter House' was seen as pointing to episcopacy and the apostolic succession,¹²⁹ the three doors of the western front to the baptismal vows¹³⁰ and the screen which separated the nave from the sanctuary to the doctrine of reserve.¹³¹

Later in 1838 Williams published a volume of poems entitled *Thoughts in Past Years*. This consisted of a selection of his poetry written between 1826 and 1838 which he believed far exceeded *The Cathedral* in terms of quality. The volume consists of a variety of poetry including nature poetry focussing on the 'Golden Valley' near Stroud, Cwmcynfelin where Williams was born and Windrush where he had served as curate, and reflects Williams' pastoral experience as a country parson as well as the Tractarian concern with ecclesiastical and political issues.¹³²

In 1839 Williams published a volume of English translations of the hymns of the Paris breviary, adapted for Anglican use. He claimed that such translations of ancient Latin hymns were more suitable for use in the church's liturgy than modern compositions.¹³³ Another volume of hymns written by Williams was his *Hymns on the Catechism* which was published in 1843. These were designed to respond to the need for hymns which were could both be understood by children and were also suitable for providing instruction on the teachings of the catechism.¹³⁴

Probably the most popular of Williams' poetic works was *The Baptistry* which appeared in 1842.¹³⁵ This work consisted of thirty-two poems on a series of images by the Flemish artist Boethius a Bolswert (1590-1634), taken from the Roman Catholic devotional manual *Via Vitae Aeternae* by the French Jesuit Antonie Sucquet (1574-1626).¹³⁶ Williams presented these images as engravings around the walls of a

¹²⁷ Froude R.H. to Williams I. (21, September, 1835), L.P.L., M.S. 4474, f. 99

¹²⁸ Williams I., *The Cathedral, or the Catholic and Apostolic Church in England* (Oxford, 1848 edition.), v-vi

¹²⁹ Ibid., 43-9

¹³⁰ Ibid., 3-10

¹³¹ Ibid., 210-11

¹³² Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, 148-154

¹³³ Williams, I., *Hymns Translated from the Parisian Breviary* (London, 1839), iv

¹³⁴ Williams I., *Hymns on the Catechism* (London, 1843), 3

¹³⁵ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 39

¹³⁶ Ibid., 39

baptistery in a church, like that of St. Ouen at Rouen.¹³⁷ The depictions evoke poetic reflection on a number of themes relating to the Christian life, for example, the choices which the individual must make if he, or she, is to be obedient to God's will, the importance of prayer for the Christian, the importance of thankfulness for God's good gifts and the importance of trust in God's providence.¹³⁸ A number of the poems from *The Baptistery* are also concerned with what the Tractarians saw as the adverse state of the Church of England in the nineteenth century,¹³⁹ a theme which Williams had already dwelt on in *The Cathedral*.

Williams also became well-known for his eight volumes of *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* which were published between 1841 and 1850.¹⁴⁰ The work was deeply patristic in tone and abounded with quotations from the church fathers. As we shall see, Williams imitated the patristic approach to scripture and stressed that, while the Bible was always true on a literal level, it was also necessary to interpret it in a deeper, spiritual sense.¹⁴¹

After leaving Oxford, Williams continued to produce a number of works, both poetry and prose, while he served as Thomas Keble's curate at Bisley. His *Sacred Verses with Pictures*, published in 1845, is a short volume of illustrated devotional poems. *The Altar*, published in 1847, was a larger work *en par* with *The Cathedral* and *The Baptistery* and consisted of sonnets on various aspects of Christ's passion, each one accompanied by illustrations of a priest celebrating a particular part of the Church of England's Communion rite.¹⁴²

Williams' other poetic works, published after he had moved to Stinchcombe, were *The Christian Scholar* (1849), *The Seven Days, or the Old and New Creation* (1850) and *The Christian Seasons* (1854). In the first of these Williams attempted to demonstrate the relevance of the Latin and Greek classical writings to the Christian faith. In his view the classics were not opposed to the spirit of Christian truth since dim reflections of it could be seen in the works of the pre-Christian writers.¹⁴³

Both *The Seven Days* and *The Christian Seasons* were lengthy works which, like *The Cathedral* and *The Baptistery* used the imagery of the physical world as the

¹³⁷ Williams I., *The Baptistery or the Way of Eternal Life* (Oxford, 1844 edition), 1

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-12, 22,32, 43,52, 165-73

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 123-34

¹⁴⁰ Skinner, "Williams, Isaac (1802-1865)", 216

¹⁴¹ Williams I., *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative: Thoughts on the Study of the Holy Gospels* (volume 1) (London, 1882 edition), 153-4

¹⁴² Williams I., *The Altar, or Meditations on the Great Christian Sacrifice* (London, 1847), *passim*

starting point for reflection on theological themes. In *The Seven Days*, Williams attempted to use the account of creation in the first chapter of Genesis as the basis for allegorical reflection on spiritual themes.¹⁴⁴ For example, the creation of the light on the first day of creation calls to mind the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Christian¹⁴⁵ and the creation of the waters on the second day the sacrament of Baptism.¹⁴⁶ Williams' last poetic work, *The Christian Seasons*, made use of the different periods of the church's year to evoke religious teaching. Central to this volume is the idea that the changing seasons of the year point to the transience of human life and the hope of eternal life in heaven.¹⁴⁷ In its emphasis on the seasons of the liturgical year the work calls to mind Keble's *The Christian Year*, though its tone is clearly that of an older man looking back and reminiscing on his past life.

Williams also wrote various prose works after 1842. His *Meditations and Prayers* published in 1845 was an English translation of Sucquet's *Via Vitae Aeternae* which had influenced his writing of *The Baptistery*.¹⁴⁸ After moving to Stinchcombe in 1848, he also published his *Sermons on the Latter Part of the Catechism* (1851) as a compendium to the sermons which had made up the ninth volume of the *Plain Sermons*, as well as his commentary on the book of Revelation, which appeared in 1852 under the title *The Apocalypse*.

In the same year Williams produced *A Memoir of the Revd. Robert Alfred Suckling* in memory of a close friend who had served as the perpetual curate of Bussage and had died in 1851.¹⁴⁹ He also edited a volume of Suckling's sermons which appeared in 1853. Between 1853 and 1855 Williams produced three volumes of sermons for each of the Sundays and feasts of the liturgical year, followed by a volume of sermons on *The Characters of the Old Testament* and *The Female Characters of Holy Scripture* in 1856 and 1859 respectively. Williams' *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, appeared in 1861 and built upon his earlier biblical commentaries and *The Seven Days*. The last of Williams' works to be published was his commentary on the Psalter entitled *The Psalms Interpreted of Christ*. This

¹⁴³ Williams I., *The Christian Scholar* (Oxford, 1849), xiii-xvi

¹⁴⁴ Williams, *The Seven Days*, 49

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 11

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 141

¹⁴⁷ Williams I., *The Christian Seasons* (London, 1854), xvii

¹⁴⁸ Skinner, "Williams, Isaac (1802-1865)", 216

¹⁴⁹ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 115-121

appeared in 1864 though Williams only succeeded in publishing the first of the three intended volumes before his death.

It is interesting to note that Isaac Williams' sister Jane, the wife of George Prevost, seems to have had an important influence over his writings. Although there are no extant letters between her and her brother, and it is impossible to identify the exact extent of her influence, in a letter to Copeland dated 1853, Williams claimed that "she alone since I left Oxford has seen what I have written, nor generally speaking have I ever printed anything without first obtaining her sanction".¹⁵⁰ The fact that Jane Prevost had assisted Isaac Williams with a number of his publications is also reflected in the preface to *The Christian Seasons* which was written as a memorial to her following her death in 1853.¹⁵¹

So this must go without thy guiding hand
And thine approving eye into the world
Which thou hast left; and not one page of this
Is mark'd with thine own hand, as always wont,
Alas! with me, nor thy dear voice hath told
What to retain, and what to cast aside.¹⁵²

It may be that, by assisting her brother with his published works, Jane Prevost herself made an indirect contribution to the Oxford Movement which has never been recognised.

It is important not to underestimate the value of Isaac Williams' contribution to the Oxford Movement even if, perhaps largely because of his poor health, he tended to remain in the background rather than in the forefront of the movement. Despite the division which entered the movement in the wake of Newman's conversion in 1845, Williams never wavered in his faith in the catholicity of the Church of England and his example provided a necessary balance to the more radical Tractarianism of individuals like Newman and Froude. Despite spending ten years at Trinity as an academic, the time which Williams spent as a rural clergyman in Windrush, Bisley and Stinchcombe reflects his emphasis on the practical duties of Christian living. For Williams the Oxford Movement was not essentially about changing the Church of England or trying to prove that it was, in fact, the true catholic and apostolic church. Rather it was about handing on the faith as it had been

¹⁵⁰ Williams I. to Copeland W.J. (17 January, 1853), L.P.L., Box 779, "Photocopies of "Isaac Williams Letters" donated by the late Mr. Edgan Hubert (died 1985)"

¹⁵¹ Bowdler T. to Williams I. (31 August, 1854), L.P.L., M.S. 4473, f. 38

¹⁵² Williams, *The Christian Seasons*, vii

understood by the early church and taught by successive generations of Anglican High Churchmen, in an attempt to improve peoples' spiritual lives. Williams is a significant figure because he formed a link between this conservative form of Tractarianism, which was typical of the 'Bisley School', and that of the Oxford Tractarians. Apart from his close friendship with James Davies, he was also on good terms with a number of the 'Z' High Churchmen, including Hugh James Rose, Benjamin Harrison, William Gresley, William Sewell and Richard William Jelf, who are to be found among his correspondents.¹⁵³

The importance of Isaac Williams and his published writings to the Oxford Movement was highlighted in a letter written by Pusey dated 1842:

I always thought you more fitted for contemplation than for practical life; you can do what few others can, & now, still fewer – write. You seem to have a special office both in your poetry & in that meditation exposition of H[oly Scr[ipture] in your books.¹⁵⁴

For Pusey, Williams' withdrawal from Oxford was in fact a blessing to the movement since it allowed him a greater opportunity to write and publish. The fact that numerous editions of Williams' works were printed throughout the nineteenth century would seem to suggest that they helped to propagate the principles of the Tractarian movement to a wide audience of parish clergy and laity outside Oxford.¹⁵⁵

A number of other letters to Williams suggest that his example and the influence of his writings were indispensable in helping to promote the Tractarian cause. James Davies, for example, wrote that

The sanction of your name goes farther than you think. By the powerful example of you . . . a move has been made. Sound, sober, sensible men are coming out bolder & on farther into old primitive Catholic ways.¹⁵⁶

Williams sent copies of his works to a number of prominent individuals such as Samuel Wilberforce the bishop of Oxford, Thomas Bowdler who later became a prebendary of St. Paul's cathedral, Charles Lyell the botanist and literary scholar, Henry Edward Manning, and bishop Connop Thirlwall of St. David's, each of whom expressed admiration for them.¹⁵⁷ C.S. Greenway of Barrington also sent a number of his own poems to Williams in order to seek his advice as to whether or not they

¹⁵³ See L.P.L., M.S. 4473-6

¹⁵⁴ Pusey E.B. to Williams I. (1842), L.P.L., M.S., M.S. 4475, f. 181

¹⁵⁵ Thomas W., "A Bibliography of the Works of the Revd Isaac Williams, MA, BD, 1802-65", *Y Llyfr yng Nghymru/Welsh Book Studies*, 8 (2007), 79-116

¹⁵⁶ Davies J. to Williams I. (6 December, 1842), L.P.L., M.S., 4474, ff. 2-3

should be published.¹⁵⁸ Even Edward Paxton Hood, a congregational minister at Stinchcombe, wrote to Williams in 1854 to congratulate him on the quality of his gospel commentaries.¹⁵⁹

Isaac Williams' reputation as a devotional writer is also confirmed by the fact that, in 1859, the publishers Francis and John Rivington asked him if he would consider writing either an *Old Testament History for Young People* which would provide a history of the Jewish people until the birth of Christ, or a *Compendious Church History* from apostolic times until the eighteenth century.¹⁶⁰ Clearly the publishers believed that Williams was a writer of the ability to do justice to either of these titles. A letter from Horatio Potter, a Tractarian sympathiser who later became bishop of New York, claimed that Williams' poetry and other devotional works were being circulated in America and had influenced many people there so that, during his serious illness in 1846, many American Tractarians were praying for Williams' recovery.¹⁶¹ Another letter from John Stuart outlined the state of the Scottish church and claimed that Williams' works had done much to aid the cause of religion in that country:

The one great want is that of holiness, and as tending to elevate the standard of holy living, to make men feel the awfulness of their privileges and responsibilities – to examine themselves as to their actual state before God – and press onward with a renewed sense of reality and sincerity, your own works amid so many that are excellent, have always appeared to me to be particularly adapted. We have felt the danger of making religion overmuch a matter of theory and disputing – and the deep, devotional pathetic spirit of your works, has been like oil diffused on the surface of tumultuous waters. I hope to be forgiven for alluding so much to your own books – but I am so cognizant of their beneficial effects at the present time, and so satisfied that this is the one end contemplated by them that I have felt emboldened to do so.¹⁶²

Williams' zeal for the cause of the Oxford Movement is evident from both the volume and content of his poetry, sermons and scriptural commentaries, each of which helped to propagate its teaching, and were widely valued. He was clearly an individual who embodied the movement's principles in his life and expounded them in his writings.

¹⁵⁷ See L.P.L., M.S., 4473, ff. 3, 38; M.S. 4475, f.5, 7-8, M.S. 4476, f. 54

¹⁵⁸ Greenway C.S. to Williams I. (no date, but pre 1842), L.P.L., M.S. 4474, f. 106

¹⁵⁹ Hood E.P. to Williams I. (1854), L.P.L., 4474, f. 131-4

¹⁶⁰ Rivington F. and J. to Williams I. (5 October, 1859), L.P.L., M.S. 4476, ff. 2-4

¹⁶¹ Potter H. to Williams C. (13 June, 1846), L.P.L., M.S. 4475, f. 146

¹⁶² Stuart J. to Williams I. (13 June, 1846), L.P.L., M.S. 4476, f. 20

Chapter Two: The Principle of Reserve

Isaac Williams was brought into the public eye in 1838 as a result of the publication of his tract “On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge” which was included as number 80 in the *Tracts for the Times*. It is ironic that a man such as Williams, who tended to shy away from public attention, should have been responsible for writing what would come to be regarded as one of the most contentious tracts of the series.¹ As a result of the opposition which *Tract 80* received Williams published another under the same title, which appeared as number 87 of the *Tracts* in 1840. R.W. Church claimed that both publications led to Williams being “singled out as almost the most wicked and dangerous of the Tractarians”.²

Both *Tracts 80* and *87* dealt with what became known as the principle of ‘reserve’ which was directly related to how Williams and the other leaders of the Oxford Movement understood the nature of revelation. According to the Tractarian view of reserve, since God always revealed himself gradually, according to humanity’s readiness to receive that revelation, it was necessary that Christian doctrine should not be expounded openly to all but taught gradually and with reverence. Reserve could be seen at work in what the Tractarians called the *Disciplina Arcani* of the early church whereby catechumens were taught Christian doctrines gradually as they progressed in faith and spiritual comprehension. Thus the most ‘basic’ truths were taught first and the more ‘complicated’ mysteries of the faith were withheld until the individual was spiritually prepared to receive them.³ Apart from their own study of the patristic writings, Williams and the Tractarians would have found the *Disciplina Arcani* outlined in the *Origines Ecclesiasticæ* of the eighteenth century church historian Joseph Bingham. Bingham claimed that, in the primitive church, it was only the baptised faithful who were permitted to play a full part in the church’s liturgy and to join in the prayers. The catechumens were not allowed to recite the Lord’s Prayer, and “the most abstruse points and profound mysteries of the Christian religion” were taught only to the baptised and not to all enquirers.⁴ The principle of reserve also lay behind the allegorical approach to scripture employed by

¹ Skinner, “Williams, Isaac”, 216

² Church, *The Oxford Movement*, 76

³ Newman J.H., *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (Leominster, 2001 edition), 44 ff.

⁴ Bingham J., *Origines Ecclesiasticæ, or the Antiquities of the Christian Church* (volume 1) (London, 1843 edition), 36-8

individuals like Origen and Clement of Alexandria, whereby the Bible was seen as possessing a deeper significance than was obvious from a purely literal reading of it.⁵

In *Tracts 80* and *87* Isaac Williams attempted to provide a thorough consideration of the doctrine of reserve as he and the Tractarians understood it. As well as attempting to prove that the ideal had its basis in scripture and the practice of the early church, he also tried to demonstrate that it was inextricably linked to the moral nature of humanity. He went on to consider the implications which the principle held for the nineteenth century church and criticised the Evangelicals for attempting to propagate the Christian faith by means which were directly opposed to the spirit of reserve.

Despite the opposition which Williams' tracts on reserve attracted, it is clear that they dealt with a principle which was central to Tractarian thought and spirituality. Not only was the principle seen as providing a basis for catechesis, but it also lay behind the Tractarian view of poetry, scripture, the sacraments, ecclesiology and the liturgy. Although it fell to Isaac Williams to provide an extensive consideration of reserve in his tracts he was not the only leader of the movement to emphasise its importance. In his *Autobiography* he claimed that he first learned of the principle through the unassuming lifestyle of John Keble and through reading Origen's commentaries on the gospels. It also featured prominently in Newman's *The Arians of the Fourth Century*.⁶ The principle had also been an important, if implicit, element of the pre-Tractarian High Church tradition⁷ and its roots can be seen in the writings of the church fathers, particularly in Clement of Alexandria and Origen's references to a secret tradition which could only be received by those who possessed the capacity to understand it.⁸ As the author of *Tracts 80* and *87* Williams was therefore attempting to expound what he saw as an important aspect of the tradition to which he belonged.

⁵ Cf. Simonetti M. (translated by Hughes J.A.), *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis* (Edinburgh, 1994), 35-9, 41-4

⁶ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 89; Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, 44-6

⁷ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 198-200

⁸ See Hanson R.P.C., *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition* (London, 1954), 53- 90

1. *Tracts 80 and 87 “On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge”*

Reserve in the Gospels and the Early Church

At the beginning of *Tract 80* Isaac Williams outlined his belief that divine revelation is always linked to a withholding of certain sacred truths until the individual is spiritually prepared to receive them.⁹ The first section of the tract attempts to demonstrate that this was the case from the example of Christ’s life and ministry as portrayed by the gospel narratives. For Williams the incarnation of Christ was an expression of reserve, since, in Jesus, God himself was “for thirty years among men, not known and believed on, even by those about Him”. Reserve was also to be seen in the way that the resurrection was revealed at first only to the disciples,¹⁰ and from Jesus’ continual refusal to reveal that he was the promised Messiah to enquirers other than his disciples.¹¹

The importance of reserve was also reflected in Jesus’ method of teaching. Williams claimed that his use of parables was an example of the divine concealment of knowledge since they were “made to convey a lesson different from what is at first sight perceptible to a careless hearer”.¹² They were not so much a means of openly expounding religious teaching as of withholding sacred truth from those who were unprepared to receive it. Thus, according to the gospel accounts, a person’s ability fully to comprehend Jesus’ teaching was directly related to his or her spiritual condition:

I would adduce . . . that the want of comprehension was indeed a fault in the moral disposition of the hearer; on which supposition alone is grounded the argument of the Truth not being fully manifested by our Lord.¹³

Jesus revealed the true meaning of his parables only to his disciples whose moral and spiritual state gave them “eyes to see” in him the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament (cf. Matthew 13:36 ff.). He did not explain them to the Scribes and Pharisees, who are portrayed as being blind to such moral and spiritual realities.¹⁴ Williams believed that the fact that Jesus used parables as a means of withholding

⁹ Williams, “On Reserve (no. 80)”, 3

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21

¹² *Ibid.*, 6

¹³ *Ibid.*, 8-9

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10

sacred teaching from those who lacked faith was confirmed by the interpretation of the church fathers.¹⁵

Williams claimed that reserve could also be seen at work in the miracles of Christ. While Jesus was always eager to help others by working miracles, his ability to do so depended upon the faith of those who approached him (cf. Matthew 13:58), since “the benefits conferred in the Gospel are in a sort of measured proportion, according to the faith of the recipient”.¹⁶ This reticence of Christ to act, according to Williams, emphasised the fact that humanity had to co-operate with God in order to partake of the benefits of salvation. This was typical of God’s means of dealing with his people in the Old Testament. For example, when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush he did not speak to Moses until he had turned to look at the bush (Exodus 3:3-4). Reserve was also reflected in Moses’ miracle of drawing water from the rock in Exodus 17, which was not carried out openly but only before the elders of Israel (Exodus 17:5).¹⁷

Williams saw Jesus’ reticence to reveal himself openly through his miracles as being directly related to the danger of committing the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit (cf. Mark 3:29-30). For Williams this sin was synonymous with rejecting the ultimate revelation of God. Had Jesus revealed himself fully through his miracles then those who beheld such a revelation would have had no excuse for their rejection of him and would have been guilty of the unforgivable sin. His use of reserve was therefore, in Williams’ view, an act of mercy towards those who might have been tempted to reject him since, “[a]ll sin is forgiven which is repented of . . . but to see God Himself revealed, and to deny Him is a state in which all principle is gone . . . we are sure there is no forgiveness.”¹⁸ In his review of Charles Forster’s *The Apostolical Authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews* which was printed in *The British Critic* in 1839, Williams claimed that the principle of reserve was also reflected in the epistles of St. Paul which “combined in their teaching a certain freedom and boldness with a kind of reserve, qualities which appear, at first sight to be . . . contradictory to each

¹⁵ Ibid., 11, quoting Cyril, *Catechesis*, vi; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, B. vi, p. 676; Chrysostom, *Homily on St. Matthew*, xiii

¹⁶ Ibid., 12

¹⁷ Ibid., 20

¹⁸ Ibid., 14

other. They declared the truth fully and fearlessly to all, yet in such a manner as was best suited to the tempers and circumstances of each”.¹⁹

In *Tract 87* Williams went on to consider the significance of reserve in the practice of the primitive church. He believed that the principle was inextricably linked to the nature of the early church, being “thoroughly and entirely infused into [its] whole system” so that “their words, their notions, their practices thoroughly breathe[d] of it”.²⁰ This was evident from the writings of a number of the church fathers from whom Williams quoted. Justin Martyr, for example, wrote that “[t]he things which were delivered to me, I am the means to convey to those who are worthy, who have become disciples of the truth”.²¹ Hippolytus also reflected the importance of reserve in expounding religious truth when he encouraged pastors to “[t]ake care that these things be not delivered to unbelieving and blasphemous tongues . . . [but] to serious and faithful men who wish to live holily and justly with fear”.²²

Williams believed that reserve was fundamental to the *Disciplina Arcani* of the early church where, rather than teaching all the doctrines of the faith to enquirers immediately, Christian teachers “kept back in reserve the higher doctrines of our Faith until persons were rendered fit to receive them by a long previous preparation”.²³ It was this practice of gradual catechesis which the Tractarians upheld as an ideal and saw as an example of how the faith ought to be taught in their own day. In Williams’ view, there was also a direct connection between the *Disciplina Arcani* and human morality. This was reflected in the writings of Tertullian who stressed the inextricable link between ‘truth’ and ‘discipline’:

discipline is an index of doctrine: they say that God ought to be feared; therefore, everything with them is free and open. But where is God not feared but where He is not? And where God is not truth is not; and where there is no truth of course there is no discipline.²⁴

¹⁹ Williams I., “*The Apostolical Authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews*”, *The British Critic*, v. 25 (July-December, 1839), 181

²⁰ Williams I., “On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge (no. 87)”, *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford* (v. 5) (London, 1840), 7

²¹ *Ibid.*, 12, citing unreferenced quotation from Justin Martyr

²² *Ibid.*, citing unreferenced quotation from Hippolytus

²³ *Ibid.*, 7

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14, citing an unreferenced quotation from the writings of Tertullian

This was closely related to the principle of reserve since it held that only those who lived faithful Christian lives, expressed through good works, could truly perceive God's revelation.

The connection between reserve and the *Disciplina Arcani* was also an important theme in Newman's *The Arians of the Fourth Century* in which the *Disciplina* was essential to Newman's defence of the church of Alexandria against the charge of Arianism. In his view the fact that Alexandrian theologians who preceded the Council of Nicea did not always use language which spoke explicitly of Christ's divinity could be seen as an example of reserve rather than of Arianising.²⁵ Closely connected with Newman's reflection on reserve and the Arian heresy was his belief that, because Christian truths were sacred, it was preferable for them to be held implicitly by the faithful rather than for them to be defined openly by dogmatic statements:

when confessions do not exist, the mysteries of divine truth, instead of being exposed to the gaze of the profane and uninstructed, are kept hidden in the bosom of the Church . . . and reserved by a private teaching, through the channel of her ministers, as rewards in due measure and season, for those who are prepared to profit by them.²⁶

While the formal declaration of doctrine was essential in order to preserve the integrity of the faith when challenged by heresy, Newman believed that this was always regrettable since the sense of reserve in declaring sacred truth was undermined.²⁷

Isaac Williams also believed that the importance of reserve was reflected in the patristic interpretation of scripture. The church fathers, he claimed, interpreted scripture in a highly allegorical way according to which the Bible was seen as containing a "latent mysterious meaning" which underlay its literal sense. This symbolic interpretation could only be comprehended by those who possessed the gift of faith.²⁸ Williams believed that this mode of interpreting scripture was in line with Jesus' own interpretation of the Old Testament and had been the universal practice of the early church.²⁹ It also paralleled God's revelation of himself through the natural

²⁵ Williams R., "Introduction", in Newman J.H., *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (Leominster, 2001 edition), xxix; Pereiro, *Ethos and the Oxford Movement*, 157

²⁶ Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, 37

²⁷ Williams, "Introduction", xxix-xxx

²⁸ Williams, "On Reserve (no. 87)", 21

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23-4

world where “He has withdrawn the veil and opened something of the mysterious vastness, and ways, and order of things celestial”.³⁰ It highlighted the difference between orthodox Christians and heretics since the latter failed to recognise the deeper meaning of scripture and saw in it nothing more than “human words”.³¹ Williams also claimed that the Hebrew language in which the Old Testament was written was in accord with the nature of reserve since it “contains many deep and ulterior meanings, which may be considered as types of each other”.³² The veneration in which the church fathers held the scriptures and the sanctity which they attributed to its interpretation is reflected in the fact that they believed that an individual could not properly interpret the Bible without the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Williams quoted Irenaeus who wrote that

Those things in scripture which we cannot discover we ought to leave to God . . . we as the last and least in His Word and in His Spirit, must need His help for the knowledge of His mysteries.³³

This emphasises the fact that, for the patristic writers, the allegorical approach to scripture was a God-given means of interpreting his reserved revelation in scripture.

John Keble also dealt with the relationship between reserve and scripture in his *Tract 89* “On Mysticism attributed to the Early Fathers of the Church”, in which he claimed that reserve was a fundamental element of the patristic interpretation of scripture. He pointed out that, in order to understand the patristic writings correctly, one had to be aware of the fact that the church fathers wrote in a reserved way about the most sacred aspects of the faith, especially regarding the sacraments and Jesus’ divine status.³⁴ For example, Keble claimed that St. Barnabas’ writings displayed “an instance of the discipline of reserve, which the Church recommended in the conveyance of all her mysteries”.³⁵ Like Isaac Williams, Keble believed that reserve was reflected in Origen’s allegorical approach to scripture since,

it was by no means his custom, to trust the ordinary hearers with all the mysterious wonders, which he seemed to himself faintly to discern in Scripture, but . . . he always suggested those which he judged best for edifying.³⁶

³⁰ Ibid., 22

³¹ Ibid., 21

³² Ibid., 23

³³ Ibid., 25, citing Irenaeus

³⁴ Keble J., “On Mysticism attributed to the Early Fathers of the Church (no. 89)”, *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford* (volume 5) (London, 1840), 13-4

³⁵ Ibid., 22

³⁶ Ibid., 56

The Relationship between Knowledge and Morality and its implications for the Doctrine of Reserve

Central to Isaac Williams' understanding of reserve was his belief that there is an inextricable link between knowledge and morality since scripture teaches that divine revelation is only vouchsafed to those who desire to receive it and are worthy to do so.³⁷ This notion was central to the thinking of the Tractarians in general. Under the influence of bishop Joseph Butler's *Analogy of Religion* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, John Keble believed that the pursuit of intellectual truth was inextricably linked to growth in moral goodness.³⁸ As James Pereiro has pointed out, this belief, was the direct opposite of the Enlightenment's emphasis on intellectual knowledge leading to moral improvement.³⁹ It was Keble's understanding of the relationship between knowledge and morality which led Newman, Froude and R.I. Wilberforce to emphasise the pastoral as well as the academic aspect of their role as college tutors at Oriel.⁴⁰

In *Tract 80* Isaac Williams claimed that the direct link between knowledge and morality was confirmed by the Bible since, in scripture, "sin is frequently spoken of by expressions which imply "the light within being darkened" and progressive holiness is continually alluded to as progress in knowledge".⁴¹ At the same time,

[the] blindness of heart and darkness which is superinduced, as the natural consequence of an evil life is . . . consistently, throughout the whole of scripture, attributed to the agency of God.⁴²

This emphasis led Williams to minimize the role of the human intellect in religious faith and to emphasise the importance of good works and the pursuit of Christian holiness. It was impossible to attain a complete knowledge of God by the intellect alone since understanding of divine truth could be achieved by "nothing else but a sense of the Divine presence", which could only be gained by the pursuit of personal sanctity.⁴³ Williams believed that it was only possible to grow in knowledge of divine truth by a humble faith since, "if we attempt to arrive at any knowledge [of religious

³⁷ Williams, "On Reserve (no. 80)", 34

³⁸ Pereiro, *Ethos and the Oxford Movement*, 86-7, 91

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 87

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 85-6

⁴¹ Williams, "On Reserve (no. 80)", 34

⁴² *Ibid.*, 36

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 40

truth] by speculation . . . that knowledge is withheld and we are punished for the attempt” to attain it.⁴⁴ He went on to list the emergence of Arianism, the development of the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation and the rejection of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration by the Evangelicals as examples of the blindness which had been inflicted by God as a punishment for an overly rationalistic approach to the Christian faith.⁴⁵

A similar point was also made in Williams’ review of Charles Forster’s *The Apostolical Authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, printed in *The British Critic*. In this article Williams considered Forster’s claim that St. Paul was the original author of the letter to the Hebrews and that it had not been written by an amanuensis other than the apostle. While Williams did not fully accept Forster’s argument and claimed that St. Luke may have acted as St. Paul’s scribe,⁴⁶ he pointed out that the real authorship of the epistle was a mystery which could never be completely resolved. This led him to reiterate the argument from *Tract 80* that it was necessary for human beings to accept doubt and not to attempt to pry into mysteries. Knowledge lay not in the power of the intellect but rather in humble acceptance of divine revelation. Doubt was a gift from God which helped to preserve humanity from intellectual pride:

. . . such a state of doubt is perhaps in all matters good for our probation. When considered with regard to our intellectual faculties, as well as those more directly moral and spiritual, our lot is to find no rest for our feet. We ought therefore . . . to seek for repose and confidence in the high thought . . . that in the paternal bosom of the Almighty all things rest; and that out of His own fullness He imparts of knowledge, and all other gifts, as seemeth to Him best: if He gives, it is good to receive from Him; if He withholds, it is good to receive not; if in a matter of practice He allows us to know, let us thankfully use the gift; if He withdraws the knowledge, let us acquiesce in this our ignorance, and thankfully receive even that also.⁴⁷

It is interesting to note that, like Isaac Williams, the eighteenth century Hutchinsonian High Churchmen also emphasised the belief that humanity could come to a complete knowledge of God only by being obedient to revelation and not by means of the human intellect.⁴⁸ Their belief that, those who rejected revealed truths did so “not from sincere inability to recognise its truth, but from perverse and sinful reliance on

⁴⁴ Ibid., 45

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Williams, “*The Apostolical Authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews*”, 172-3

⁴⁷ Ibid., 176

⁴⁸ Varley E.R., *The Last of the Prince Bishops: William Van Mildert and the High Church Movement of the Early Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1992), 41

their own intellectual self-sufficiency”,⁴⁹ is reminiscent of the Tractarian emphasis on the link between knowledge and morality.

Williams’ emphasis in *Tract 80* on “practical obedience”⁵⁰ as the necessary means of obtaining knowledge of divine truth also reflects his belief that growth in true knowledge of God was inextricably linked to holiness of life. This was expressed by the author of the first epistle of John in his emphasis on the importance of love of God as a fulfilment of the divine commandment (cf. 1 John 2) and as the means of coming to knowledge of God’s truth (1 John 4:7). The author of the epistle, Williams claimed,

. . . often mentions this knowledge in connection with love, and such love as the result of obedience . . . actions of self-denial dispose the heart to prayer, prayer to the love of God, and the love of God to the knowledge of Him⁵¹

The Implications of the Doctrine of Reserve for Methods of Expounding Christian Truth

Isaac Williams believed that the principle of reserve was opposed to the Evangelical emphasis on the need to preach the truths of the gospel as openly and extensively as possible.⁵² In both of his tracts he made use of a distinctively anti-Evangelical polemic, claiming that this group was guilty of a lack of respect for sacred truth.⁵³ He also criticised the increasingly popular practice of widely distributing copies of the scriptures brought about by advances in the expansion of the printing industry,⁵⁴ claiming that this sought to reveal the more sacred Christian truths to those who were not morally and spiritually prepared for their reception:

. . . if it is a state of heart alone which can receive the truth, to bring it forward before persons unprepared to acknowledge it does not signify . . . that they cannot receive it is the appointment of God, but our attempting to act contrary to His mode of acting may be productive of evil.⁵⁵

The national schools were also subject to Williams’ criticism for attempting to teach religious subjects openly to pupils without making use of the system of “parental and pastoral training” favoured by the church which involved the gradual

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Williams, “On Reserve (no. 80)”, 45

⁵¹ Ibid., 40-1

⁵² Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 199; Conybeare W.J., *Church Parties* (edited by Burns A.), in Taylor S. (editor), *From Cranmer to Davidson: A Church of England Miscellany* (Suffolk, 1999), 287-8

⁵³ Williams, “On Reserve (no. 87)”, 80

⁵⁴ Williams, “On Reserve (no. 80)”, 61

⁵⁵ Ibid., 70

teaching of doctrine “by practical instruction; such as catechising and the use of a constant devotional form”.⁵⁶ While he recognised that building churches was in itself a worthy activity, he questioned the intention behind the nineteenth century increase in church building and was concerned that it should not be an attempt to “do by human means, and such as partake of this world, that which is the work of God alone, as if the mammon of the world could promote the cause of God”.⁵⁷

Williams’ criticism of distributing copies of the Bible as a means of converting the unbeliever found a striking parallel in E.B. Pusey’s sermon *The Church the Converter of the Heathen* which was preached at Melcombe Regis the same year that *Tract 80* was published. In this sermon Pusey criticised the belief that the heathen could discover Christian truths by reading the Bible for themselves without a teacher to guide them.⁵⁸ Like Williams in *Tract 80*, Pusey taught that merely printing copies of the scriptures could not help to spread the truths of the faith. While such a method might have been appealing on a human level since it appeared to allow the propagation of the faith with greater ease, Pusey claimed that,

a different history for [Christ’s] Church was traced by the finger of God on Calvary; as is the Head, such must the members be. It is not by the easy unsacrificing multiplication of copies of the written word, but by self-sacrificing labour; not the written Word only, but the Word of God, living in and quickening His chosen temples, sanctifying them, and testifying His own presence by the holy awe of the habitation wherein He dwells, that so great a work must be accomplished.⁵⁹

In Pusey’s view to place the Bible in the hands of the unconverted, without also providing them with the necessary guidance in interpreting it, was thoroughly lacking in reserve since it was a “profanation, such as befalls the most worthless of human books”.⁶⁰

Isaac Williams’ critique of Evangelical spirituality also focussed on preaching. In *Tract 80* he criticised attempts by Evangelicals to draw people to the Christian faith by means of sermons which were attractive in their tone of delivery since such a practice ignored the fact that “it will always be true of human nature that it cannot

⁵⁶ Ibid., 71

⁵⁷ Ibid., 68

⁵⁸ Pusey E.B., *The Church the Converter of the Heathen. Two Sermons preached in Conformity with the Queen’s Letter in behalf of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel* (Oxford, 1838), 7-8

⁵⁹ Ibid., 10

⁶⁰ Ibid., 12

approach God without a sacrifice”.⁶¹ Evangelical preaching fell short of the Christian ideal, in Williams’ view, since its emphasis lay not on the God’s truth but rather on the ability of the preacher.⁶² In contrast to this he claimed that authentic preaching ought to be based on the principle of reserve and emphasise the importance of practical obedience to God:

If people in general were asked what was the most powerful means of advancing the cause of religion in the world we should be told in eloquence of speech or preaching . . . Whereas if we were to judge from Holy Scripture . . . we should say obedience.⁶³

The most prominent tenet of Evangelicalism which came under attack from Williams, however, was the practice of attempting to convert the sinner by explicitly expounding the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. Although many claimed that this practice could be supported from the epistles of St. Paul, Williams held that this was not the case. The apostle did refer frequently to “Christ crucified”, but what he was stressing, according to Williams, was “the necessity of our being crucified to the world, it is our humiliation together with Him, mortification of the flesh, being made conformable to His sufferings and His death”.⁶⁴ While the Evangelicals believed that the Christian was saved merely by faith in Christ’s atoning death, Williams argued that it was essential to stress the fact that the process of sanctification was costly and involved participation in Christ’s own sufferings (cf. Matthew 16:24-8).⁶⁵ Although he did not deny that the Christian was saved by faith alone, Williams argued that, since the atonement was one of the most sacred truths of the faith, reserve demanded that it should not “be instilled or obtained by lifting up the voice in the street” but rather by “obedience and penitence, so that, as each man advances in holiness of life and comes the more to know what God is, the more does he feel himself the chief of sinners”.⁶⁶ The Evangelical practice, in Williams’ view, undermined the pragmatic Tractarian approach to the sacraments and the authority of the church and was “thoroughly un-Scriptural, un-Catholic, unreal”.⁶⁷

In his review of Charles Forster’s book on the letter to the Hebrews, Williams criticised the Evangelicals for emphasising one particular aspect of the faith at the

⁶¹ Williams, “On Reserve (no. 80), 69

⁶² Williams, “On Reserve (no. 87)”, 74

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 75

⁶⁴ Williams, “On Reserve (no. 80)”, 74

⁶⁵ cf. Williams, *The Baptistery*, 75-84

⁶⁶ Williams, “On Reserve (no. 87)”, 53

expense of the others. In his view it was necessary to accept the whole of the faith as taught by the church's creeds and not to isolate individual doctrines from the others.⁶⁸

St. Paul, he claimed, was a perfect example of someone who held a holistic view of the Christian faith, since, although he repeatedly emphasised the importance of "Christ Crucified",

his faith in its height and depth and breadth was surely none other than that which tradition has explained to us by the Creed. He did not choose the Atonement of our Lord as the one point of belief he deemed sufficient, as some now do; not His example as others; nor the necessity of the guidance of His Spirit; nor His speedy coming to judgement, as another party would. But rather, believing in Christ as God, he considered all respecting Him as of infinite importance, and did not venture to select and systematize.⁶⁹

In response to the Evangelical argument that nothing was essential to the Christian faith apart from Christ's atoning death, Williams pointed to the example of John the Baptist. Although it was his,

very office . . . to be the herald of Christ . . . yet so little did he publicly make a practice of declaring this, that there was a doubt about whether he was not himself the Christ: but instead of proclaiming Him aloud, he taught Repentance, and to each individual amendment of life.⁷⁰

It was precisely because the atonement was such an important doctrine that Williams claimed that it ought to be treated with reverence and reserve. This was reflected in Christ's own life and preaching since, "He taught the Atonement always, but never openly . . . in the Beatitudes, in the parables, in His miracles, in His commands, in His warnings, in His promises; He taught it always, but always covertly".⁷¹ This view of reserve was also held by John Keble who, when preparing Charlotte Young (one of his parishioners at Hursley who later became a prominent writer) for confirmation, reminded her of the danger of talking too openly about religion.⁷² Newman's emphasis on reserve also led him to express dislike for the Evangelical emphasis on openly preaching the doctrine of the atonement. In a letter of March 1835, for example, he claimed that he recoiled from "their rudeness, irreverence, and almost

⁶⁷ Ibid., 48

⁶⁸ Williams, "The Apostolical Authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews", 192-3

⁶⁹ Ibid., 193

⁷⁰ Williams, "On Reserve (no. 87)", 52

⁷¹ Ibid., 54

⁷² Rowell G., *The Vision Glorious: Themes and Personalities of the Catholic Revival in Anglicanism* (Oxford, 1983), 33

profaneness”, since he believed that they were guilty of “making a most sacred doctrine a subject of vehement declaration, or instrument of exciting feelings”.⁷³

To Isaac Williams, the Evangelical means of expounding Christian truth was fundamentally unbalanced in its attempt to present the process of sanctification as being divorced from any sense of sacrifice and thus attempting to give the faith a greater human appeal. He claimed that such an approach,

has a vast effect on the whole of society . . . the world accepts them . . . as palliatives to an uneasy conscience, as an assistance to throw off the sense of responsibility, and as false easy notions of repentance.⁷⁴

The Evangelical approach was by its very nature secular since it had become “publicly acceptable to the world” whereas Christ had taught that Christian truth would inevitably meet with opposition (cf. John 16:33).⁷⁵ In Williams’ view the only acceptable means of expounding Christian truth were those which were in accord with the principle of reserve and which were founded on the pragmatic duties of Christian obedience.⁷⁶ Williams’ critique of Evangelical spirituality is also reflected in his review of John Keble’s *The Psalter, or Psalms of David in English Verse* for *The British Critic*, where he claimed that hymns written by Nonconformists often reflected a bold tone of self-confidence which was at odds with the sense of awe and humility which was typified by reserve and reflected in the liturgies of the primitive church.⁷⁷

Such anti-Evangelical rhetoric was also reflected in John Keble’s sermon on *Primitive Tradition Recognised in Holy Scripture* which was delivered at Winchester cathedral in 1836. Like Williams, Keble accused the Evangelicals of failing to uphold the principle of reserve and was particularly critical of their belief that each individual ought to read the Bible by themselves without the aid of tradition or the guidance of their ministers. Keble believed that this practice went against the principle of reserve and, because of what he saw as its irreverence for scripture, would lead to the “explaining away [of] the meaning, and afterwards in lowering or evading the supernatural authority” of the Bible.⁷⁸

⁷³ Selby R.C., *The Principle of Reserve in the Writings of John Henry Cardinal Newman* (Oxford, 1975), 24 quoting Newman J.H. to Stephen J. (16 March 1835), Cambridge University Library M.S., Add. 7349/15 (c) 138

⁷⁴ Williams, “On Reserve (no. 87)”, 80

⁷⁵ Williams, “On Reserve (no. 80)”, 76

⁷⁶ Williams, *The Doctrine of the Church in the Writings of Isaac Williams*, 95

⁷⁷ Williams I., “*The Psalter, or Psalms of David in English Verse*”, *The British Critic*, v. 27 (January, 1840), 3

⁷⁸ Keble J., *Primitive Tradition Recognised in Holy Scripture* (London, 1837), 45

The Ideal of Reserve reflected in the Tractarian understanding of the Church and the Sacraments

In contrast to the Evangelical means of expounding religious teaching, Isaac Williams emphasised the Tractarian ideal of practical piety expressed through the sacraments and prayer.⁷⁹ This pragmatic approach, in his view, provided the best means of propagating the faith in a reserved manner. Whereas the Evangelicals were keen to teach the doctrines of the Christian faith as openly as possible, Williams stressed the fact that the *Tracts for the Times* were written primarily for clerics and so were faithful to the *Disciplina Arcani* as it had been practiced by the early church. Unlike the Evangelical approach, no attempt had been made to make the faith appear more appealing by divorcing it from less palatable teachings like the gravity of post-baptismal sin, fasting, mortification and the last judgement.⁸⁰ In an unpublished sermon on Deuteronomy 4:29, Williams was particularly critical of the Evangelical emphasis on religious enthusiasm which, “would make the lovely and heavenly nature of Religion itself to consist in nothing but universal feelings and assurances, instead of that fervent and steady principle which devotes the daily conduct to God and makes the heart pure”.⁸¹

As well as avoiding what he saw as the short-comings of Evangelicalism, Williams claimed that the leaders of the Oxford Movement had resisted some of the more rationalising tendencies of Roman Catholicism. In his view the Roman attempt to define doctrines of the faith which the Church of England was prepared to accept as mysteries, was equally opposed to the doctrine of reserve. As will be considered in chapter five, he was particularly critical of the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation which attempted to define a mystery of the faith in human language.⁸² This is reminiscent of John Keble’s argument that it was a lack of reserve in approaching the mystery of the eucharist which had led to the definition of transubstantiation as an attempt to define a mystery on the one hand, and the Protestant rejection of the real presence on the other.⁸³

⁷⁹ Williams “On Reserve (no. 87)”, 125

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 98

⁸¹ Williams I., unpublished sermon on Deuteronomy 4:29, L.P.L., M.S. 4478, f. 46

⁸² Williams, “On Reserve (no. 87)”, 101

⁸³ Keble, *Primitive Tradition*, 47

For Williams, the principle of reserve did not just relate to the way in which an individual perceived divine revelation but was inextricably linked to the very nature of the church. As a spiritual institution he claimed that the church

holds all the doctrines which those who agree not with her consider most essential, but in a sort of reserve; being calculated to bring men to the heart and substance of those things of which this theme embraces the shadow.⁸⁴

Williams also believed that the principle of reserve was connected to church buildings. He claimed that only those who possessed the gift of faith could recognise the divine presence within the church building since, “the most holy men will most reverence the place of God’s presence and he who more values the place of God’s presence will become the most holy”.⁸⁵ This point was echoed in the sermon which Williams preached at the consecration of All Saint’s, Llangorwen in 1841, where he claimed that, in order to recognise God’s presence, the individual had to display a humble and contrite state of heart, as was foreshadowed by Moses and Solomon’s encounter with God (cf. Exodus 40:34-5; 2 Chronicles 7:1-3).⁸⁶

Williams also saw the principle of reserve at work in the liturgical life of the church. The rite of baptism, for example, made a reserved reference to the doctrine of the atonement when it spoke of “our being crucified with Christ, being dead with Christ, being buried with Christ and the consequent necessity of our mortifying our earthly members”.⁸⁷ He also saw it as being reflected in the liturgical blessing where,

no words and arguments, no learned proofs nor eloquent demonstrations, of the blessing[s] that [are] . . . conveyed render us of themselves capable of receiving them; but it is a secret which God Himself dispenses as men are found worthy.⁸⁸

The practice of fasting, according to Williams, also provided Christians with the means of partaking in Christ’s sufferings and provided a reserved means of reflection on Christ’s atoning death.⁸⁹ This suggests that the doctrine of reserve lay at the heart of Williams’ rejection of the Evangelical emphasis on preaching and formed the basis of his emphasis on the importance of practical piety and personal holiness.

⁸⁴ Williams, “On Reserve (no. 87)”, 83

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 88

⁸⁶ Williams I., *A Sermon Preached at the Consecration of the Church of Llangorwen, in the Diocese of St. David’s* (Aberystwyth, 1841), 11-2

⁸⁷ Williams, “On Reserve (no. 87)”, 89

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 90

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 92

The belief that reserve was central to the life and nature of the church was also reflected in Newman's writings.⁹⁰ In one of his *Sermons bearing on Subjects of the Day* he claimed that the sacramental rites of the church contained a meaning which could not be fully comprehended by the human mind or explained in words. He therefore warned his listeners

[n]ever . . . [to] come to Church or to Holy Communion, never [to] be present at a Baptism, marriage or burial, or at any other rite, without feeling that there is a great deal more than you see.⁹¹

Newman claimed that Christ's presence with his church following his ascension into heaven was reserved by its very nature since the Spirit "came invisibly, and invisibly He hath dwelt in the Church ever since".⁹² Since its earliest days, he claimed, the church had attempted to dispense divine revelation in a reserved way:

When He had once ascended, henceforth for unstudied speech there were solemn rites; for familiar attendance there were mysterious ministrings; for questioning at will there was silent obedience; for sitting at table there was bowing in adoration; for eating and drinking there was fasting and watching.⁹³

The Tractarian emphasis on reserve was also echoed in E.B. Pusey's unpublished "Lectures on Types and Prophecies" which were delivered in 1836.⁹⁴ Williams' correspondence with Pusey makes it clear that he was familiar with the lectures and held them in high regard. On more than one occasion he urged Pusey to publish them, so it is possible that they may have influenced his view of reserve.⁹⁵ The "Lectures on Types and Prophecies" were mainly concerned with the interpretation of the Old Testament and the way in which a deeper meaning could be seen as lying behind the literal sense of the Bible. Pusey compared this approach to scripture with the way in which human conversation can be seen as 'veiling' a deeper meaning which, in the interests of reserve, ought to be kept back from general discussion:

Thus every one has been aware, how in mixed society, he has often had pleasure in uttering words, which in his own mind related to some holier subject than he thought it expedient either for himself or others to speak of

⁹⁰ See Newsome D., "Newman and the Oxford Movement", Symondson A. (editor) *The Victorian Crisis of Faith* (London, 1970), 85ff.

⁹¹ Newman J.H., *Sermons bearing on Subjects of the Day* (London, 1844), 160

⁹² *Ibid.*, 157

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 159

⁹⁴ Jasper D., "Pusey's 'Lectures on Types and Prophecies of the Old Testament'", Butler P. (editor.), *Pusey Rediscovered* (London, 1983), 51-2

⁹⁵ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (no date, Wednesday 1838), P.H. M.S. (L.B.V., no. 2); Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (15 December, 1844?), P.H. M.S. (L.B.V., no. 24)

more plainly, yet one who knew him well, would know that the veiled meaning was his most real one, and that it was for the sake of that, that the words were uttered.⁹⁶

Pusey also pointed out that it was possible for an individual's words to contain a deeper meaning when viewed retrospectively than he or she was initially aware of since,

when we are under strong emotions, words are often uttered which are fuller than we ourselves at the time are fully aware; we feel only that we have uttered truths beyond ourselves; and it is upon reflection only that we find how much the Spirit within us, which gave us those emotions, and the words too, meant by them.⁹⁷

This emphasis on the use of language to veil a more sacred meaning can be seen as another expression of reserve.

2.The Response to the Tracts

The principle of reserve which was reflected in Isaac Williams' tracts had a parallel of sorts in the theology of the broad churchmen who emphasised the importance of accommodation, the belief that doctrines ought to be presented in a way which was appropriate to the recipient's spiritual and moral capacity to receive such teaching.⁹⁸ This idea was taken up by Thomas Arnold in his "Essay on the Right Interpretation and Understanding of the Scriptures", in which he claimed that "the revelations of God to man were gradual and adapted to his state at several periods when they were successively made".⁹⁹ Although there was a point of contact between the idea of reserve and accommodation, it is clear that Arnold's understanding was diametrically opposed to that of Isaac Williams and the Tractarians. For Arnold accommodation meant that, as humanity progressed and developed, God would reveal more of himself so that the educated believer in the 1800s had a greater understanding of divine truth than the members of the early church. He felt that the Tractarian application of accommodation in the doctrine of reserve as it was expressed in Williams' tracts had taken the notion to "extravagant and offensive lengths" so that it had been brought into "great suspicion".¹⁰⁰ Arnold's approach would have been anathema to the

⁹⁶ Pusey E.B., "Lectures on Types and Prophecies of the Old Testament", P. H. M.S., p. 19

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Newsome, "Newman and the Oxford Movement", 81

⁹⁹ Ibid., 81 quoting Arnold T., "Essay on the Right Interpretation and Understanding of the Scriptures", *Sermons*, II (1878 edn.), 285

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Tractarians who believed that Christian antiquity contained the fullness of truth and saw reserve as a means of reverencing the most sacred truths which the church had always believed.¹⁰¹ It is something of a paradox that two such different approaches were based on a similar principle.

Isaac Williams' tracts on reserve received virulent criticism from a number of Evangelicals who were appalled by what they saw as an attempt to justify the withholding of Christian teaching from the laity.¹⁰² George Townsend made a fierce response to *Tract 80* in his *Charge* of 15 August, 1838, and argued that Williams' thesis was a "perversion of the simplicity of Christian teaching" and an attempt to devalue the Reformation.¹⁰³ The Evangelical journal the *Record* also responded negatively to both *Tract 80* and *87* claiming that,

the character of these tracts is mysticism rendered plausible by metaphysical and sophistical reasoning. The temper and spirit is Gnostic and superstitious. Everything is mysterious and almost too sacred to be handled. The reverence expressed is morbid, quite alien from the healthful spirit of the Scriptures but in harmony with that of the ascetics and contemplative devotees.¹⁰⁴

It was also pointed out by some Evangelicals that they did not deny the need to treat sacred issues with respect as Williams had argued. Hugh Stowell, for example, claimed that "[n]othing is more unbecoming, irrational or repulsive than to trifle with that which is sacred". What they did object to, however, was any notion that it was acceptable to keep "the distinguished truths of the Gospel in the shade" and to prevent the doctrine of the atonement from being at the heart of preaching.¹⁰⁵ They feared that the Tractarian emphasis on reserve was an attempt to hold individuals in total subjection to the clergy, who alone were permitted fully to understand the Christian faith.¹⁰⁶ A letter from Lord Ashley to *The Times* claimed that the contents of Williams tracts ought to make him ineligible to be elected to the university's chair of poetry:

I cannot concur in the approval of a candidate whose writings are in contravention of the inspired Apostle, and reverse his holy exultation that he had "not shunned to declare to his readers the whole counsel of God" I will not consent to give my support, however humble, toward the recognition of

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 82

¹⁰² Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 199

¹⁰³ Toon P., *Evangelical Theology 1833-1856: A Response to Tractarianism* (London, 1979), 38, quoting Townsend, *Sermons . . . with Two Charges* (1849), 455

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., quoting *The Record* (27 August 1840)

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 134, quoting Stowell, *Tractarianism Tested by Scripture* (1845), i 305-9

¹⁰⁶ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 199

exoteric and esoteric doctrines in the Church of England, to obscure the perspicuity of the Gospel by the philosophy of Paganism.¹⁰⁷

Evangelical criticism of reserve also centred upon how the Tractarians interpreted the writings of the church fathers. Isaac Taylor tried to demonstrate that the Tractarian patristic appeal was unbalanced since some of the Church Fathers did not stress the importance of reserve as had been claimed.¹⁰⁸ He also claimed that the *Disciplina Arcani* of the primitive church had its root in paganism and that it was therefore a negative development within the Christian tradition. In his view the doctrine of reserve as expounded by the Tractarians was an example of what was condemned by Jesus in Luke 11:52, namely the withdrawing the key of knowledge from God's people.¹⁰⁹

Another line of argument was pursued by G.S. Faber in his *Apostolicity of Trinitarianism* which was published in 1832 and presented an extensive study of the *Disciplina Arcani*, with specific reference to the means by which the doctrine of the Trinity had been kept secret during the persecutions of the early church.¹¹⁰ While acknowledging that the *Disciplina* had been beneficial during times of persecution, Faber argued that it was no longer necessary during the changed historical circumstances of the nineteenth century. As Isaac Taylor pointed out, for the ideal of reserve to be observed authentically at a later date in history it would be necessary to alter the structure of the church so that congregations could be "classed, like large schools, according to their knowledge, talents, powers of expression and general proficiency".¹¹¹ Faber also argued that, even during times of persecution, the early church only withheld sacred truth from non-believers, nothing was kept back from those who had been baptised.¹¹²

Isaac Williams was somewhat taken-aback by the violent response to his first tract. In his *Autobiography* he claimed that the objections of the bishops of Winchester and Gloucester and Bristol to the tract arose from the fact that they did not fully understand it.¹¹³ In 1841 he published a response to the criticisms made against his tracts by bishop J.H. Monk of Gloucester and Bristol. In this pamphlet he claimed

¹⁰⁷ "The Oxford Controversy – Letter from Lord Ashley", *The Times*, 15 December, 1841, issue 17854, page 3

¹⁰⁸ Toon, *Evangelical Theology*, 38

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 134

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 133

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 135

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 134

that the purpose of his tracts was not to argue that the scriptures should be withheld from the laity so that they were dependent upon the clergy to interpret the Bible for them.¹¹⁴ He also argued that the principle of reserve was fundamentally scriptural and, while the bishop felt that the tracts implied that human beings ought to decide which elements of revelation should be withheld, Williams pointed out that this was in fact determined by the Holy Spirit working through the church's tradition.¹¹⁵ As well as refuting Monk's claim that reserve was neither apostolic nor reconcilable with the practice of catechesis,¹¹⁶ Williams emphasised the fact that the tracts did not denigrate the importance of the doctrine of the atonement but merely taught that it ought to be treated with awe and reverence.¹¹⁷

Williams felt that most of the opposition he received was caused by the title of the *Tract 80* rather than by its contents¹¹⁸ since the very term 'reserve' evoked the ire of the Evangelicals who were growing in opposition to the Oxford Movement. He pointed out that such a reaction was, in fact, caused by a misinterpretation of the wording of the title since, as bishop Thirlwall of St. David's had pointed out to him, "[t]he very title 'Reserve *in Teaching*' intimated that the teaching of the Gospel was not withheld, for it was '*in Teaching*' that the caution was to be exercised".¹¹⁹ As it was Newman who was responsible for choosing the title for *Tract 80*, it is possible that, in making this point, Williams was trying to shift on to him some of the blame for the negative reaction which the tract received.

In *Tract 87* Williams attempted to refute some of the arguments which had been raised by the Evangelicals against his tracts, though in his *Autobiography* he made it clear that he made no apology for what he had written, claiming that the Evangelical objections arose as a result of their ignorance on the subject.¹²⁰ At the beginning the tract Williams claimed that no valid arguments had been raised against the thesis which he had put forward in *Tract 80*, "but [rather] much vague declamation, and strong alarms expressed, because the view interferes with certain

¹¹³ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 90

¹¹⁴ Williams I., *A Few Remarks on the Charge of the Lord Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol on the subject of Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge* (Oxford, 1841), 3

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4-5

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-8

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9

¹¹⁸ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 90

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 91

peculiar religious opinion[s]”.¹²¹ Williams was convinced by his argument not only because he saw it reflected in scripture and tradition, but also because he had learned of its importance through his pastoral work and experience of life.¹²²

Tract 87 also dealt with the Evangelical claim that the idea of reserve was the result of the infiltration of pagan culture into Christianity. Williams did not deny that the principle could be seen at work in pre-Christian culture, but saw this as supporting rather than undermining his argument since it suggested that reserve was integral to human nature and therefore part of the divine will in creation. It was therefore natural to find reserve expressed in a variety of cultures and civilisations:

If the principle . . . is a truth of God . . . such a principle must be found on our moral and spiritual nature, and may be expected to be found among mankind; this would account for its existence in Egypt and early Greece.¹²³

The fact that the principle of reserve was, according to Williams, “an universal rule in morals, and not confined to circumstances” led him to refute the Evangelical argument that the *Disciplina Arcani* was appropriate for the early church in times of persecution but not necessarily for that of the nineteenth century.¹²⁴ While Williams’ tracts did provide an extensive consideration of the ideal of reserve on the basis of evidence from scripture and church history, he did not address Isaac Taylor’s point about the inconsistency of patristic evidence. At first sight, G.S. Faber’s argument that the *Disciplina Arcani* had not withheld religious teaching from the baptised does appear to compromise the validity of Williams’ argument. However, it must be remembered that Williams’ objection was primarily against attempting to convert unrepentant sinners by openly expounding the doctrine of the atonement. He did not necessarily object to teaching it to the baptised when it was presented hand in hand with the obligations of Christian holiness.

In contrast to Evangelical opposition, *Tracts 80* and *87* also received a positive response from some. In a letter to Williams dated 10 February 1845 a school teacher named Fenning Park wrote that,

[b]efore I [had] ever heard that there was such a Tract as “Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge” I had seen & felt the impropriety of Holy Subjects and names being made so common; [and] was exceedingly struck in reading the Tract no. 87 to find my opinions & feelings in print.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Williams, “On Reserve (no. 87)”, 1

¹²² *Ibid.*, 4

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 9

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 84

¹²⁵ Park F. to Williams I. (10 February, 1845), L.P.L. M.S. 4475, f. 127

Park went on to claim that his experience as a school teacher and as a parish clerk for many years had confirmed his belief that, during the nineteenth century “[s]acred subjects [were] made too familiar to the injury of real unobtrusive religion”.¹²⁶ The tracts also received some support from bishop Thirlwall of St. David’s in his episcopal charge of 1842. Unlike the majority of his fellow-bishops, Thirlwall attempted to defend *Tract 87*, claiming that the purpose of Williams’ tract was “not to recommend or sanction the suppression of religious knowledge, but to lay down principles which . . . ought to regulate the communicating of it”.¹²⁷ The title of the work suggested that it was not Williams’ intention to argue that religious truth should be withheld from the laity since “reserve in communicating appears to imply some kind of communication”.¹²⁸ Although Thirlwall believed that *Tracts 80* and *87* ought to have attempted to demonstrate how the principle of reserve could be applied practically, he claimed that the principle “may still be profitable, if it tends to warn us against the danger of partial views and exhibitions of the truth, and to lead us more carefully to preserve both the fullness and proportion of the faith”.¹²⁹

Williams’ tracts were also supported by Henry Arthur Woodgate, the rector of Belbroughton and a former fellow and tutor of St. John’s College, Oxford, who, during the contest for the poetry professorship, wrote *A Brief Analysis of the Tracts on Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge*. Woodgate claimed that, while he had initially agreed with those who wished to see both Williams and Garbett withdraw from the contest, since reading *Tracts 80* and *87* he had come to believe that the charges made against Williams were unfounded.¹³⁰ His analysis of the tracts was therefore an attempt to explain their meaning and put it into context. In opposition to the critics of the tracts, Woodgate claimed that they were firmly based on the Bible, reflecting a “deep devotional spirit and acquaintance with Holy Scripture”. In his view “no clergyman (or layman) can read [them] without profit (if in a proper spirit,) nor find the principle otherwise than of essential service to bear in mind both in his public and private teaching”.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Thirlwall C., *A Charge to the clergy of the diocese of St. David’s* (London, 1842), 58

¹²⁸ Ibid., 59

¹²⁹ Ibid., 60

¹³⁰ Woodgate H.A., *A Brief Analysis of the Tracts on Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge in the series called Tracts for the Times: with remarks on the same* (Oxford, 1842), 3-8

¹³¹ Ibid., 17, 42

Although much of Woodgate's work consisted merely of an outline of Williams' tracts and lengthy quotations from them, he did attempt to defend his opposition to the Evangelical emphasis on the doctrine of the atonement. Williams' argument, Woodgate claimed, was not that the doctrine of the atonement should be kept from the laity or that Christians were not saved entirely by the benefits of Christ's death on the cross. What he had taught was that the doctrines of the Christian faith were all inter-connected so that it was wrong to teach one, especially the most sacred, in isolation from others. A correct balance was provided by the Church of England's Prayer Book where "these several features of doctrine are preserved in their due proportion, no one part being placed in undue prominence, to the exclusion or prejudice of the others".¹³² Williams had not condemned the doctrine of the atonement in itself but the fact that the Evangelicals, by their over-emphasis on justification by faith, had attempted to make the doctrine popular by separating it from the practical duties of Christian living:

The doctrine of Christ Crucified is inseparably connected with our own moral crucifixion, repentance, humility, obedience, self-denial, mortification, the daily taking of our Cross and following Him – denying ourselves something for His sake. Separated from these, there is nothing to surprise us in the fact that the doctrine (so called) should recommend itself to the worldly-minded and anti-nomian, while the self-indulgent see in it, nothing which calls for any personal sacrifice on their part.¹³³

Woodgate turned the Evangelical criticism of Williams' tracts against itself claiming that, by emphasising the doctrine of the atonement in place of other important doctrines, it was in fact the Evangelicals who were withholding the fullness of Christian truth from the people:

It is, I say, a curious circumstance, and one illustrative of the deceitfulness of the human heart, because it is the very practice of this party, as mentioned above, viz., that in their public teaching they do *not* declare the whole counsel of God, which appears to have called forth these two Tracts.¹³⁴

Woodgate's only criticism of Williams' tracts was that they had failed to demonstrate how the principle of reserve could be enacted in the church in a practical way.¹³⁵

¹³² Ibid., 12

¹³³ Ibid., 13-14

¹³⁴ Ibid., 16

¹³⁵ Ibid., 41

3. The Doctrine of Reserve and the High Church Tradition

Like the Evangelicals, a number of the ‘Z’ High Churchmen were critical of the tracts on reserve. While speaking highly of the content of Isaac Williams’ tracts, W.F. Hook echoed G.S. Faber’s point that the *Disciplina Arcani* had been a means of guarding the faith in times of persecution and that it would not be expedient to attempt to re-introduce it into the nineteenth century Church of England. A.P. Perceval’s reaction to *Tracts 80* and *87* was one of “regret and alarm” since he believed that the logical conclusion of Williams’ argument was that the church could withhold God’s grace from the laity.¹³⁶ William Patrick Palmer claimed that, having read Williams’ tracts, he failed to understand how the principle of reserve could be applied in a practical way. Like Perceval he saw the emphasis on reserve as one of the erroneous teachings of the movement along with the development of Romanizing practices.¹³⁷ Thomas Mozley suggested that, in providing two lengthy treatises expounding the principle of reserve, Isaac Williams had actually betrayed the very principle which he was attempting to propagate. It was ironic that,

had the Tracts gone on, and had [Isaac Williams] lived long enough, he would have published a library on the duty of not telling people all we believe and know, be it ever so necessary to be believed and known.¹³⁸

Henry Phillpotts, the High Church bishop of Exeter, claimed that the tracts on reserve undermined the duty of the clergy to expound the teachings of the faith to the people.¹³⁹

Despite the unease which many of the ‘Z’s felt towards Williams’ tracts, it would appear that reserve did in fact play an important role in the pre-Tractarian High Church tradition.¹⁴⁰ In *Tract 80* Williams claimed that High Churchmen of the previous generations such as George Herbert, Robert Nelson and King Charles I could be seen as individuals whose lives reflected the importance of reserve. He believed that their example of “humility, which must ever accompany increasing holiness of

¹³⁶ Chapman R., “The Tractarian Principle of Reserve” (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1978), 58

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 59

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 59-60 quoting Mozley T., *Reminiscences chiefly of Oriel College and the Oxford Movement* (1882), 431

¹³⁹ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 199 citing Phillpotts H., *A charge delivered to the clergy of the diocese of Exeter, at the Triennial Visitation in . . . August, September and October 1839* (London, 1839), 14-5

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 198-200

life”, was a pragmatic expression of reserve.¹⁴¹ This suggests that Williams did not see the doctrine of reserve as a new development but as something which had been an integral part of traditional High Church piety.

According to William Copeland, the Tractarian concept of reserve was heavily influenced by the eighteenth century bishop Joseph Butler who had a profound “dislike of excessive talkativeness”.¹⁴² In chapter six of his *Analogy of Religion*, Butler, like Williams in his tracts on reserve, claimed that God’s revelation was never made indiscriminately to all people at all times, but that some were given a clearer perception of divine truth than others:

it was intended [that] revelation should be no more than a small light, in the midst of a world greatly overspread . . . with ignorance and darkness; that certain glimmerings of this light should extend and be directed to remote distances, in such a manner as that those who really partook of it should not discern from whence it originally came; that some in a nearer situation to it should have its light obscured, and, in different ways and degrees intercepted: and that others should be placed within its clearer influence, and be much more enlivened, cheered and directed by it¹⁴³

In considering passages of scripture which speak of divine truth being withheld from the individual (for example Daniel 12:9-13 and Isaiah 29:13-14), Butler claimed that Christian truth was designed so “that those who are desirous of evading moral obligations should not see it; and that honest-minded persons should”.¹⁴⁴ This emphasis on the connection between morality and the ability to comprehend divine revelation was remarkably similar to Williams’ tracts on reserve.

Points of contact with *Tracts 80* and *87* are reflected in the writings of other pre-Tractarian High Churchmen. In his *Remarks upon Dr. Clarke’s Exposition on the Church Catechism*, Daniel Waterland claimed that the doctrine of baptismal regeneration “ought to be kept sacred and inviolable against all attempts, either to disguise the sense, or to elude the truths wrapped up in it”.¹⁴⁵ An important example of reserve is to be found in Charles Daubeny’s archidiaconal charge of 1824 which criticised “the unreserved and indiscriminate application of strong evangelic language

¹⁴¹Williams, “On Reserve (no. 80)”, 50

¹⁴² Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 86 quoting Pusey House Copeland Papers: Copeland W.J., unpublished manuscript of his “Narrative of the Oxford Movement”

¹⁴³ Butler J., *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (London, 1856 edition), 260

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 271

¹⁴⁵ Waterland D., *The Works of Rev. Daniel Waterland D.D., formerly Master of Madgalene College, Cambridge, Canon of Windsor, and Archdeacon of Middlesex* (volume 5) (Oxford, 1823), 374

to Christians who might be in the infancy of their growth”.¹⁴⁶ An element of reserve was also reflected in the life-style and spirituality of Joshua Watson, the leader of the Hackney Phalanx, who, according to Kenneth Hylson-Smith, was “by nature reticent, and . . . abhorred introspection, sermonising and drama or ostentation in religious matters”.¹⁴⁷

The principle of reserve was also reflected in William Jones of Nayland’s *Essay on the Church* in which, like Isaac Williams, he criticised the Evangelical practice of popular preaching and their neglect of the church’s liturgy and sacraments:¹⁴⁸

there is a perverse prejudice in favour of *preaching*; and consequently a shocking neglect of those duties which belong to the people. It is a fine easy way for people with itching ears, to hear a preacher talk them into Heaven; while they neglect all the more essential parts of divine worship.¹⁴⁹

For Jones the Evangelical emphasis on the sermon reduced Christian worship to little more than a form of entertainment.¹⁵⁰ He believed that the Evangelical approach was fundamentally flawed since it was an attempt by humanity to reach God rather than allowing him to reach out to humanity through the sacraments and liturgy of the church:

it is a great mistake to suppose, that the whole of religion consists in our taking of Christ; it is beginning at the wrong end: for Christ is to take us . . . There is a covenant between us and God, into which God, of his infinite grace, takes us; we do not take him, neither can we.¹⁵¹

Like Isaac Williams, William Jones believed that Evangelical spirituality, with its emphasis on popular preaching was severely lacking in reserve.

There is also an echo of the principle of reserve in the Bampton Lectures of George Croft, published in 1786, in which he argued that the Bible ought to be treated with special reverence. In the seventh of his addresses Croft criticised dissenters who had separated from the Church of England for making use of “the language of Scripture in the common business of life”. In his view such use of religious language was sacrilegious and undermined the “habitual reverence” in which scripture ought

¹⁴⁶ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 200 quoting Daubeny C., *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of Sarum . . . 1824* (London, 1824), 8

¹⁴⁷ Hylson-Smith, *High Churchmanship in the Church of England*, 103

¹⁴⁸ Jones W., *An Essay on the Church* (Gloucester, 1787), 63

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 67-8

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 68

always to be held.¹⁵² Another similarity between Williams' tracts and the teaching of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen is to be seen in the Hackney Phalanx's criticism of the British and Foreign Bible Society which sought to widely distribute copies of the scriptures.¹⁵³ Writing to R. Churton in 1813 Henry Handley Norris made use of the same argument which Williams would use two decades later, claiming that scripture was "not in the purpose of God, the instrument of conversion – but the repository of divine knowledge for the perfecting of those already converted".¹⁵⁴

As the author of *Tracts 80* and *87* on reserve Isaac Williams was responsible for outlining the importance of a principle which he held in common with the other leading Tractarians. The doctrine of reserve was not a new development, but had been found in the discipline of the primitive church and the writings of the church fathers, as well as being an important part of pre-Tractarian High Church piety. If Williams, Newman and Keble deviated from their predecessors regarding their emphasis on the importance of reserve then they did so because they made what had previously been something implicit into a fundamental principle. Although the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen had upheld the importance of reserve they did not speak extensively about it as a principle as Williams did in his tracts.¹⁵⁵

While the High Churchmen contemporary with the Oxford Movement would not have objected to the idea that sacred truth should always be treated with reverence, the idea that Christian teaching ought to be held back was seen as deeply shocking. On the whole, however, the opposition which the tracts attracted was the result of misunderstanding. Williams' argument was that Christian truths should be taught with reverence, ensuring that the individual was spiritually prepared to receive them. It upheld the connection between God's revelation and the moral state of the receiver and was holistic in its attempt to unite the importance of teaching the faith with the sacraments, prayer and good works. When properly interpreted it is clear that Williams' tracts built upon the legacy of the pre-Tractarian High Church tradition in its emphasis on the importance of reverence for doctrine and in its critique of Evangelical spirituality.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 69

¹⁵² Croft G., *Eight Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* (Oxford, 1786), 183

¹⁵³ Varley, *The Last of the Prince Bishops*, 65-9

¹⁵⁴ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 200 quoting Sutton Coldfield Churton Papers: Norris H.H. to Churton R. (4 March, 1813)

¹⁵⁵ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 198

Chapter Three: The Tractarian Poet

While Isaac Williams' tracts provide an outline of the doctrine of reserve which was so important to the spiritual temper of the Oxford Movement, his poetry can also be seen as an important expression of that principle. In a letter to Williams following the publication of *The Baptistery* in 1842 James Davies wrote that his poetry contained "a beautiful art of revealing & concealing – of throwing a veil over, while you give vent to our most sacred feelings. For in the present day they are either rudely explored, or entirely suppressed".¹ In Davies' view Williams' poetry had helped to make a valuable contribution to the church in the nineteenth century and pointed to something of a renewal in her spiritual life:

we much need good church poetry. For our Holy Mother is represented, either as quite distorted, that is without any form at all – or else as nothing but form – a mere dry, ghostly frame of skin and bones . . . without her full bursting spirit of life & intelligence & moral meaning, without her looks of love and truth – without her yearnings and alarms. I thank you for giving us some of her own genuine poetry – some of her holiest, happiest and gentlest – as well as her most awful associations – for setting before us some of her fullness of life as well as examples of proportion.²

Davies' assessment of the value of Williams' poetry would seem to stand in contrast to R.W. Church's dismissal of it as having been written in a "lower and sadder key" to that of John Keble.³ More recent scholarship has also paid greater attention to Williams' poetic contribution to the Oxford Movement. G.B. Tennyson, for example, has claimed that Williams' poetry frequently surpasses that of Keble⁴ and that he "pursued the implications of Tractarian poetics and methods farther than any of his contemporaries".⁵ While Keble published only two volumes of poetry, Isaac Williams produced no less than eleven during the course of his life and was able to write devotional verse which, according to Tennyson, often outshone that of his mentor. It would therefore appear unjust that Williams has been referred to merely as being Keble's 'moon'.⁶

Having said this, it is clear that Isaac Williams' poetry was influenced by that of John Keble. His admiration for Keble as a poet is reflected in his *Autobiography*

¹ Davies J. to Williams I. (6 December, 1842), L.P.L. M.S. 4474, f. 1

² Ibid.

³ Church, *The Oxford Movement*, 78

⁴ Tennyson G.B., "The Sacramental Imagination", Tennyson G.B. and Knoepfelmacher U.C. (editors) *Nature and the Victorian Imagination* (California, 1977), 381

⁵ Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, 171

where he claimed that Keble's ability as a poet was far superior to that of H.H. Milman, his opponent in the contest for the vacant chair of poetry. "Keble", Williams wrote, had "more poetry in his little finger than Milman in his whole body".⁷ Williams' review of Keble's metrical Psalter also expressed admiration for his poetic ability, claiming that the elder man possessed,

a power over words and sentences, such as a skilful artist has over his tools, so as to be able to clothe his ideas with an exactness, aptitude, and perhaps, we might say, terseness of language, so as to render poetic diction subservient to opinions and principles which he wishes to inculcate".⁸

Whereas many poets were carried away by their poetic genius, Williams claimed that, as a Christian poet, Keble had succeeded in controlling his ability so that it was always used in the service of the church.⁹

It is also likely that Williams attended Keble's *Praelections Academicæ*, delivered in Latin, while he was poetry professor for the University of Oxford between 1832 and 1841.¹⁰ These lectures made it clear that the link between reserve and poetry was important to Keble since he believed that poetry was a means by which human emotions could be expressed in a reserved way.¹¹ Poetry was inextricably linked to reserve since it contained a secret meaning which could only be uncovered by the individual who took the effort to meditate on it and to understand its meaning.¹² Such a view of the relationship between poetry and reserve was also reflected in Williams' review of Keble's work. Here Williams claimed that "the best poets are often obscure",¹³ and that poetry was often a better means of conveying truth than prose.¹⁴ This suggests that Williams saw poetry as an expression of reserve which was particularly apt for expressing sacred truth, since its meaning was not obvious to all but could only be revealed after an attempt to come to terms with the meaning of the poem. Williams' article also described poetry, along with music, as being one of the "powerful principles for touching the secret springs of the human

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁷ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 13-4

⁸ Williams, "The Psalter, or Psalms of David in English Verse", 16

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Tennyson G.B., "The Sacramental Imagination", 372

¹¹ Prickett S., *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (Cambridge, 1976), 109-110

¹² Beek W.J.A.M., *John Keble's Literary and Religious Contribution to the Oxford Movement* (Nijmegen, 1959), 48-9

¹³ Williams, "The Psalter, or Psalms of David in English Verse", 23

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14

heart”.¹⁵ In his view those who were “strongly moved by sentiments of a sacred, or sublime, or tender nature beyond the reach and order of daily life, can find no way of giving vent to them so well as in poetic forms and expressions”.¹⁶ Poetry could therefore be described as

nothing else than this power of throwing, most faithfully and accurately and into its most suitable shape, by the aid of harmonious construction, rhythmical cadence, and rhyme, the more hidden feelings and principles of the heart.¹⁷

Williams also claimed that the principle of reserve was reflected in the “subdued and self-forgetting temper” of Keble’s *The Christian Year*,¹⁸ a collection of poems for each Sunday and Holy Day of the church’s liturgical calendar which proved highly popular and even outsold the works of William Wordsworth.¹⁹ It is therefore likely that the importance of poetry as an expression of reserve was something which Williams learned from John Keble.

While Williams’ verse was clearly influenced by that of his fellow-Tractarian poet there is also evidence to suggest a link to the poetry of the seventeenth century High Church poet George Herbert. Apart from the fact that Herbert’s poetry had an influence on John Keble,²⁰ *The Cathedral* makes it clear that Williams also admired him as a poet. In this work Williams numbered Herbert among a number of High Church and Nonjuror figures such as Thomas Wilson, William Laud, Thomas Ken, King Charles I, John Kettlewell and Jeremy Taylor and provided a poetic tribute to him which suggested that his poetry was comparable with the book of Psalms as devotional verse:

For now thou art a holy thing,
And singing the great King
For ever with a noble strain;
Nor praise of ours can pain,
If we be tuned by thy lays
To sing thy “Master’s” praise.²¹

¹⁵ Ibid., 1

¹⁶ Ibid., 15

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 3

¹⁹ Prickett S., “Tractarian Poetry”, *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, Cronin R. Chapman A. and Harrison A.H. (editors), (Oxford, 2002), 279

²⁰ Griffin J.R., “Herbert and the Oxford Movement”, Miller E. and DiYanni R. (editors), *Like Seasoned Timber: Essays on George Herbert* (New York, 1987), 329-343; Thompson E.W.S., “The Temple and the Christian Year”, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 54, no. 9 (December, 1939), 1018-1025.

²¹ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 193

This comparison of Herbert with the author of the Psalms was also made by his seventeenth century biographer Barnabas Olney who described him as “that sweet singer of the Temple”.²² Williams’ veneration for Herbert is also reflected in that he is described as the stereotype of the ideal “country pastor” and is likened to the beloved disciple who reclined on Jesus’ breast at the Last Supper (cf. John 13:25).²³

An important aspect of the reserve which is central to Williams’ poetry is his use of poetic analogy by which imagery drawn from the physical world can be made to deal with spiritual and theological themes. In a letter to his mother James Davies recognised that this was an important element in Williams’ poetry, describing him as a man who “sees meaning in everything, the mystical within the material world”.²⁴ This chapter will consider the earliest and most popular of Williams’ poetic works, namely, *The Cathedral*, *The Baptistery*, *The Altar* and *Thoughts in Past Years* in order to demonstrate how they reflect his use of analogy as an expression of reserve and also to examine the extent to which he was influenced by the poetry of John Keble and George Herbert.

1. *The Cathedral*

The Cathedral appears to have been a popular work, its first edition selling out in under a year and being quickly followed by a second. That many people associated the work with the Tractarian cause is reflected by W.J. Copeland’s claim that booksellers in Cheltenham had been criticised for selling it.²⁵ Before its publication Hurrell Froude showed interest in the work and wrote to Williams that John Keble felt that it ought to be published.²⁶ Another individual who was greatly impressed with *The Cathedral* was Robert Broadley, the vicar of St. Peter’s, Swinton, near Manchester, who claimed that he had found the work a great spiritual aid and claimed that its poetry contained a deeper spiritual meaning than Williams appeared to be aware of:

I am certain in my own mind – that a Higher Power than you appear to think has produced that book through your instrumentality; and that it is eventually

²² Clarke E., “George Herbert’s *The Temple*: The Genius of Anglicanism and the Inspiration for Poetry”, Rowell G. (editor), *The English Religious Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism* (Oxford, 1992), 132

²³ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 192-3

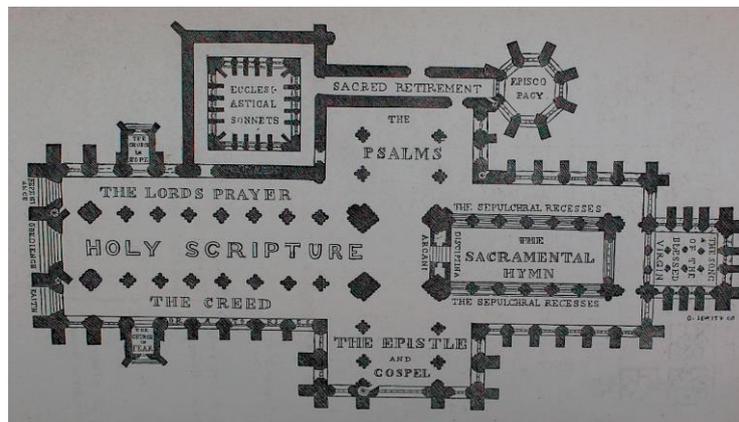
²⁴ Davies J. to his mother (11 November, 1851), L.P.L. M.S. 4474, f. 7

²⁵ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 39

²⁶ Froude R.H. to Williams I. (21, September, 1835), L.P.L. M.S. 4474, f. 99

intended to aid in bringing about things which it is possible, you have never conceived.²⁷

In *The Cathedral* Williams attempted to use the architecture of a cathedral building as the starting-point for poetic reflection on various theological themes which were connected to the church as a spiritual institution so that, for each part of the building, a poem is provided on a different aspect of “the liturgy, the Doctrine and the Discipline of the Church”.²⁸ Williams stated in ‘The Advertisement’ to the work that his purpose was to “draw moral and religious instruction from visible objects”.²⁹ In the ‘Advertisement’ to the work Williams made it clear that the idea behind the work had been inspired by George Herbert’s *The Temple*.³⁰ Published after Herbert’s death in 1633 this work consists of a collection of verse with particular poems being assigned to different parts of a church building. Opening with a section entitled “The Church Porch”, the work proceeds to a section entitled “The Altar” followed by another entitled “The Church”.³¹ Although *The Cathedral* is more intricate in terms of the internal architecture referred to, it is clear that the idea behind Herbert’s work would have served as a foundation for Williams’ work. Williams also claimed that his work was influenced by William Wordsworth’s *The Excursion*. Since John Keble held Wordsworth in high regard as a poet,³² this may well point to the influence of Keble over Williams.



Plan of the cathedral from Williams I., The Cathedral, or the Church Catholic and Apostolic in England (Oxford, 1843 edition), no page number. Reproduced with permission from the Lambeth Palace Library, shelf-mark H5173(W5).

²⁷ Broadley R. to Williams I. (1840), L.P.L. M.S. 4473, ff. 64-5; Broadley R. to Williams I. (26 April, 1840), L.P.L. M.S. 4473, ff. 66-7

²⁸ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), v

²⁹ *Ibid.*, vi

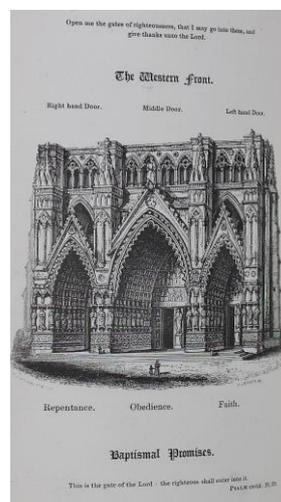
³⁰ *Ibid.*, v

³¹ Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, 160

³² Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion*, 109

Williams' use of a cathedral building as the basis for reflection on theological themes is underlined by 'The Dedication' to the work in which he claimed that the tabernacle in the Old Testament was a "type of things invisible" in that it pointed to the church building, which itself foreshadowed the holy city of Revelation 21:2.³³ A similar approach was also employed in *The Temple* where Herbert saw the church building as being foreshadowed by the Jewish temple, which itself pointed to the Christian soul as a temple of the Holy Spirit and also prefigured the kingdom of Heaven.³⁴ The allegorical significance of *The Cathedral* is also highlighted by the work's subtitle, *The Church Catholic and Apostolic in England*. This suggests that the building is not to be seen as an end in itself, but as pointing in a more profound sense to the catholic and apostolic church as a spiritual institution.³⁵

The Cathedral opens with a set of three poems on the 'Western Front'. These present the three doors through which entrance is gained to the cathedral building as pointing to the promises of repentance, obedience and faith which are necessary to secure membership of the church through baptism.³⁶ The three poems are comparable with Herbert's poem from *The Temple* on the lock and key of the church door which reflect on how sin can prevent people from recognising the presence of God in their lives.³⁷



The Western Front from Williams I., *The Cathedral, or the Church Catholic and Apostolic in England* (Oxford, 1843 edition), no page number. Reproduced with permission from the Lambeth Palace Library, shelf-mark H5173(W5).

³³ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), xv

³⁴ Lewalski B.K., *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, 1979), 287

³⁵ Cf. Williams, *A Sermon Preached at the Consecration of All Saint's Llangorwen*, 16

³⁶ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 3-10

³⁷ Herbert G., *The Temple* (Cambridge, 1633), Hutchinson F.E. (editor), *The Works of George Herbert* (Oxford, 1941), 66

On entering the cathedral building the reader is led by Williams around the cloisters and is presented with a series of twenty-eight sonnets focussing on various issues relating to the life of the nineteenth century Church of England. A prominent theme in these poems is Williams' theological conservatism and suspicion of political liberalism and change. His poem entitled "The Modern Cathedral", for example expressed regret for what he saw as the "lost faith" of his day. "Political Changes" and the "Prayer for the Parliament" were critical of the reforming measures of the 1820-30s which the Tractarians believed had compromised the authority of the church, while "New Ways" expressed antipathy for the "new creed" of theological liberalism which Williams believed had rejected the ancient authority of tradition.³⁸ Such an emphasis on the liberalism of the age was to recur in Williams' later poetic works *The Seven Days* and *The Christian Seasons*.³⁹ The fact that Williams chose to deal with these issues indirectly through poetry, rather than through prose, can be seen as an example of reserve.

The journey from the cloisters to the chapter house evokes a poem on 'Sacred Retirement' in which Williams considers how the soul, when lifted above the noise and bustle of daily life, is able to recognise God's presence in the created world and even in itself. The first stanza of the poem sets the scene with its vivid portrayal of the "calm unalloyed" of a rural church close to a mountain lake as evening approaches. The second stanza goes on to claim that the divine presence, often too silent to be noticed, can be discerned beyond the continual motion of the natural world, as God "walks with us below in silence eloquent".⁴⁰ This alludes to the principle of reserve since, although God is always present, it is only those who are able to see beyond the material world who are able to discern that presence.

In stanza six Williams presents the Christian as praying that, despite the difficulties of the spiritual life, he, or she, might be so perceptive of God's presence in the world that his, or her, own soul might become a 'Temple' of that divine presence:

Oh! Hide me in thy temple, ark serene,
Where safe upon the swell of this rude sea,
I might survey the stars, thy towers between,
And might pray always; not that I would be
Uplifted or would fain not dwell with thee
On the rough waters, but in soul within

³⁸ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 19, 26, 28, 32

³⁹ Williams, *The Seven Days*, 96, 106; Williams, *The Christian Seasons*, 90-100

⁴⁰ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 39-40

I sigh for thy pure calm, serene and free;
I too would prove thy Temple, 'mid the din
Of earthly things, unstain'd by care or sin!⁴¹

After his poem on the chapter house, which, being the place where episcopal elections took place, is seen as alluding to the doctrine of the apostolic succession,⁴² Williams moves on to the nave of the cathedral which makes up the largest section of the work. In this section the reader is taken systematically around the body of the nave, beginning with the north porch, which represents 'The Church in Hope' and the south porch, which represents 'The Church in Danger'. The first of these poems focuses on the history of God's people in the Old Testament as prefiguring the coming of Christ and the establishment of his church,⁴³ while the second centres on the church in history as Williams and the Tractarians saw it, in their day, being compromised by the political developments of the 1820-30s.⁴⁴

The journey around the nave takes the reader through the north and south transepts, the first of which evokes a twenty-nine sonnet poem on the Psalms. The sub-title of this work 'Jesus Christ in Prophecy' highlights Williams' belief, also reflected in his later works, that the Psalms speak directly of the coming of Christ since, through them,

By figure, rite and storied mysteries,
The glorious light, in the highest Heaven that dwells,
Tempers its image to man's feebler eyes.⁴⁵

The poem on the south transept, entitled 'Jesus Christ in History', focuses on the historical witness which the epistles and the gospel narratives bear to Christ. The weekly gospel and epistle readings appointed to be read at the church's communion service are described as being a message from God to the church.⁴⁶ Williams went on to claim that, apart from referring to Christ's presence in history, the scriptures reflect the fact that he continues to be present with his church in every age. The healing presence of Christ in the sacrament of baptism was just as potent in the nineteenth century as it had been when he healed blind man at the pool of Bethsaida (John 5:1-9):

⁴¹ Ibid., 41

⁴² Ibid., 43-9

⁴³ Ibid., 53-5

⁴⁴ Ibid., 198-200

⁴⁵ Ibid., 76; Williams I., *The Psalms Interpreted of Christ* (volume 1) (London, 1864), 29-30; Williams, "The Psalter, or Psalms of David; in English Verse", 21-3

Christ hath been in the waters, and the whole
 Of our baptismal being doth abound
 With more of healing than Bethesda's pool,
 Stirr'd by the Angel, where there lay around
 The impotent, the maim'd, and sickness bound;
 Emblem of this world's sorrows, 'mid the show
 Of portals fair, which over-arch the ground,
 And seem to mock her children's varied woe.
 Look on us, or we die where healing waters flow!⁴⁷

Further poetic reflection on the importance of the scriptures for the Christian is reflected in Williams' poem on the central aisle of the nave. Throughout this Williams presents himself as being led by the Holy Spirit, a "Heaven-descended Guide", who must always accompany the Christian if he is to interpret the scriptures correctly:⁴⁸

Thy guiding light a little further on!
 Shower on my heart Thy radiance, without which
 Thine own sure word were but a barren void,
 But ever and anon, as Thy calm light
 Falls on it, Thy deep fullness comes to view.
 Oft clouds and darkness all about Thee dwell,
 Till thoughts responsive wake with changeful life,
 And open all Thy word . . .⁴⁹

This suggests, as Williams would outline more explicitly in his biblical commentaries, that the proper interpretation of scripture was directly linked to the principle of reserve. His reference to the 'clouds' and 'darkness' suggest that the true meaning of God's revelation in the Bible could not be understood by those who sought to interpret scripture merely according to the light of their own intellect but only by those humble enough to submit themselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰

Throughout this poem Williams deals with scripture systematically, beginning with the Old Testament. In verse five he summarises the Old Testament history from the Fall to the call of Abraham and presents the Bible not merely as providing an account of historical events, but as possessing spiritual relevance for the Christian. Thus the account of the Fall in Genesis 3 points to the reality of human sin and leads him to want to "hide . . . from [his] sins in coverts green".⁵¹ In verse six Williams

⁴⁶ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 166

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 177

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 117

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 123

⁵⁰ Cf. Williams I., *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 150-1; Williams I., *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis, with notes and reflections* (London, 1861), 1-10

⁵¹ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 125

claimed that the exodus of God's people from Egypt (Exodus 13, 14) can be seen as prefiguring both the Christian's spiritual journey to heaven and God's redemption brought about through the passion of Christ.⁵² Such a Christological interpretation of the Old Testament was also typical of Williams' biblical commentaries.⁵³

In the next stanza of the poem Williams claimed that the wisdom literature of Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, like the rest of the Old Testament, could be seen as prefiguring the coming of Christ since within them "the Gospel's light in secret burns".⁵⁴ The Christocentric interpretation of the Old Testament is brought out even more clearly in Williams' reflection on the prophets who had spoken explicitly of Christ's coming. The belief that they had foreshadowed the coming of Christ is highlighted by use of the imagery of dawn. The prophets are compared to glimmers of light preceding the rising of the sun, which represents Christ himself:

Meanwhile, as flows the stream of mortal things,
There riseth up the mist of human woes,
And, lo, that mist is skirted with the gleam,
Which harbingers the slowly-rising morn,
And brightens more and more, as darker grows
The gather'd cloud, until effulgent made
With rays prophetic purpling all the dawn,
Lo, it reveals the Sun of Righteousness,
Streaming in light o'er the dim vale of life,
And hills of immortality afar.⁵⁵

The north and the south aisles are seen by Williams as representing two other essential components of the Christian life, namely the Lord's Prayer and the creed. In the poem on the north aisle the image of the natural world continually changing and yet remaining the same in terms of its substance⁵⁶ is applied to the Lord's Prayer in the Christian life. Although the same, familiar prayer is used throughout life, its presence is portrayed as sanctifying the many joys and sorrows which accompany the Christian on life's journey. The constancy of this one prayer throughout life's changes is also seen as an image of Christ himself who is "the same yesterday, to-day and forever" (Hebrews 13:8):

A faithful Friend, best boon of Heaven,

⁵² Ibid., 126

⁵³ Cf. Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 149-50 and ff; Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 16-7; Williams, *The Psalms Interpreted of Christ* (v. 1), 15; Williams, "The Apostolical Authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews", 190-1

⁵⁴ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 130

⁵⁵ Ibid., 131

⁵⁶ Ibid., 91

Unto some favour'd mortal given,
 Tho' still the same, yet varying still,
 Our each successive want to fill,
 Beneath life's ever fitful hue
 To us he bears an aspect new
 Round childhood's path a happy charm,
 In age a tried supporting arm;
 A chastening drop in cup of gladness,
 A light to paint the mists of sadness:
 To cheer, to chide, to teach, to learn,
 Sad or severe, serene or stern . . .
 Faint emblem of a better Friend,
 Who walks with us till life shall end.⁵⁷

In the remainder of the poem's verses Williams considers the relevance of the Lord's Prayer to baptism and confirmation, the church's daily service, the sacrament of Holy Communion, marriage and the burial of the dead.⁵⁸

The south aisle of the cathedral led Williams to consider the importance of the creed for the Christian. As with the Lord's Prayer, he considers how the creed forms part of the various rites of passage which make up the Christian life.⁵⁹ Williams claimed that obedience to the teaching contained in the creed was essential for one to come to a complete knowledge of God and taught the importance of faith rather than relying solely on the human intellect:

So order me, *without Thy shrine*,
 To walk in holy discipline,
 Thy treasures in my soul to hide,
 To steer me from the rocks of pride,
 The lowliness of place to love,
 And holiest truths by practice prove,
 Resign'd, resolv'd, in meekness bold,
 Thy steps to watch, Thy hand to hold,
 That so Faith's scroll, which I repeat,
 May find in me accordance sweet.⁶⁰

This suggests another link to the principle of reserve since the Christian could only come to a true knowledge of the faith by obedient submission to the teachings of the church and not just by pondering them intellectually.

As the reader is led around the body of the cathedral poems are also provided on the oratories⁶¹ and the sepulchral recesses.⁶² The oratories are subtitled

⁵⁷ Ibid., 93-4

⁵⁸ Ibid., 96-107

⁵⁹ Ibid., 158-9

⁶⁰ Ibid., 164-5

‘Consolations and Strongholds’ and evoke short poems on important aspects of church life such as church music, the Athanasian Creed, fast days, festivals and the blessing. The sepulchral recesses are given the sub-title ‘The Churchman’s Friends’ and contain verses on various High Church and Nonjuror figures including Thomas Ken, William Laud, King Charles I, Jeremy Taylor and Lancelot Andrewes.

The Cathedral reaches its climax when the visitor is brought by Williams to the choir, or the sanctuary, at the heart of the building. The steps leading up to this most sacred part of the cathedral building are presented as alluding to the litany which Williams saw as a “crystal stair” by which the church’s prayers ascended to heaven.⁶³ The approach to the choir evokes two poems, one entitled ‘Despondency’ and the other ‘Invitation’. The first of these short verses reflects on the human tendency to feel unworthy to approach the presence of God while the second emphasises God’s gracious invitation which continues to call the individual regardless of his, or her, human failings:

O sacred Awe, whose downcast look
Is on the pavement of the shrine,
Which all unearthly seems to shine,
Look up, a healing Presence brook!⁶⁴

The last line of this verse suggests that the remedy for human sin is to be found in the gift of God’s presence dispensed through the sacraments, especially that of Holy Communion. The theme of these poems is reminiscent of Herbert’s “Love (III)” from *The Temple* which presented God in dialogue with the sinner inviting him, or her, to trust in divine grace and to share in the spiritual food of Holy Communion despite their unworthiness.⁶⁵

Williams’ poem on the screen deals specifically with the doctrine of reserve. The screen was an apt image of reserve since it separated the choir, which represented the sacred, from the nave, which represented the secular.⁶⁶ In this poem Williams reflected upon the intrinsic connection between reserve and the natural world which reveals God’s presence to those who have faith to perceive it:

Nature withdraws from human sight
The treasures of her light;

⁶¹ Ibid., 63-74, 181-91

⁶² Ibid., 57-61, 192-7

⁶³ Ibid., 203

⁶⁴ Ibid., 209

⁶⁵ Herbert, *The Temple*, reproduced in Hutchinson (ed.), *The Works of George Herbert*, 188-9

⁶⁶ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 309-10

In earth's deep mines or ocean's cells,
 Her secret glory dwells.
 'Tis darkly thro' Night's veil on high
 She shews the starry sky;
 And where of beauty aught is found,
 She draws a shade around;
 Nor fully e'er unveils to sense
 Steps of bright providence.⁶⁷

The second verse deals with the connection between reserve and the life of Jesus, which was an important element of *Tract 80*. Just as rocks and minerals were hidden beneath the earth's surface and the glory of God was veiled beneath the created world, so Jesus' divinity was concealed by his human nature in the incarnation and was only revealed to the "faithful few" who believed in him.⁶⁸ In the third verse Williams presented reserve as a principle which continued to be an essential part of the Christian life, since only the 'pure of heart' could comprehend the fullness of God's revelation:

Alone e'en now, as then of old,
 The pure of heart behold
 The soul-restoring miracles
 Wherein His mercy dwells;
 New marvels unto them reveal'd,
 But from the world conceal'd.⁶⁹

"The Sacramental Hymn" which focuses on the choir of the cathedral forms the apex of Williams' work. This poem presents the most sacred part of the church building as alluding to the presence of Christ in the created world, the church and the sacraments, especially the Holy Communion.⁷⁰ The hymn consists of twelve verses, each consisting of three stanzas, the first spoken by men on earth, the second by the angels in heaven, and the third by the angels and men in unison. Every first stanza begins with the words "Glory be to God on high", every second with "Peace be upon earth below", and every third with "Goodwill to man from God above". These phrases are thus repeated throughout the hymn calling to mind the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* of the communion service. The image of angels and men being united in the worship of God also points to the preface of the communion rite where the priest invites the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 210

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 211

⁷⁰ Cf. Edgecombe R.S., "Allegorical Topography and the Experience of Space in Isaac Williams's *Cathedral*", *English Studies*, 3 (1999), 236-7

people to praise God “with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven”.⁷¹

In “The Sacramental Hymn” the dialogue between the men and angels draws attention to Williams’ belief that the physical world can be seen as conveying the presence of God. Whereas the stanzas attributed to the ‘men’ emphasise the transcendence of God, those of the angels point to his proximity to humanity within the created world, while the stanzas attributed to ‘Angels and Men’ link these two themes. Thus Williams was trying to stress the fact that God’s transcendence above creation and his proximity to humanity are inextricably linked. The first stanza of verse one refers to God’s abode

Beyond where dwells the evening star,
In his golden house afar;
Where upon th’ eternal noon
Never look’d the silver moon.⁷²

Using imagery reminiscent of the call narrative of Isaiah 6:1-8, the second stanza sung by the angels dwells upon God’s descent to earth in the incarnation and in the sacrament of Holy Communion:

God is in His holy hill;
Let the earth and sea be still;
And the child of sin and woe
Come before Him, bowing low;
In His breast the living One
Makes His altar and His throne;
He comes from Heaven’s high citadel,
With men on earth to dwell⁷³

The third stanza sung by the ‘Men and Angels’ reflects on how, by Christ’s becoming man, humanity is able to share in the grace of the incarnation through the sacraments:

. . . from His cradle to His throne
Extends a living zone,
Which builds anew the ancient heavens and earth,
Now teaming with the throes of a more glorious birth.⁷⁴

The same pattern is reflected in the eighth verse where the first stanza reflects upon the souls of the departed, as though far away, being given a share in Christ’s

⁷¹ *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments* (Oxford, 1662 edition), 304

⁷² Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 213

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 214

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

resurrection.⁷⁵ The second stanza, however, suggests that the immortal life won by Christ's resurrection is not just something to look forward to in the future. Rather, it is made a reality here and now for the Christian through the sacrament of Holy Communion.⁷⁶ This theme recurs in verse eleven where stanza one reflects on God's feeding the Israelites with manna in the wilderness (cf. Ex. 16) and stanza two on Jesus' feeding of the multitudes (cf. John 6:1-15). On neither occasion did such bread from heaven make those who received it immortal.⁷⁷ Stanza three, however, contrasts the manna of the book of Exodus, and the bread with which Jesus fed the multitudes, with the gift of his body and blood in the sacrament of Holy Communion by which Christians are given a share in Christ's resurrection as a pledge of future immortality:

But now behold the Sacrifice,
On which alone the soul can live;
Higher than Heaven th' uncounted price,
The boon which nature cannot give;
Fast as His holy hand supplies,
The blessing multiplies,
'Mid earthly vanities the Bread of Truth,
And 'mid decay and death, food of immortal youth.⁷⁸

This makes it clear that 'The Sacramental Hymn' encapsulates Williams' understanding of how spiritual truth is conveyed through the physical world. The importance of reserve is underlined through Williams' emphasis that, since humanity cannot perceive God's transcendence directly, it is conveyed through nature, the church and the sacraments. Such an understanding of God's revelation found its climax in the sacrament of Holy Communion where the real presence of the body and blood of Christ was conveyed through the outward elements of bread and wine.

The reader is led on from the choir to the Lady Chapel, on which Williams provides a poem on the Virgin Mary. While reflecting great respect for her and referring to her as the "Holiest of women", Williams' poem was critical of Roman Catholic veneration of her which, in his view, amounted to idolatry.⁷⁹ Referring to Jesus' words in Luke 11:27-8, Williams claimed that Mary was blessed not just because she had borne Jesus, but because she had humbly accepted God's will and co-

⁷⁵ Ibid., 224

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 228-9

⁷⁸ Ibid., 229

⁷⁹ Ibid., 234

operated with his plan.⁸⁰ In venerating Mary Christians should not offer worship to her, but should rather offer praise to Christ for all that his grace had achieved in her:

For not in thee, thou maiden-mother mild,
As superstition deem'd, 'tis not in thee
That we rejoice, meek mother undefil'd,
But in our God alone both thou and we;
For thou wast compass'd with humanity,
And Christ alone thy light, thy strength, thy tower,
Thine innocence, thy victory, thy dower.⁸¹

Williams' veneration of the Virgin Mary appears to have had much in common with that of George Herbert. In his poem "To All Angels and Saints" from *The Temple* Herbert referred to the Virgin Mary not just as a "Blessed Maid", but also as the "Mother of . . . God", the title which she was assigned by the Council of Ephesus. That he believed that Mary was involved in God's redemption of humanity is reflected in his description of her as,

. . . the holy mine, whence came the gold,
The great restorative for all decay
In young and old,⁸²

Despite his veneration for the Virgin Mary, Herbert also shared Williams' caution and stated that petitions ought not to be offered to her since this was expressly forbidden by God Himself, to Whom alone all worship is due.⁸³ A more extreme view was taken by John Keble in his *Lyra Apostolica* where he claimed that Christians should pray to the Virgin Mary using the *Ave Maria*:

. . . unforbidden may we speak
An Ave to Christ's Mother meek.
(As children with "good morrow" come
To elders in some happy home:)
Inviting so the saintly host above
With our unworthiness to pray in love.

To pray with us, and gently bear
Our falterings in the pure bright air.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Ibid., 235

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Herbert, *The Temple*, reproduced in Hutchinson (ed.), *The Works of George Herbert*, 77-8

⁸³ Ibid.; Boyd M. and Brown C.C. (editors), *George Ryle, Mr Herbert's Temple and Church Militant Explained and Improved (Bodleian MS. Rawl D. 199)* (London, 1987), 98

⁸⁴ Rowell, *The Vision Glorious*, 31 citing Keble J., *Lyra Innocentium* (1903 edition), "Mother out of Sight", appendix

Before taking his leave of the main body of the cathedral building Williams provided a poem entitled “The Parting Voluntary”. This reflects upon the sound of an organ voluntary breaking forth throughout the building and transmitting its sound to the farthest corners of the cathedral’s nave.⁸⁵ For Williams this image of the organ voluntary filling the church building pointed to the church catholic through which the apostolic faith held for centuries continued to be taught to each new generation:

E’en thus on these our waning centuries,
Feeble and faint, compar’d with earlier years,
The Gospel broke, when there was seen to rise
“The second Temple and deserving tears;”
Now bursts forth the last ebbing tide, - once more
Aid our poor efforts till we gain the shore!⁸⁶

The Cathedral concludes with a series of poems on the pillars and the windows. Williams saw the pillars of the nave as representing the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, and provides poems on figures such as Noah, Abraham, Joshua, David and Isaiah, who are presented as prefiguring Christ.⁸⁷ The pillars of the choir evoke poems on the twelve apostles,⁸⁸ who are described as the “eternal corner-stone” which “bearest up Heaven’s pillar’d frame”.⁸⁹ Just as the pillars uphold the physical church building, so is the church catholic “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20). It is also significant that Williams chose the Old Testament figures to form the pillars to the nave and the apostles those of the choir. This suggests that, as the nave leads to the choir, the most sacred part of the building, so the characters of the Old Testament prefigure the Christian dispensation. It is also appropriate that the pillars to the sanctuary were chosen to represent the apostles since the Tractarians believed that it was through the apostolic succession that the church had received authority to celebrate the sacraments through which Christ continued to be present in the church.

The various side windows of the nave evoke poems on a number of the church fathers including Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Justin, Cyprian, Clement of Alexandria, Cyril of Jerusalem, Chrysostom and Augustine.⁹⁰ Unlike the apostles, prophets and patriarchs, these are not presented as forming the pillars of the cathedral. It is

⁸⁵ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 240

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 244-255

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 260-9

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 268

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 274-97

significant, however, that they were symbolised by the windows. This implies that, just as the light shone through the windows by which the church fathers were represented, so their lives can be seen as bearing witness to the truth of the Christian faith by reflecting the light of Christ. This is reminiscent of Herbert's poem on the church windows from *The Temple* where he claims that, although human beings are morally frail like fragile glass, they can, nonetheless, by God's grace, reflect in their lives something of the glory of God:

Lord, how can man preach thy eternall word?
He is a brittle crazie glasse:
Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford
This glorious and transcendent place,
To be a window, through thy grace.⁹¹

Between Williams' poetic reflections on the patriarchs, apostles and the church fathers are two poems on the west and east windows which focus specifically on the birth and passion of Christ.⁹² The purpose of these poems is to emphasise the fact that the saints are objects of veneration not because of their own personal merits, but rather because their lives manifested the grace won by Christ:

If there be aught of health in these Thy Saints,
Reliev'd from mortal taints,
'Tis but that they their feeble thoughts have rais'd,
And upon Thee have gaz'd;
And follow'd Thee from Bethlehem's lowly room,
To Calvary's solemn gloom.⁹³

The final poem of the work, entitled 'The Departure', draws *The Cathedral* to a close by emphasising the link between the cathedral building and the ancient church catholic as a spiritual institution.⁹⁴

2. The Baptistry

Isaac Williams reflected on specific parts of the church building in two successive works of poetry, namely *The Baptistry* and *The Altar*, the first of which focussed on the font which was seen as alluding to the importance of the sacrament of baptism in the Christian life. The work uses Boethius á Bolswert's allegorical depictions as the starting point for a series of poetic reflections on various aspects of the Christian life.

⁹¹ Herbert, *The Temple*, Hutchinson (ed.), *The Works of George Herbert*, 67

⁹² Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 270-2; 289-301

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 298

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 303-5

Each poem is preceded by an illustration and a key which helps to explain its allegorical meaning and the images are presented as pictures found around the baptistery of a church.⁹⁵ Owain Jones claimed that *The Baptistery* was one of the most popular of Williams' works.⁹⁶ Pusey read some of the poems to his children and his daughter Lucy knew some of its passages by heart.⁹⁷ Robert Broadley praised it and wrote that its pictures were "most extraordinary . . . [and] are sufficient to bring any one, under the guidance of the good Spirit, to 'Eternal Life'". He also claimed that the poetry of the work pointed to a new spiritual revival in the Church of England where "the clouds that have so long been hanging over the Church are . . . clearing away, and the True Light beginning to shine".⁹⁸ Although James Davies, William Copeland and Thomas Keble disliked the pictures in the work,⁹⁹ Roundell Palmer, a friend of Williams who had also won the Chancellor's Prize for Latin Verse in 1831,¹⁰⁰ spoke highly of its poetry in a letter to Williams dated 1842:

With all my admiration for many of your former poems, I confess I was not prepared for such a volume as the Baptistery . . . I do not see how it should be possible for such poems as these to fail of popularity and permanent reputation. Looking at them in a merely aesthetical point of view . . . I should refer them to the first rank of English poetry.¹⁰¹

This was praise indeed coming from someone who believed that the influence of William Wordsworth's poetry was second only to the Bible.¹⁰²

Unlike *The Cathedral*, *The Baptistery* was not written according to a systematic structure. Although the themes covered by Williams' poems all relate to important aspects of the Christian life, they do not lead on from one to another but can stand alone. The poems deal with a variety of issues, including the importance of making decisions, penitence, prayer, childhood, the transience of earthly life, the church, death, the saints and the final judgment. The work bears the subtitle *The Way of Eternal Life* which highlights the fact that, while baptism is the central theme of

⁹⁵ Williams, *The Baptistery* (1858 edition), 1

⁹⁶ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 39

⁹⁷ Pusey E.B. to Williams I. (no date), L.P.L. M.S. 4475, f. 253; Pusey E.B. to Williams I. (no date), L.P.L. M.S. 4475, f. 258

⁹⁸ Broadley R. to Williams I. (23 April 1842), L.P.L. M.S.4473, f. 72

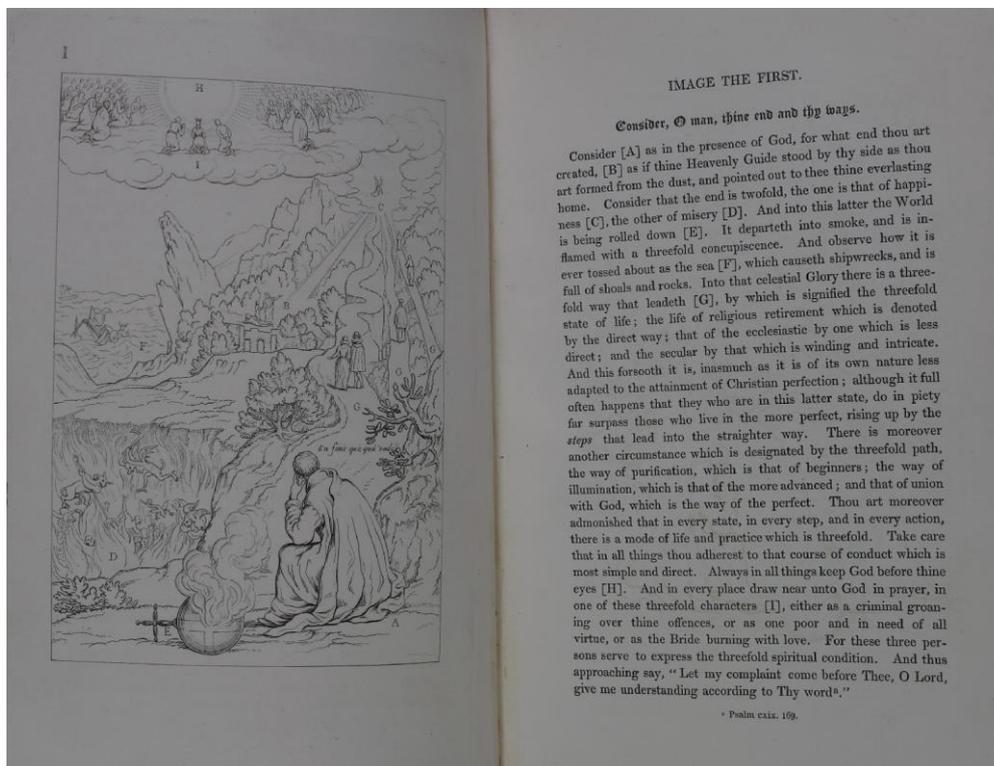
⁹⁹ Davies J. to Williams I. (6 December, 1842), L.P.L. M.S. 4474, f.1; Williams I. to Keble T. (4 October, 1842), L.P.L. Box 779 "Letters from Isaac Williams to Rev. Thomas Keble and his Family"; Williams I. to Keble T. (no date), L.P.L. Keble Dep. 9/42

¹⁰⁰ Steele D., "Palmer, Roundell, first earl of Selborne (1812-1895)", Matthew H.C.G. and Harrison B., *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*(v. 42) (Oxford, 2004), 522

¹⁰¹ Palmer R. to Williams I. (31 March, 1842), L.P.L. M.S. 4475, ff. 121-2

¹⁰² Steele, "Palmer, Roundell, first earl of Selborne (1812-1895)", 522

Williams' poem, his aim was not to focus primarily on the nature of that sacrament, but to present baptism as the beginning and foundation of the Christian life while considering the various issues which the individual will have to face during it.



"Image the First" and Commentary from Williams I., The Baptistery, or the Way of Eternal Life (Oxford, 1844 edition), no page number. Reproduced with permission from the Lambeth Palace Library, shelf-mark G812(W5).

In making use of Boethius á Bolswert's images Williams was anticipating what would become a common trend later on in the Oxford Movement, namely, the adaptation of Roman Catholic devotional material for use within the Church of England.¹⁰³ At first sight it would seem ironic that Williams, belonging to the Bisley School and being deeply anxious about Newman's increasing attraction towards Rome, should make use of such images in his poetry. A letter which he wrote to Thomas Keble following the publication of *The Baptistery* makes it clear that Williams was concerned that the nature of the pictures might lead some to misinterpret the intention behind the work.¹⁰⁴ Williams' concern that his work should not be interpreted as being crypto-Roman Catholic is reflected in its opening section

¹⁰³ Jones, *Isaac Williams*, 39

¹⁰⁴ Williams I. to Keble T. (4 October, 1842), L.P.L. Box 779, "Letters from Isaac Williams to Rev. Thomas Keble and his Family"

entitled 'Prefatory Thoughts'. This consists of a poetic dialogue between A and B, in which A (Isaac Williams) attempts to justify his use of such images and emphasises his deeply anti-Roman sentiments.¹⁰⁵ The opening lines of the dialogue present the poetry of *The Baptistery* as leading on from that of *The Cathedral*:

The Church with her deep mysteries and rites
Portray'd in semblance of Cathedral aisles,
With pillar'd shades of stone, and cloistral walks,
Deadens and stiffens our expansive thoughts
Of her ethereal essence, casing them
In dead cold marble; every finite form
That would set forth a nature infinite
Must circumscribe it.¹⁰⁶

A few lines later speaker B goes on to express the fear, presumably held by many, that Williams' poetic emphasis on the physical world as conveying spiritual truth could be seen as reflecting sympathy for the church of Rome.¹⁰⁷ Speaker A, responds to this charge by stressing his belief that Roman Catholic devotion was clearly allied with superstition and idolatry:

Such vain talk
I heed not, - taking all religious care
That nought be left that bears the taint of ill
To injure blameless souls; for much I fear
That e'en the tokens of her piety,
The rosary, the amice, cowl and veil,
Are so allied with evil, that they seem
As deeply steep'd in some enchanter's well,
And not in Holy Baptism.¹⁰⁸

He goes on to claim that, even if the use of analogy had the potential to be taken to extremes, as it had in Roman Catholicism, it was not fundamentally wrong in itself and could be adapted and used to positive effect within the Church of England:

What forbids,
But e'en from shades where baneful weeds lie hid,
I still may gather flowers, and bid them grow
In the home vineyard of our mother Church?¹⁰⁹

Williams went on to emphasise the importance of using the physical world poetically as a means of teaching Christian truth. This, he claimed, was not only justifiable, but

¹⁰⁵ Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, 166

¹⁰⁶ Williams, *The Baptistery* (1858 edition), xv

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, xvii

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, xvi-xvii

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, xvii

essential, because the Christian faith was founded on the doctrine of the incarnation. The physical world could therefore be used in an attempt to help humanity grow closer to God:

Music and Architecture, varied forms
Of Painting, Sculpture, and of Poetry;
These are allied to sense, but soul and sense
Must both alike find wing and rise to Heaven;
Both soul and body took the Son of Man,
Both soul and body must in Him serve God.¹¹⁰

In Williams' view the poetic revival which was taking place within the Church of England as a result of the Oxford Movement anticipated a true religious revival:

The Church, 'tis thought, is wakening through the land,
And seeking vent for the o'erloaded hearts
Which she has kindled – pours her forth anew, -
Breathes life in ancient worship, - from their graves
Summons the slumbering Arts to wait on her¹¹¹

This view was also held by Keble who believed that religious poetry could help to elicit a move from the more scientific, rationalistic way of thinking, which had been prominent in eighteenth century, to a new emphasis on the importance of morality and the supernatural.¹¹² In his *Praelections*, Keble had claimed that a true spiritual revival was always preceded by a poetic revival which helped to turn people's hearts and minds away from material concerns to spiritual matters. While poets like Spenser and Shakespeare had anticipated the religious revival of the reign of Charles I, the poetry of S.T. Coleridge, Walter Scott and William Wordsworth had helped to prepare the way the way for the Oxford Movement.¹¹³ Another belief which Williams held in common with Keble was that poetry was a means of regulating the "moral principles and affections" of the human heart.¹¹⁴

Williams' emphasis in the "Prefatory Thoughts" of *The Baptistery* on the physical world being a means of reflecting on spiritual truth underlines his indebtedness to the influence of John Keble and also to the Romantic movement. His claim that the poetic revival was a "vent for the o'erloaded hearts" is reminiscent of Keble's claim in *Tract 89* that poetry was "the expression of an overflowing mind, relieving itself, more or less indirectly and reservedly, of the thoughts and passions

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., xviii

¹¹² Beek, *John Keble's Literary and Religious Contribution to the Oxford Movement*, 73

¹¹³ Pereiro, *Ethos and the Oxford Movement*, 78-9

¹¹⁴ Williams, "The Psalter, or Psalms of David; in English Verse", 2

which most oppress it”,¹¹⁵ and also of William Wordsworth’s view of poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”.¹¹⁶ Williams’ poetic reference to the church “waking through the land”, also calls to mind Newman’s description of the Oxford Movement as “a ‘spirit afloat’” which was “rising up in hearts where it was least expected”, a passage which scholars have seen as underlining the connection between the Oxford Movement and Romanticism.¹¹⁷

Like *The Cathedral*, the allegorical nature of *The Baptistery* can be seen on a number of levels. The physical baptistery represents the sacrament of baptism, which in turn points to the Christian’s journey through life. Specific issues which relate to this journey are represented by the pictures around the baptistery. Williams’ use of allegory is also reflected in the poetry of *The Baptistery* which uses imagery drawn from the natural world in order to reflect upon theological themes. The use of such imagery was founded on the belief that God’s revelation could be discerned not just in scripture and the church, but also through the created world:

Is not all His world
And all His word one speaking parable,
Speaking to sense of things invisible?¹¹⁸

This point was also emphasised in the first poem of the work:

This world is but Thy mirror, fram’d to teach
Thy children of the Truth behind the veil;
Love’s handmaids charm with beauty, charming preach,
And preaching hurry by, bloom but to fail;
For all material things, so passing frail,
Are but her handmaids, walking in disguise.¹¹⁹

Thus Williams claimed that the sun could be seen as representing Christ, the wind the Holy Spirit, and the morning dews, rivers and oceans, the sacrament of Baptism.¹²⁰ Like his poem on the *Disciplina Arcani* in *The Cathedral* Williams drew out the connection between reserve and the natural world which ‘veiled’ the presence of the divine from the eyes of sinful humanity:

Upon their earthward side dark shades prevail,
But on the side beheld by Heaven-taught eyes,

¹¹⁵ Keble, “On Mysticism attributed to the Early Fathers of the Church (No. 89)” (London, 1868 edition), 147

¹¹⁶ Wordsworth W., *Lyrical Ballads* (London, 1992 edition), 62

¹¹⁷ Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, 17 quoting Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, 95

¹¹⁸ Williams, *The Baptistery* (1858 edition), xxiii-xxiv

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

There is a living light which their true Sun supplies.¹²¹

Since all creation pointed beyond itself to its creator, Williams believed that the world was touched by the “unearthly hand” of God and that,

Trees, rivers, birds, and stars, and sea, and land,
Are but the veil of the eternal strand.¹²²

So great was Williams’ belief in the presence of God beyond the natural world that he claimed that this was in fact more real than the physical sphere which could be perceived by the senses:

Things are most real which we shadows deem,
In Fancy’s visions Truth’s stern figures stand,
Calling to Heaven, of Heavenly things their theme;
The earth in which we live appears the only dream.¹²³

Williams’ emphasis on the created world being a ‘veil’ beyond which the presence of God could be discerned was a common Tractarian theme. The emphasis on the imagery of nature as reflecting theological truth was an important aspect of John Keble’s *The Christian Year* which Newman claimed first helped him to appreciate fully “that material phenomena are the types and instruments of real things unseen”.¹²⁴ For Keble, as for Williams, the created world was to be seen as a channel of divine revelation since the natural and the supernatural were inextricably linked.¹²⁵ In the poem for Septuagesima Sunday from *The Christian Year*, for example, Keble claimed that, like scripture, nature revealed the presence of God to those who were spiritually able to perceive it:

There is a book, who runs may read,
Which heavenly Truth imparts,
And all the lore its scholars need,
Pure eyes and Christian hearts.

The works of God above, below,
Within us and around,
Are pages in that Book to show
How God Himself is found.¹²⁶

Further on in the poem Keble reflected on the distinction between “two worlds”, the physical as opposed to the spiritual sphere. Like Williams he believed that it was

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, 12

¹²⁵ Beek, *John Keble’s Literary and Religious Contribution to the Oxford Movement*, 77-8

human sin which prevented one from discerning the revelation of the spiritual in and through the physical.¹²⁷ This is reminiscent of Williams' view of reserve since it was only those who possessed the necessary state of heart who were able to read divine revelation in the book of nature.

Williams' use of the imagery of nature as pointing to spiritual truths is also a point of contact with the poetry of William Wordsworth. In *Christian Mysticism* W.R. Inge wrote that Wordsworth's poetry "bids us seek for real and not fanciful analogies . . . The symbolic value of natural objects is not that they remind us of something that they are not, but that they help us to understand something that they in part are".¹²⁸ John Keble's published *Praelections* also included a tribute to Wordsworth whom he described as an "inspired poet" who,

BY THE SPECIAL GIFT AND CALLING OF ALMIGHTY GOD
WHETHER HE SANG OF MAN OR OF NATURE
FAILED NOT TO LIFT UP MEN'S HEARTS TO HOLY THINGS¹²⁹

Keble believed that Wordsworth's nature poetry would help to emphasise the sacramentality of nature and help to bring about a return to the mystical view of nature which had been held by the church fathers.¹³⁰ The fact that both Williams and Keble drew frequently on the imagery of nature in their poetry is also significant since they saw the country as representing the sacred and the principle of reserve as opposed to the industrial town which represented the spirit of rationalism and the rejection of reserve.¹³¹

A particularly striking poem in *The Baptistery* which draws on the imagery of the natural world is that on the seventh image entitled "Actions Written in Heaven". Here Williams considered how an individual's actions pass from the temporal realm to the eternal where they are beheld by the company of heaven and will come to effect that person's eternal destiny.¹³² Towards the end of the poem Williams provided a stark portrayal of the waterfall at Devil's Bridge near Aberystwyth, the style of which reflects his indebtedness to William Wordsworth:

Spray and wave, and drippings frore,

¹²⁶ Keble J., *The Christian Year* (London, 1887 edition), 46

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 47

¹²⁸ Brilioth, *The Anglican Revival*, 70 quoting Inge W.R., *Christian Mysticism* (London, 1918 edition), 309

¹²⁹ Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion*, 109

¹³⁰ Beek, *John Keble's Literary and Religious Contribution to the Oxford Movement*, 82

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 76-7

¹³² Williams, *The Baptistery* (1858 edition), 70-1

For a hundred feet or more,
 As the river swift descended,
 There in middle air suspended,
 Deep ravines around it blended.
 Icicles, and hanging flake,
 From a bridge, and rock, and break,
 And the woodland's snowy tress,
 In its pensive loveliness,
 O'er them hung, in silent trance
 Witnessing their headlong dance
 Caught in air, there to remain
 Bound in winter's crystal chain.¹³³

This vivid image is made to portray how transient human actions can be seen to pass beyond this temporal sphere into the eternity of heaven:

Thus methought men's actions here,
 In their headlong full career,
 Were passing into adamant,
 Hopes and fears, love, hate and want,
 And the thoughts like shining spray,
 Which above their pathway play,
 Standing in they eye of day,
 In the changeless Heavenly noon,-
 Things done here beneath the moon.

Thus above our heads aloof
 Hangs the Heavens' o'erarching roof,
 And upon the golden strand
 Angels round in stillness stand,
 And behold our actions pass
 Into the transparent glass.¹³⁴

The imagery of nature is also employed in the poem on the fourth image entitled "The Christian Warrior". In the world of nature, Williams points out, the natural elements, creatures, and even human beings, are continually at war with one another so that "war is coeval, war confederate with life".¹³⁵ For Williams such conflict within the created world represented the spiritual battle in which the Christian was engaged against the power of evil and sin.¹³⁶ Another frequent allusion to the imagery of the natural world is reflected in Williams' frequent use of the autumnal imagery of falling leaves to depict the transience of earthly life and the inevitability of death. This is reflected in "The Balances of the Sanctuary", where the depiction of

¹³³ Ibid., 77

¹³⁴ Ibid., 77-8

¹³⁵ Ibid. (1844 edition), 33

¹³⁶ Ibid., 36

autumn, which anticipates not only the coming of winter but also the beginning of the new year, is seen by Williams as pointing to death and also to the hope of immortality:

Brightly looks forth the wand'ring Moon
On rear of the Autumnal noon;
And seems descending from a Heavenly door,
And speaking of a happier shore,
When Death's dim shade shall on us fall,
And Night display her spangled pall.
The day that goes away
Lifts up a glorious curtain in the soul
From things that are more beautiful than Day.¹³⁷

A more stark and less optimistic use of autumnal imagery to speak of death and the transience of life is to be seen in the twentieth poem entitled "The Day of Days, or the Great Manifestation". Whereas the poem which has just been quoted saw autumn as pointing beyond death to the hope of eternal life, here Williams' main focus was on the impending final judgement. A sense of urgency and fear is created by the use of abrupt, three-line verses throughout this extended poem:

Solemn is th' Autumnal pall,
When the leaves in silence fall
Through the branching forest hall:

Darker gloom shall clothe the sky,
As that Season draweth nigh
When the stars shall fall from high.¹³⁸

Williams' use of autumnal imagery, and in particular the depiction of falling leaves, is also found in his later works of poetry.¹³⁹

George Herbert's poetry also made use of imagery drawn from the natural world in order to emphasise spiritual truths. His poetic description of a rose, for example, a beautiful yet prickly flower, suggests the allurements of worldliness which, while it appears attractive at first, will but cause the Christian spiritual injury:

What is fairer than a rose?
What is sweeter? Yet it purgeth.
Purgeth enmitie disclose,
Enmitie forbearance urgeth.

If then all that worldlings prize

¹³⁷ Ibid. (1858 edition), 188

¹³⁸ Ibid., 215

¹³⁹ Williams, *The Seven Days*, 375; Williams, *The Christian Seasons*, 111-2

Be contracted to a rose;
Sweetly there indeed it lies,
But it biteth in the close.¹⁴⁰

Images of horticulture are also used by Herbert in “The Flower” to suggest both the invigorating power of God’s grace on the human soul and the transience of human life. In the second verse the reference to flowers which “. . . depart / To see their mother-root, when they have blown;” and which during “All the hard weather, / Dead to the world, keep house unknown”,¹⁴¹ suggests the transience of human life in the same way as Williams’ autumnal imagery. The use of the image of withering flowers to suggest the inevitability of death can also be seen in Herbert’s poem ‘Life’:

Farewell deare flowers, sweetly your time ye spent,
Fit, while ye liv’d, for smell or ornament,
And after death for cures.
I follow straight without complaints or grief,
Since if my sent be good, I care not if
I be as short as yours.¹⁴²

Herbert’s references to life’s transience, however are more subtle and less morbid than Williams’. The main focus of Herbert’s ‘The Flower’, for example, is not so much the inevitability of death as the undeserved gift of God’s grace:

How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean
Are thy returns! Ev’n as the flowers in spring;
To which, besides their own demean,
The late-past frosts tributes of pleasure bring.
Grief melts away
Like snow in May,
As if there were no such cold thing.¹⁴³

Such imagery of spring to suggest the effect of divine grace on the soul stands in contrast to Williams’ autumnal imagery.

3.The Altar

In *The Altar*, Isaac Williams’ focus shifted from baptism to the sacrament of the eucharist. As in *The Baptistery* his emphasis on reserve meant that he did not deal explicitly with the sacrament in the work, but attempted to approach the mystery of

¹⁴⁰ Enright D.J., *George Herbert: Everyman’s Poetry* (London, 1996), 79

¹⁴¹ Herbert, *The Temple*, reproduced in *The Works of George Herbert*, 166

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 94

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 165

the eucharist through a series of sonnets reflecting on Christ's sufferings which were linked to images of a priest celebrating various parts of the Communion service.¹⁴⁴



Image 27 from Williams I., *The Altar, or Meditations on the Great Christian Sacrifice* (London, 1847 edition), no page number. Reproduced with permission from the Lambeth Palace Library, shelf-mark H5149.C5 W5 (This illustration links the administration of the Holy Communion to Christ's death on the cross).

For example, in the first poem which reflects on Christ's approach to the garden of Gethsemane, Williams emphasised the importance of careful preparation before approaching the sacrament of Holy Communion. Such preparation involved greater detachment from the things of this world in order to achieve union with Christ:

Whene'er I to Thine altar would draw near,
In solemn preparations would I call
On solitude and silence; and from all
Withdrawn . . .
Commune with mine own self . . .¹⁴⁵

The importance of preparation before receiving communion was also highlighted in Williams' poem on Judas' betrayal of Jesus:

. . . if Thou to Thy Table wilt receive,
Let nought within us Thy good Spirit grieve;
But wash us clean as guests to sit with Thee;

¹⁴⁴ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 160-1

¹⁴⁵ Williams I., *The Altar, or Meditations in Verse on the Great Christian Sacrifice* (London, 1847 edition), 4

Grant us the nuptial robe of Charity,
And feet with holy preparation shod . . .¹⁴⁶

In “The Cup of Agony”, which reflects on Jesus’ mental anguish while praying in Gethsemane, the word ‘cup’ is used to suggest a link between his sufferings and the sacrament of the eucharist. Although human sin was the cause of Christ’s agony it is rewarded by the unmerited gift of himself in the sacrament:

The cup we give to Thee is deadly wine,
Made of the poisonous grapes our sins have borne;
Thou givest in return the cup Divine,
Full of Thy love.¹⁴⁷

This poem is reminiscent of George Herbert’s poem “The Agonie” which also dwells upon Jesus’ prayer in the garden and links his suffering, caused by human sin, to the source of grace freely dispensed through the eucharist:

Love is that liquour sweet and most divine
Which my God feels as blood, but I as wine.¹⁴⁸

Williams went on to claim that receiving Holy Communion ought always to be accompanied by a humble contrition for the sins which were the cause of Christ’s sufferings:

. . . we may in that costly Sacrifice
Eat of Life’s Bread, and know its countless price,
With bitter herbs and sorrow.¹⁴⁹

The image of the cup is also employed in the poem on “Christ Bearing the Cross” where it suggests that the Christian must bear life’s sorrows in union with Christ, strengthened by the grace offered through the sacrament of the eucharist:

Thus may we to that awful cup draw near
Thou hadst to drink amid that multitude,-
Draw near, and look into that cup of Blood,
And see our very selves reflected there.
We too must of a cup of sorrow drink;
Our destined road is called “the vale of tears,”
Where we must bear our cross in human fears
And sorrows, and to earth in silence sink.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 13

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 10

¹⁴⁸ Herbert, *The Temple*, Hutchinson (ed.), *The Works of George Herbert*, 37

¹⁴⁹ Williams, *The Altar* (1847 edition), 10

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 71

Williams' most direct references to the sacrament of Holy Communion in *The Altar* are to be found in his poems on "The Burial of Christ" and on "Christ Risen". The first of these presents the sepulchre in which the body of Christ was laid as a vivid image of the human heart.¹⁵¹ As the stone tomb was transformed by the presence of the body of Christ so that it became a symbol of the resurrection, so the human heart, hardened by sin, could be renewed by the presence of Christ conveyed through the sacrament of Holy Communion:

Make Thou my heart as this sepulchral hall,
Though filled with recollections that appal;
Till from a sepulchre, by Thee made clean,
It shall become a Temple all serene.¹⁵²

In the poem on the resurrection of Christ Williams went on to claim that the resurrection is made a reality for Christians through the reception of daily communion:

. . . in our heart of hearts, the Morning true,
He comes, our daily Bread, - loved and adored,-
The Light of lights on our Baptismal dew
Fresh shining with the new day.¹⁵³

Through receiving the sacrament, the Christian was able to become the abode of God's presence:

. . . in the soul
From feeling and impassioned sense withdrawn,
Incarnate God, the Living Altar-coal,
Enters the soul, the body sanctifies.¹⁵⁴

The Altar also contains detailed reflections on Christ's sufferings, which are reminiscent of continental Roman Catholic devotion to the passion, like his description of "The Cross Dropping Blood":

Blood from His Hands is falling, drop by drop,
And from his Temples; now in streams they roll-
Haste downwards to the earth as to their goal;
Now hang on His pale Body, and there stop,
Or on the wood below; till from the top
Unto the base the blood-stains mark the whole.¹⁵⁵

Another example of this is the sonnet on Jesus being nailed to the cross:

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 111

¹⁵² Ibid., 110; cf. Williams, *The Cathedral*, 41

¹⁵³ Ibid., 118

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, 168 quoting Williams, *The Altar* (1847 edition), 85

. . . with His Blood
The One true priest His Altar doth anoint,
As through His outstretch'd palms the iron point
They drive . . .¹⁵⁶

At first sight it may appear surprising that, given Williams' emphasis on reserve, he chose to include such explicit descriptions of the passion in his poetry. However, it is likely that he would have felt that such reflection on the human sufferings of Christ, as opposed to reflection on his divine nature or the doctrine of the atonement, was fully in keeping with the nature of reserve. Williams' descriptions of Christ's physical sufferings can therefore be seen as an expression of poetic reserve since they are an attempt to use poetry to its full effect in order to refer indirectly to the gravity of human sin and the depth of God's love for humanity.

Williams made use of the imagery of nature in *The Altar* as a means of reflecting on spiritual themes as he did in *The Baptistry*. In his poem on Peter's denial of Christ, for example, the transitory state of the created world is used to emphasise the fickleness of human nature:

Like some frail reed, which in the pale moonlight
Bows down, then broken hangs upon the ground;
Like some ice-scene with golden sunbeams crown'd,
Which vanishes before mid-day grows bright . . .
So our best feelings cherish'd long and fair
One hour of darkness may lay desolate.¹⁵⁷

Williams also made use of the imagery of autumn in his poem on "The Crown of Thorns" as he had in *The Baptistry* to reflect upon the link between death and immortality. In the poem the image of a red-skied autumn sunset (which is said to precede a bright sunrise) is used to point to the inextricable link between Christ's sufferings and his resurrection:

In the fair autumn of the year's decline
When quiet stars come forth at evensong,
There doth a something to the skies belong
That speaks of roseate light which is divine;
When the sun sinks into his western shrine.
Leaving on even-gate a blood-like stain,
As on the door the paschal victim slain.
Those tints of light that blend with purple wine,
Which the sun leaves behind, portend a morn

¹⁵⁶ Williams, *The Altar* (1847 edition), 78

¹⁵⁷ Williams, *The Altar* (1849 edition), 42

Of glorious promise . . . ¹⁵⁸

Williams' references to the 'paschal victim' and the 'purple wine' again allude to the eucharist through which the Christian, by feeding on Christ's body and blood, shares in Christ's resurrection. The inextricable link between Christ's sufferings and his resurrection was also the theme of Herbert's poem "Easter", in which the image of a lute played on Easter morning in praise of the risen Lord is seen as alluding to the sufferings of the crucifixion:

Awake, my lute, and struggle for thy part
 With all thy art.
The crosse taught all wood to resound his name,
 Who bore the same.
His stretched sinews taught all the strings, what key
Is best to celebrate this most high day. ¹⁵⁹

Another prominent natural image employed by Williams in *The Altar* is that of water as the means of washing away human sins. While such imagery has a clear link with the sacrament of baptism, Williams also saw human tears as pointing to the contrition necessary to bring about the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁶⁰ The link between the imagery of water and forgiveness of sins is also brought out in the poem on "Pilate Washing his Hands", where refreshing showers of rain, which follow a humid summer's afternoon and enable the created world to renew itself, are made to reflect the refreshing nature of God's grace. ¹⁶¹

The Altar received a mixed response following its publication. In contrast to *The Cathedral* and *The Baptistery* which appeared in a number of editions, only two editions of *The Altar* were ever produced. ¹⁶² It did, however, receive a warm response from some of Williams' friends. Samuel Wilberforce informed Williams that the High Churchman W.F. Hook spoke highly of the work, ¹⁶³ while Charles Lyell wrote of it in glowing terms claiming that "[t]he work is beautiful, and while it exercises thought and the imagination it answers your great purpose, the awakening a devotional feeling". ¹⁶⁴ H.E. Manning also admired *The Altar* claiming that it was "of all things

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 87; cf. Williams, *The Christian Seasons*, 85

¹⁵⁹ Herbert, *The Temple*, Hutchinson (ed.), *The Works of George Herbert*, 41

¹⁶⁰ Williams, *The Altar* (1847 edition), 32

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 67

¹⁶² Thomas, "A bibliography of the works of the Revd. Isaac Williams", 83-5, 91-3, 99

¹⁶³ Wilberforce S. and Anderson C. to Williams I. (no date), L.P.L. M.S. 4473, f. 3

¹⁶⁴ Lyell C. to Williams I. (12 May, 1847), L.P.L. M.S. 4475, f. 5

most blessed on earth” and hoped that it would help to increase devotion to the sacrament of Holy Communion.¹⁶⁵

Two problems which *The Altar* faced were the nature of the illustrations and the sonnet form in which Williams had composed the poems. It would appear that the level of ceremonial advocated in the pictures of the work made a number of people, including Samuel Wilberforce, uneasy.¹⁶⁶ A letter to Williams from Manning suggests that he was being encouraged to remove the illustrations from the work. Manning was shocked at this proposal and encouraged Williams to retain some of the images:

Did you mean that you have been urged to suppress the rest of the Book or of the Plates? If the former I trust nothing will induce you to consent. If the latter, I should be inclined to join in this wish and to suggest that five should be done like those in the Baptistry, one general further frontispiece summing up the whole idea & four in the book –

1. The Oblation
2. The Consecration
3. The Distribution
4. The Angelic Hymn with the Heavenly Court¹⁶⁷

Although there are no extant letters which confirm this, it is possible that the objection to the illustrations in *The Altar* came from Thomas Keble and the ‘Bisley School’. Owain Jones felt that this was the case,¹⁶⁸ and this is feasible since it is clear that Thomas Keble had disliked the images which appeared in *The Baptistry*.¹⁶⁹ Whoever objected to the illustrations it is clear that they influenced Williams since the first edition of *The Altar* was suppressed and the second printed without the pictures.¹⁷⁰

The poetry of *The Altar* was also somewhat restricted by Williams’ attempt to write solely in the sonnet form. For all his admiration of the work Charles Lyell criticised his “adhering so rigidly to one particular form . . . of the Italian sonnets, by which you unavoidably, sometimes sacrifice perspicuity to rhyme”.¹⁷¹ The same point has also been made by G.B. Tennyson who claimed that Williams’ “poetic muse is unequal to such a sustained performance as required by the task he set himself in *The Altar*”.¹⁷² It may be that the work would have proved more popular had Williams

¹⁶⁵ Manning H.E. to Williams I. (30 April, 1847), L.P.L. M.S. 4475, ff. 14-5

¹⁶⁶ Wilberforce S. and Anderson C. to Williams I. (no date), L.P.L., M.S. 4473, f. 3

¹⁶⁷ Manning H.E. to Williams I. (22 May, 1847), M.S. 4475, ff. 17-8

¹⁶⁸ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 76-7

¹⁶⁹ Williams I. to Keble T. (no date), Keble Dep. 9/42

¹⁷⁰ Thomas, “A bibliography of the works of the Revd. Isaac Williams”, 99

¹⁷¹ Lyell C. to Williams I. (12 May, 1847), L.P.L. M.S. 4475, f. 5

¹⁷² Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, 170

written it in a more free poetic style. It is also unfortunate that the images were omitted from the second edition since the link between the descriptions of Christ's sufferings and the celebration of the eucharist is the central theme of the work.

4. *Thoughts in Past Years*

Any consideration of Isaac Williams' poetry would be incomplete without mentioning his *Thoughts in Past Years*, his second published poetic volume. Although this work was not based upon a developed structure like *The Cathedral*, *The Baptistery* and *The Altar*, it does contain some of his earliest poetry and is made up of poems of varying length which can stand alone. Williams believed that *Thoughts in Past Years* contained better poetry than his other published works.¹⁷³ The poetry in this work reflects the influence of the Romantic movement on Williams more clearly than any of his later works, and Owain Jones suggested that, had Williams continued to write in this style then his work may have proved more popular.¹⁷⁴

The first two sections of the work, entitled "The Golden Valley" and "The Country Pastor" contain poems written between 1829 and 1830, many of which deal with issues which would have confronted Williams during his pastoral ministry as curate of Windrush.¹⁷⁵ The title of the second section calls to mind George Herbert's manual for rural clergy, *The Country Parson*, and points to his influence over Williams.¹⁷⁶ Like Williams' other works a number of poems in *Thoughts in Past Years* use the imagery of nature as a means of conveying spiritual truth. One of the sonnets of "The Golden Valley", for example, sees the white landscape after a snow-storm so "delicately gentle, soft and pure", as pointing to the glory of God's heavenly kingdom.¹⁷⁷

Some of the poems of "The Country Pastor" section of *Thoughts in Past Years* reflect on the way in which Williams believed that the authority of the church was being threatened by the secular state.¹⁷⁸ One in particular laments society's rejection of Christian obedience and deference to the authority of the church,¹⁷⁹ while another accuses the Church of England of having become lapse in her spiritual observances,

¹⁷³ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 94

¹⁷⁴ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 13

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Jones, *Isaac Williams*, 12-3

¹⁷⁶ Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, 149

¹⁷⁷ Williams, *Thoughts in Past Years* (1848 ed.), 27

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 51-3

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 53

notably the observance of the weekly eucharist and of fast-days.¹⁸⁰ Three poems also consider the importance of the principle of reserve for Williams.¹⁸¹ One of these, entitled “Christian Reserve” suggests that, as well as being a theological principle, reserve was also a fundamental aspect of human nature since,

Things which abide nearest the fountain spring
Of our affections cannot bear the light
Of common day, but shrink at ruder sight,
As so decay.¹⁸²

Reserve was also directly linked to love, “a Heav’n-born thing”, which, in order to develop and flourish, needed “secret and shade”.¹⁸³

“The Mountain Home” section of *Thoughts in Past Years* is particularly noteworthy in that it contains poems written at Cwmcynfelin, many of which allude to the landscape of rural Cardiganshire. Williams continued to treat nature sacramentally, seeing it as pointing to spiritual realities which cannot be seen or heard. In “The Sea and Mountains at Night”, for example, imagery of the physical world is used to reflect on the mystery of the resurrection.¹⁸⁴ In the fourteenth verse of this poem the image of the waves of the sea ceaselessly rising and falling is used to suggest how the created order will come to share in the resurrection of Christ and to thank God for the gift of redemption:

And thou again, thou lost and ruin’d earth,
That strugglest with the mystery dimly thrown
Around thee, and the clouds that mar thy birth,
Shalt burst the bars of darkness, purer grown,
And walk in glory round thy Maker’s throne;
Rising from out the dust, and o’er thee flung
A mantle of bright lustre not thine own,
Shalt climb the ancient Heav’ns, the stars among,
To hymn the Crucified and join the eternal song.¹⁸⁵

Another poem entitled “Farewell to the Waterfall” uses the image of the waterfall at Devils’ Bridge in Cardiganshire which is described as “ever moving yet the same” to point to the nature of God who is eternal yet ever new (cf. Revelation 1:8).¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 54-6

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 50

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 75

¹⁸⁵ Williams, *Thoughts in Past Years* (1838 ed.), 132-3

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 184

Williams presented the waterfall flowing towards the ocean as a vivid image of the Christian's pilgrimage through earthly life to heaven.¹⁸⁷

A central theme in *Thoughts in Past Years* was Williams' emphasis on the transience of life compared with the eternity of heaven. This is brought out clearly in a poem entitled "Reflections in an Illness in the Year 1826" which consists of an extended blank verse monologue which reflects upon life and death through the imagery of nature. Central to the poem is the transience of life which is so often "hurried on from scene to scene",¹⁸⁸ and the need for the Christian during time of anguish and difficulty to unite his, or her, sufferings with those of Christ.¹⁸⁹ The use of blank verse and run-on-line, together with words like 'solitudes', 'cold', 'loneliness', 'dark' and 'weight', emphasise the unremitting nature of sickness and the anguish and loneliness which it brings. According to G.B. Tennyson, one passage from this poem which depicts a bridge over a roaring mountain stream, reflects the influence of Wordsworth on Williams through its emphasis on the individual's separation from God:

I stood amid the mountain solitudes,
On a rude plank that cross'd the torrent chasm,
Roaring eternally, till on the eye
Hung the cold tear unconscious, and I turn'd,
Unworthy with those shadowy forms to blend,
Nature's unsullied children: then came on
Feelings of solemn loneliness and thought,
Amid the silence of creation's works,
Waking the echoes of the past; until
The veil of things, and this mysterious being,
And the dark world, and fall'n humanity,
Hung like a weight upon the soul; then woke
Stirrings of deep Divinity within,
And, like the flickerings of a smouldering flame,
Yearnings of an hereafter: Thou it was,
When the world's din and Passion's voice was still,
Calling Thy wanderer home.¹⁹⁰

This verse, in which the narrator only gradually becomes aware of the presence of God beyond the natural world after 'the world's din and Passion's voice' have become silent, again points to the principle of reserve. This is underlined by Williams' emphasis on the 'silence of creation's works' being a 'veil' which

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 185

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 114

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 121

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 123; Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, 150-1

concealed the ‘mysterious’ presence of God. The conclusion of this poem underlines Williams’ emphasis on the transience of earthly life. Everything belonging to the material world, he claims, the world and all its beauty, is no more real than the passing dream of a sick man. All of life’s joys and sorrows will appear as nothing when measured against the eternity of heaven:

. . . Awhile,
And all this strange terraqueous scene of things
Shall be but like a sick man’s dream, or gleams
That came upon the dawn of infancy,
And all our tears but like the dews of night,
Lost in the presence of eternal sun.¹⁹¹

In “The River’s Bank” section of *Thoughts in Past Years* Williams’ focus turned away from the rugged mountain imagery of rural Wales towards the more refined landscape of Gloucestershire, though he continued to portray the natural world in sacramental terms. “The Banks in Summer”, for example, presents the bright summer sun as a symbol of the resurrected Christ, “the life of all that cannot die”,¹⁹² while “The Banks in Autumn” again made use of autumnal imagery to emphasise the transience of earthly life.¹⁹³ Again the transience of the natural world is presented as pointing to the hope of immortality. Thus autumn is described as being “Sweeter than Spring” and the sufferings of consumption to “whisper a sweet tale / Of better things” in the life to come.¹⁹⁴

A number of the poems of this section dwell upon the difficulties which the individual must face in trying to lead the Christian life. In one poem entitled “Rejoicing in Hope” Williams points out that it is only by obedience to God’s commands that one can be led safely through the trials and dangers of life:

Onward still – and on I go
Rejoicing – be it wind or snow,
Sunshine or shadow - Thou the way
Marhallest – May I obey.¹⁹⁵

Williams’ poem “An Orphan Child”, from this section reflects the influence of the poetic style of Wordsworth:

Half hidden in its stony tower,
A woodland strawberry bloom’d alone,

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 124

¹⁹² Williams, *Thoughts in Past Years* (1848 ed.), 130

¹⁹³ Ibid., 131-2

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 131

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 157

And bore to Heav'n its little dower,
Unseen, unknown.

An orphan bird on a lone tree
Sat singing to the star of even,
In song it seem'd so cheerfully
Of one in Heaven.

'Neath clouds that wrapt its early morning,
I saw a gentle blue-eyed child,
With hopes of Heav'n its nest adorning,
It sweetly smiled.¹⁹⁶

The most explicitly Tractarian of the sections of *Thoughts in Past Years* is “The Sacred City”, which deals with the status of the church as Williams saw its authority being usurped by the secular state. The first poem of the section, with its emphasis on “majestic towers” and “tall spires”, reflects his love for the city of Oxford. For Williams there was a close connection between that city and Christian antiquity and this first poem concludes with a plea that all should “venerate and love” that city’s “ancient ways”.¹⁹⁷ The majority of the poems in this section reflect the most important concerns of the Oxford Movement. “The Church of England”, for example, reflects the typical High Church view of the established church as a *via media* between Roman Catholicism and Reformed Protestantism,¹⁹⁸ while “O Lord, to Whom Shall we Go?” dwells upon the Church of England’s state of spiritual complacency. The Eucharist was no longer celebrated frequently, the litany was no longer recited, and the church’s bishops were no longer prepared to defend the Christian faith in the face of liberalism and error.¹⁹⁹ “The Coronation on a Fast Day” lamented the general rejection of regal authority in Williams’ day, while “The Days of the Royal Martyr” reflected the traditional High Church veneration for Charles I.²⁰⁰

This section of Williams’ work also contains two poems entitled “The Hymns of Nature” and “Science and Revelation”. The first of these reflects on how the presence of God can be discerned in nature,²⁰¹ while the second claims that divine revelation was manifested not just in scripture and church teaching, but also through scientific discovery as humanity learned more and more about the workings of the

¹⁹⁶ Williams, *Thoughts in Past Years* (1838 ed.), 216; Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 158

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 177

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 178

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 179-80

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 183-4

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 230-2

natural world.²⁰² This was a point which Williams was also to make towards the end of his life in his commentary on the book of Genesis.²⁰³

The penultimate section of *Thoughts in Past Years* is entitled “Reliquae Latine” and contains a collection of the Latin verses which Williams wrote while he was in school at Harrow. The most interesting of these is his prize-winning poem on geology *Ars Geologica* (Geological Art), which has never been published in English. Written in the style of Lucretius and employing the metre used by Virgil in his *Aeniad*, the poem attempts to provide a complete geological analysis of the earth. This poem claimed that the geological complexities of the earth pointed to God the creator,²⁰⁴ and foreshadowed Williams’ later use of imagery drawn from the physical world to deal with spiritual themes. His emphasis on the transience of the created world in his later works was central to the *Ars Geologica* as is reflected in its powerful conclusion:

O domus æterni Artificis, formosa ruinis,
Exitioque ingens! ut adhuc per sæc’la renascens
Induis indefessa decus, bibis et jubar aureum
Ætheris! At subit hora, ubi rerum hic dædalus ordo
Solevntur flammis, cum concurrentia cæco
Maret ruent elementa, et, claustris undique ruptis,
In vastam exsiliunt incendia viva ruinam,
Naturæque rogo se involvet machina mundi.²⁰⁵

[O, home of the everlasting Artificier
Beautiful in its fall, mighty in its destruction!
As reborn to this day through the ages you wear your glory unwearied,
You drink too the golden radiance of the upper air!
But the hour is at hand, when this fine-wrought order of the world,
Shall dissolve in flames, when the elements clashing in blind combat
Shall come to destruction and, its bulwarks everywhere shattered,
Raging fires shall burst forth into a vast destruction,
And the fabric of the world shall immolate itself
In nature’s funeral pyre.]²⁰⁶

The final section of *Thoughts in Past Years* is entitled “*Lyra Ecclesiastica*” and consists entirely of English translations of ancient devotional hymns. These include the requiem hymn *Dies Irae*,²⁰⁷ the *Circa Exsequias Defuncti*, the translation

²⁰² Ibid., 236

²⁰³ Cf., Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 10-6

²⁰⁴ Williams, *Thoughts in Past Years* (1848 ed.), 397

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 405

²⁰⁶ Unpublished translation by P.M. Jones

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 303-7

of which is entitled “Hymn on the Funeral Rites for the Dead”,²⁰⁸ as well as translations of twelve of the hymns of St. Ambrose of Milan²⁰⁹ and of the Greek “The Hymns of Synesius” by Ptolemais.²¹⁰ The translation of the Greek and Latin devotional hymns of the early church was to become an important feature of the Tractarian movement in later years.

It is interesting to observe that Isaac Williams’ earliest poetry contained in *Thoughts in Past Years* anticipates themes which would continue to feature in his later works. The poems on reserve point to *Tracts 80* and *87* and his references to the state of the Church of England to the poetry of *The Cathedral*. The poems which reflect on the issues relating to the Christian life are reminiscent of *The Baptistery* while his poem on “The Holy Communion” can be seen as prefiguring *The Altar*. A poem entitled “The Natural and Spiritual Man, or Classical Complaints and Scriptural Remedies” from “The Sacred City” section of *Thoughts in Past Years* can be seen as anticipating *The Christian Scholar* in its attempt to reconcile the Greek and Latin Classics with Christian truth, while Williams’ poem on “Science and Revelation” and his *Ars Geologica* point to his commentary on the book of Genesis. Williams also took his translation of ancient devotional texts further in his *Hymns translated from the Parisian Breviary*, while the adaptation of Roman Catholic devotional material for use in the Church of England was reflected in the images which he chose to use in *The Baptistery* and *The Altar*. All this would seem to suggest that Williams was an individual whose religious outlook changed little during the course of his life, since the main themes of his later works were already prefigured in his earliest poetry.

Although none of Isaac Williams’ works of poetry were re-printed beyond the end of the nineteenth century they clearly made an important contribution to the Oxford Movement. Through their use of physical imagery, whether of the natural world, church architecture, or allegorical images to evoke reflection on theological themes, they can be seen as an expression of the principle of reserve which was an important element of the Tractarian movement. For Williams, poetry was a means of dealing with sacred themes in an indirect way by using the created world as an allegory which pointed beyond itself to God its creator. While being an expression of

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 320-33

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 334-61

²¹⁰ Ibid., 362-83

reserve his poetry also provided a means of propagating Tractarian principles such as the doctrine of the church and the sacraments.

A consideration of Williams' poetry suggests that he was influenced by both George Herbert and his fellow-Tractarian John Keble. While both Herbert and Williams composed their poetry according to very different modes of expression (Herbert writing in a metaphysical style and Williams under the influence of the eighteenth century poets and Romanticism) it would appear that there are a number of points of contact between the poetry of both men. This is evident through their use of the imagery of the natural and physical world to evoke religious teaching. It is also likely that the metaphysical style of Herbert's poetry would have appealed to Williams since this way of writing, in which the poem often appears to be an intellectual riddle with which the individual must grapple in order to understand its true meaning, would seem to lend itself particularly well to the principle of reserve. Since Williams clearly admired Herbert as a poet and seems to have been influenced by his ideas it may be that Owain Jones' assertion that the similarities between the two poets are little more than "the small change of so much religious verse and derive from the Bible"²¹¹ is in need of reappraisal.

Williams' poetry also appears to have been directly influenced by that of John Keble and William Wordsworth. The emphasis on nature as being able to point beyond itself and teach God's truth is common to both Williams and Keble and also suggests a link with the Romantic poet. Although as a young man Williams struggled to understand why Keble was so influenced by Wordsworth, by 1825 he seemed to have come to share the older man's view. In a letter to his father he quoted Wordsworth's "She lived among untrodden ways", claiming that this poem reflected an "unrivalled sympathy of pathos".²¹²

At the same time there are also differences between Isaac Williams and John Keble's poetry which, according to G.B. Tennyson, generally arise from the fact that Williams was the better poet. The influence of the grave-yard school, and in particular of the eighteenth century poet William Cowper, in his view gave Williams' poetry a sombre tone which lent itself well to his poetic descriptions of rural Wales and helped to make his nature poetry more dramatic than Keble's.²¹³ Tennyson also claimed that

²¹¹ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 159

²¹² Williams I. to Williams I.L. (c. 1825), L.P.L. M.S. 4476, f. 97

²¹³ Tennyson, "Sacramental Imagination", 381

Williams possessed a greater ability to end his poems than Keble.²¹⁴ Above all, however, Williams' poetry surpasses that of Keble in its ability to provide the reader with a complete aesthetic experience of the beauty of nature as the revelation of God. Whereas Keble's poetry tended to view creation as something which could be read two-dimensionally like a book, for Williams it is presented as an experience with which the reader can fully engage.²¹⁵ This is underlined by Williams' poems from "The Golden Valley" section of *Thoughts in Past Years* which suggest that God's presence is to be found in all of life's experiences.²¹⁶

This suggests that Isaac Williams' poetry was an attempt to build upon Keble's approach to nature in his own, more sophisticated way. Bearing in mind the fact that Williams wrote a number of published poetic works during his life and that his nature poetry is more developed poetically than that of Keble, it is surprising that relatively little attention has been paid to his poetic works. Although it is true that the best of his nature poetry was restricted to *Thoughts in Past Years* and *The Baptistery*, even *The Cathedral* and *The Altar*, which were less striking poetically, made a significant contribution to the Oxford Movement through their structure and attempt to propagate Tractarian principles.²¹⁷ It may be that, had Williams written more nature poetry akin to that of *Thoughts in Past Years* and *The Baptistery* and had he succeeded in being elected to the chair of poetry in 1842, then his reputation as a Tractarian poet would have been more widely recognised.

²¹⁴ Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, 151

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 154

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 151

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 156

Chapter Four: Isaac Williams and the Bible

Of all the leaders of the Oxford Movement it was Isaac Williams who seemed the most concerned to publish works which would provide guidance on the interpretation of scripture.¹ Although E.B. Pusey published a commentary on the minor prophets of the Old Testament in 1860 and on the book of Daniel in 1864, these were predominantly academic in tone and attempted to undermine the arguments of the contemporary biblical criticism,² the importance of which was increasingly emphasised by the Broad Churchmen throughout the nineteenth century.³ Williams' commentaries were more devotional in their approach to scripture and drew on the patristic writings in order to provide an interpretation of scripture suitable for ordinary parish clergy and laity. They included his *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* as well as those on the first four chapters of Genesis, the Psalms and the book of Revelation. The influence of the writings of the church fathers in the commentaries⁴ makes it clear that Williams was not advocating a new approach to scripture but rather attempting to expound and popularise the patristic method which, although it had been maintained to an extent by the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen, had, in his view, fallen into disuse in the previous century.⁵ It is not surprising that, given their appeal to the ancient method of scriptural interpretation, Williams' commentaries reflect the same negative view of biblical criticism which was reflected in Pusey's commentary on the book of Daniel.⁶

In contrast to the attempts of the biblical critics to treat the Bible like any other work of literature and question belief in its plenary inspiration, Isaac Williams'

¹ E.B. Pusey wrote commentaries on the book of Daniel and the Old Testament prophets, but these did not appear until the 1860s.

² Liddon H.P., *The Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey* (volume 4) (London, 1989), 71-4

³ Reardon B.M.G., *From Coleridge to Gore* (London, 1971), 81-4; Sanders C.R., *Coleridge and the Broad Church Movement* (New York, 1972), 82-3; Tulloch J., *Movements of Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century* (Leicester, 1971 edition), 24-30; Altholz J.L., *Anatomy of a Controversy: the Debate over Essays and Reviews, 1860-1864* (Aldershot, 1994 edition), 16-20, 28-31; Chadwick O., *The Victorian Church* (Part 2) (London, 1970), 75-90; Jones, O.W., *Rowland Williams: Patriot and Critic* (Llandysul, 1991), 59-67

⁴ Cf. Williams, *The Doctrine of the Church in the Writings of Isaac Williams*, 36: Isaac Williams refers to such patristic works as Clement of Rome's *Epistle*, Ignatius' *Epistle to the Ephesians*, Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata*, Origen's *Commentaries on the Scriptures*, *Contra Celsus* and *Letter to Gregory Thaumaturgus*, Cyril of Jerusalem's *Catechesis*, Basil *On the Holy Spirit*, Chrysostom's *Commentary on St. Matthew*, and Augustine's *Commentary on St. John*, *Religious Truth and Concerning Different Questions*.

⁵ Williams, "The Apostolical Authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews", 194; Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 150

⁶ Pusey E.B., *Daniel the Prophet: Nine Lectures, delivered in the Divinity School of the University of Oxford* (London, 1876 edition), 1-8

commentaries presented scripture as a form of divine revelation which ought to be read in a spirit of devotion and accepted in faith. In his review of Charles Forster's *The Apostolical Authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews* he emphasised the danger of placing too much emphasis on the human intellect when interpreting the Bible, claiming that it was essential for all study of scripture to be accompanied by obedience to the traditions of the church:

. . . refreshing, interesting, and edifying as these inquiries [i.e. the interpretation of scripture] are, it is only so as long as they are conducted under the guidance and control of Church authority. Without those beacon lights which, as time goes on, mark the limits wherever our enquiry may safely expatiate, we are at once abroad on the sea of doubt. The bold and speculative spirit . . . leads the inquirer as far from truth as it does from natural piety. But, under the Church's parental restraints, thus to harmonize, to compare, and to contrast expressions and passages of Holy Writ is in every portion of the inspired volume a study rich in unfolding treasures of Divine Wisdom.⁷

Williams' belief that it was morally wrong to speculate as to the nature and authorship of scripture was reflected in his claim that all 'good men' would wish to accept, without question, the traditional belief that St. Paul was the author of the epistle to the Hebrews. In his view any enquiry into the issue of the epistle's authorship touched upon a matter of the utmost sanctity, and brought with it a very real danger "lest . . . feeling too much the interest of a Critic and a Scholar, we forget the awful nature of the subject, and lose the deeper thoughts which become a Christian".⁸ That such an attitude was typical of Williams' approach to scripture is reflected in an article printed in *The Morning Chronicle* in May, 1854, claiming that, by popularising the patristic approach to scripture, Williams' commentaries had helped to "anchor the English religious mind to his steadfast shore of primitive thought and belief, in spite of the ever-veering gales of neological speculation".⁹

While Isaac Williams would have been at one with many of the Evangelicals of his day in his attempt to defend the literal truth of the Bible against the criticism being advocated by the Neologists, his approach to scripture also set him apart from the most extreme Evangelicals known as the Recordites. According to W.J. Conybeare, these regarded the Bible "not as a collection of books written by men

⁷ Williams, "*The Apostolical Authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews*", 194

⁸ *Ibid.*, 167

⁹ Freeman P., "English and German Theology and the Universities", *The Morning Chronicle (London)* (26 May, 1854, Issue: 27276)

under Divine guidance, but as a single book, dictated in every word and letter by God Himself". Such an attitude led them to "resort to the most arbitrary and unscrupulous misinterpretations, either violently wresting Scripture to make it accord with the facts, or denying facts which they cannot reconcile with Scripture".¹⁰ While Williams firmly maintained the literal and historical truth of the biblical narrative, he was prepared to accept that scripture was influenced by the human authors who had acted as instruments of God in recording his revelation. Another aspect which set Williams apart from the Recordite Evangelicals was his belief, strongly influenced by the writings of the church fathers,¹¹ that, beyond its literal truth scripture also contained a deeper spiritual and figurative meaning which could only be understood by those who read it in a spirit of humble obedience. Williams' emphasis on the distinction between the letter and the spirit of scripture is particularly reminiscent of Origen's *On First Principles*. Like Origen, Williams claimed that the spiritual meaning of scripture was veiled beneath its literal sense so that it could only be fully understood by those who were truly advanced in divine wisdom.¹² This can be seen as an application of the principle of reserve to the interpretation of scripture.

That Williams was deeply impressed by the allegorical approach to the Bible is reflected in his poem on Origen from *The Cathedral*. Here he claimed that Origen's approach to scripture had helped to recognise the depth of spiritual and Christological meaning throughout the Bible. The full meaning of scripture could be discerned not as a result of the intellect but only by prayer and devotion:

Into God's word as in a palace fair
 Thou leadest on and on, while still beyond
 Each chamber, touched by holy Wisdom's wand,
 Another opes, more beautiful and rare,
 And thou in each art kneeling down in prayer,
 From link to link of that mysterious bond
 Seeking for Christ.¹³

¹⁰ Conybeare (Burns ed.), *Church Parties* in Taylor (ed.), *From Cranmer to Davidson*, 279-82

¹¹ Origen, *On First Principles*, Book 4, Chapter 2, in Butterworth G.W. (editor), *Origen on First Principles* (London, 1936), 269-77; Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, book 2, chapters 6, 9, 10 in Schaff P. (editor), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (volume 2, series 1) (Edinburgh, 1993), 537-9; Augustine, *Unfinished Commentary on Genesis 5*, in Augustine, *On Genesis*, 5, Rotelle J.E. (editor) (New York, 2002 edition), 116

¹² Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 150; Origen, *On First Principles*, chapter 2:4, in Greer R.A., *Origen* (London, 1979), 182-3; Vogt H.J., "Origen of Alexandria (185-253)", Kannegiesser C., *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Boston, 2004), 546

¹³ Williams I., "Origen (XCI)", Newman J.H. (editor), *Lyra Apostolica* (Derby, 1836), 111

This poem also contains a note of caution, however, in Williams' expression of concern that Origen's ability as a biblical exegete had taken on "the colourings of earthly thought"¹⁴ and actually undermined the truth of scripture. This suggests that he believed that Origen tended to over-emphasise the allegorical meaning of scripture at the expense of its literal and historical truth. For Origen the spiritual interpretation of the Bible was the only one that was really important. In his *First Principles*, for example, he claimed that the Holy Spirit had deliberately included in the canon passages that were impossible to understand literally in order to encourage the reader to search for its spiritual meaning.¹⁵ This stood in contrast to Williams' belief that, while the fullness of divine revelation was contained in the spiritual interpretation of scripture, the Bible was also true on a literal and historical level.¹⁶ While the allegorical method upheld by Alexandrian fathers like Origen must have appealed to Williams' poetic mind, it would appear that he was most comfortable with a mode of interpretation which saw the spiritual meaning of scripture as being dependent upon its historical truth. In this sense his approach had most in common with that of figures like Augustine, Jerome and Chrysostom who emphasised both allegory and the literal truth of scripture.¹⁷

If Origen's emphasis led Williams to undermine the literal meaning of scripture, then the contemporary Evangelicals, in his view, were guilty of the opposite error, namely of ignoring its spiritual significance. Williams believed that, in rejecting the spiritual meaning of scripture, they were failing to accept the fullness of God's revelation and, like Origen, he claimed that their over-emphasis on the letter of the Bible made them resemble the Jews who had failed to recognise the coming of Christ.¹⁸

Williams' emphasis on the spiritual interpretation of the Bible was closely linked to his view of poetry in which the imagery of the physical world could be used to evoke reflection on theological themes. There is also a clear connection between the spiritual interpretation of the Bible and the principle of reserve since the full

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Origen, *On First Principles*, chapter 2:9, in Greer, *Origen*, 187-8; Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 44-6; Horbury W., "Old Testament Interpretation in the Writings of the Church Fathers", Mulder M.J. (editor), *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1988), 765

¹⁶ Cf. Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 153

¹⁷ Horbury, "Old Testament Interpretation", 768-770

¹⁸ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 197-9; Origen, *On First Principles*, chapter 2:1, Greer, *Origen*, 178

meaning of scripture was not obvious to all but could only be understood by those who possessed the necessary state of heart.¹⁹ This was underlined by an unpublished sermon on Ecclesiastes 9:10:

God has been pleased to give us a book which shall be our guide and support to Eternal Life. How in the Holy Scriptures there are many passages which are hard to be understood, the spiritual meaning which is unto life is in a manner hid from a careless reader, and only to be gained by attentive reading and prayer. This was doubtless intended that these things should be revealed to those who [would] give them attention, and concealed from those who would not. If there are therein some passages hard to be understood we cannot suppose that they came there by chance, they were doubtless on purpose left to try and to exercise our patient industry and humility, our disposition to learn the truth. Not that it is a metre of mere scholarship, and learning, for the most ignorant will arrive at that knowledge which is spiritual and practical, while the most learned and critical we all know may wander far from it.²⁰

The belief that the spiritual interpretation of scripture was connected to the principle of reserve was also upheld by Newman in his *The Arians of the Fourth Century*.²¹

In his emphasis on the spiritual method of scriptural interpretation which had been upheld by the church fathers, Williams was at one with both his fellow Tractarians and also with a number of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen including Daniel Waterland, Thomas Wilson, William Van Mildert, George Horne and William Jones of Nayland. When writing his commentaries, Williams wrote to his fellow-Tractarians in order to seek their advice.²² His approach to scripture seems to have been particularly influenced by E.B. Pusey's "Lectures on Types and Prophecies of the Old Testament" which were delivered in the autumn of 1837 to an audience of 29 people which included Isaac Williams.²³ These lectures marked Pusey's transition away from the liberalism of the German rationalists who had influenced him as a young man and have much in common with Williams' works on the Bible, not least in their emphasis on the spiritual interpretation of scripture.²⁴ In a letter to Williams on

¹⁹ Williams, "On Reserve (no. 87)", 21-2; cf. Williams I., *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative: The Holy Week* (volume 6) (London, 1880 edition), 184

²⁰ Williams I., unpublished sermon on Ecclesiastes 9:10, L.P.L., M.S. 4478, ff. 15-6

²¹ Periero, *Ethos and the Oxford Movement*, 118 citing Newman, *The Arians*, 62ff.

²² Williams I. to Pusey E.B., (no date), P.H. M.S. (L.B.V., no. 10); Newman J.H. to Williams I. (26 July, 1838) in Tracey G. (editor), *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* (volume 6) (Oxford, 1984), 271-2

²³ Forrester D., *Young Doctor Pusey: A Study in Development* (London, 1989), 102-3; Jasper, "Pusey's 'Lectures on Types and Prophecies of the Old Testament'", 51

²⁴ Cf. Rowell, *The Vision Glorious*, 73; Pusey E.B., "Lectures on Types and Prophecies of the Old Testament" (unpublished M.S. at Pusey House Library), 7-8, 10, 23-24

his lectures Pusey outlined how, in his lectures, he had dealt with the spiritual significance of numbers in the Bible:

The typical character of numbers comes out very strikingly. I am quite satisfied with the results. 1 and 3 of course plain; 2 division or reunion; 4 the world; 7 (4 plus 3) reconciliation of God with the world; 12 (4 multiplied by 3) presence of God with the world or the Church; 10 (4 + 3 + 2 + 1) perfection as aggregate of individuals; 5 (½ ten) imperfect union. Twelve and perhaps five I found in a German book but I find myself coinciding with it.²⁵

Williams appears to have been greatly impressed with Pusey's lectures and encouraged him to publish them,²⁶ although he ultimately failed to persuade his colleague.

1.Thoughts on the Study of the Holy Gospels

Isaac Williams' most extensive biblical commentary was his eight volume work on the gospels. After outlining his understanding of how one ought to approach the gospels as sacred texts in the first volume of the work, in the second he attempted to harmonise the four gospel narratives. This harmonisation, which presupposed the fact that the events recorded in the gospels were literally and historically true, was intended to accompany the subsequent volumes of Williams' commentary by presenting the events of each of the four gospels in chronological order. The remainder of the volumes of the *Devotional Commentary* consisted of spiritual reflections and commentary on the events recorded in the gospels. Since a detailed discussion of every volume of Williams' *Devotional Commentary* would be beyond the bounds of this thesis, this chapter will centre on the first volume of the work entitled *Thoughts on the Study of the Holy Gospels*, which provides a detailed outline of how Williams felt that the gospels should be interpreted.

From the outset of his commentary, Williams accepted the differences between each of the four gospel accounts, pointing out that "a different manifestation of our Blessed Lord Himself comes forth in each".²⁷ Although such variation could be attributed to the different aims and purposes of the evangelists,²⁸ Williams claimed that ultimately the differences between the gospel narratives had been intended by God himself and could therefore be attributed to "some great and Divine purposes"

²⁵ Pusey E.B. to Williams I. (no date), L.P.L. M.S. 4475, f. 257

²⁶ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (no date), P.H. M.S. (L.B.V., no. 2)

²⁷ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 2

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 90

which could not be fathomed by the human intellect.²⁹ This suggests that, while he accepted the fact that each of the gospel accounts was, to a certain extent, conditioned by the unique circumstances of the individual who wrote it, he was afraid that such an emphasis on the intention and purposes of the human ‘authors’ of scripture could undermine the fact that the Bible was ultimately a form of divine revelation written by God himself.

Although each of the gospel narratives differed in the details which it provided about Jesus, Williams claimed that this did not undermine the fact that each was faithful in providing an accurate portrayal of his life and ministry. On the contrary, he believed that the variations between the different accounts serve to “imply that [Jesus’ speeches and actions] were of such a character, so numerous, manifold, and varied, as to admit of this distinguishing selection, to suit the Divine purpose, in each inspired Evangelist”.³⁰

Williams’ reticence to dwell on the human role of the evangelists is reflected in his belief that the four accounts ought to be read together as reflecting God’s revelation through Christ, rather than one gospel being examined in isolation from the others:

There is a danger in entering thus critically and closely on the structure of each of the Gospels; lest in examinations of the composition and nature of each particular part we lose the more general view, a sense of harmonious proportion and majesty, as a whole, of those four pillars upon which the Temple of God is constructed.³¹

This underlines Williams’ rejection of biblical criticism which had begun to view the gospels as human writings.³² For Williams it was essential that the evangelists should be viewed as “instruments in the hand of God” rather than as authors in their own right. The result of biblical criticism, in his view, was to undermine the authority and sanctity of scripture.³³

In Williams’ view the different portrayals of Jesus provided in each of the gospels was underlined by the vision of the four living creatures of Ezekiel 1:4-14, 10:1-17 and Revelation 4:6-8, each of which had the face of a lion, a human, an ox and an eagle. Since Williams believed that a consensus of the church fathers including

²⁹ Ibid., 2

³⁰ Ibid., 59

³¹ Ibid., 91

³² Grant R.M. and Tracy D., *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (London, 1984), 110 ff.

³³ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 415

Augustine, Irenæus, Victorinus, Athanasius, Ambrose, Jerome and Gregory the Great, held that the different faces of these creatures represented the four evangelists,³⁴ he held that the vision, interpreted spiritually, could be seen as pointing to God's revelation of himself through the gospel. Thus the whirlwind and fire of Ezekiel 1:4 could be seen to suggest the divine presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.³⁵ The fact that the creatures possessed human characteristics (cf. Ezekiel 1:5) pointed to the mystery of the incarnation, while the human hands which were covered in wings (cf. Ezekiel 1:8) suggested that the evangelists were but the human vehicles of divine revelation in writing the gospels.³⁶

The different faces of each of the four creatures pointed to the specific differences between the four gospel narratives. The face of the lion for Williams pointed to Matthew the evangelist. The lion possessed regal significance since the gospel according to Matthew was particularly concerned with the kingdom of Christ.³⁷ Williams believed that Matthew's emphasis on the kingdom was underlined by his portrayal of Jesus' genealogy which traced his ancestry back to Abraham via King David and made special mention of the kings of Israel.³⁸ The birth narrative contained in the gospel also reflected the regal theme in its emphasis on the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus and on the fact that, as king of the Jews, Herod feared that Jesus posed a threat to his authority.³⁹ Jesus' method of teaching and of denouncing the Scribes and Pharisees towards the end of the gospel also reflected his kingly authority.⁴⁰

According to Williams the face of the man suggested Mark the evangelist. He believed that Mark's gospel narrative was more concerned than any of the others with providing a vivid portrayal of the humanity of Jesus. In contrast to later biblical criticism which came to the conclusion that Mark was the first of the evangelists to write his gospel account and that Matthew and Luke subsequently built upon it,⁴¹ Williams believed that Mark wrote an abbreviated gospel based on the narratives of

³⁴ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 5; Cf. Augustine, *The Harmony of the Gospels*, book 1, chapter 4 in Schaff P., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (volume 6, series 1) (Edinburgh, 1996), 80-1

³⁵ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 13

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 26-7

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 27

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 27-8

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 31-2

⁴¹ Mc Grath A., *N.I.V. Bible Commentary* (London, 1996 edition), 233

Matthew and Luke. Believing Mark to have been closely associated with Peter, Williams claimed that he supplemented Matthew and Luke's accounts with Peter's eye-witness testimony.⁴² Mark's narrative was made more vivid by its inclusion of this testimony provided by Peter and this gave it a stronger emphasis on Jesus' human nature.⁴³ This was reflected in Mark's frequent emphasis on Jesus 'looking' at his disciples and others and on his expression of various emotions such as anger, sympathy and love.⁴⁴ Williams noted that Mark's gospel narrative also contains a number of specific points which at first appear insignificant but which suggest that the evidence of an eye-witness lay behind the gospel. For example, Mark's mention of specific times on which events occurred (e.g. Mark 4:35) and that Jesus laid his hands on only a 'few' sick people (Mark 6:5).⁴⁵

Williams claimed to follow the patristic writers in seeing the ox's face as representing Luke. He believed that the ox, with its connotations of sacrificial worship, represented the third evangelist whose gospel account was primarily sacerdotal in character.⁴⁶ This theme is evident from the opening of the gospel which begins by referring to the priest Zechariah, and also in Luke's emphasis on Jesus' presentation in the Temple.⁴⁷ Luke's narrative was particularly concerned with Jesus' mercy for the penitent sinner, which was inextricably linked to his atoning death on the cross. Thus Luke's portrayal of Jesus in priestly terms and his emphasis on his love for the sinner were directly connected.⁴⁸ Luke's emphasis on Jesus' mercy and compassion for the sinner was emphasised, for example, in the parables of the prodigal son, the lost sheep, the good Samaritan, the conversion of Zaccheus⁴⁹ as well as in his portrayal of Jesus' ministry not just to the Jewish people but also to the gentiles.⁵⁰ This theme of universality led Williams to suggest that the gospel may have been derived from the testimony of St. Paul, who had been responsible for preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:1-10).⁵¹ Despite Luke's emphasis on Jesus' mercy and forgiveness, Williams noted that his narrative also contains a note of

⁴² Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 36-7

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 51

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 40-2

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 45-6

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 59

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 61-3

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 60

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 65

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 69-70

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 72

spiritual urgency since, in order to receive forgiveness, the sinner must turn to God in penitence and humility.⁵²

The fourth gospel was symbolised by the face of the eagle. Williams believed that the eagle could be seen as representing John the evangelist's faith in the divinity of Christ which was the central theme of the fourth gospel, since "the mere natural motion of this bird high on the wing, as poised in mid air, does of itself afford a lively emblem or picture of faith, of faith supporting itself under a sense of our Lord's Divinity".⁵³ At the same time the eagle could be seen as alluding to the character of Jesus as portrayed in the gospel, since the role of the incarnate Word was to restore fallen humanity to its divine status:

. . . this figure of the eagle . . . may apply to our Lord Himself as revealed in this Gospel, - that He is therein bearing His people as it were on eagle's wings, and bringing them unto Himself; disclosing Himself therein as the Son of God, in whom alone we have access to the Father; lifting us aloft, as the eagle does her young, till in the sense of His Divine power we are able to sustain ourselves towards Heaven, and above terrestrial cares.⁵⁴

Williams noted that the fourth evangelist emphasised the divinity of Jesus through the record of his discourses and miracles, which highlighted in particular the importance of the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist,⁵⁵ and also in the narrative sections of the gospel. The introduction to Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet at the Last Supper (John 13:1 ff.), for example, emphasises the fact that he had come from, and was to return to, God the Father.⁵⁶ According to Williams the theological emphasis of the fourth gospel set it apart from the three synoptic gospels.⁵⁷

Williams' *Devotional Commentary* reflects his emphasis on the spiritual interpretation of the Bible. While he upheld the literal truth of scripture believing in its "Divine authority . . . even down to the very word and letter of it, as deeply and closely true",⁵⁸ he also claimed that a higher, spiritual sense always lay beyond the letter of scripture and could only be discerned by those who possessed the gift of faith.⁵⁹ Williams claimed that this method of interpreting the Bible had always been

⁵² Ibid., 71

⁵³ Ibid., 80

⁵⁴ Ibid., 81

⁵⁵ Ibid. 82-5

⁵⁶ Ibid., 85-6

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 153

⁵⁹ Ibid., 150

upheld in the traditions of the church and was typical of the approach of the church fathers.⁶⁰

In his gospel commentaries Williams intended to demonstrate that the interpretation of scripture in terms of both its literal and spiritual sense was justified not just on the basis of the practice of the church fathers, but also because Jesus had himself made use of such a method in his interpretation of the scriptures. Williams pointed out that, while Jesus had interpreted the Jewish scriptures in a spiritual sense, his disagreement with the Scribes and the Pharisees arose from the fact that they sought to interpret it literally and could not see beyond the letter of scripture.⁶¹ Williams realised that many would reject this spiritual interpretation of scripture as undermining its literal truth by requiring “too much to be granted by faith”.⁶² He claimed that this was far from the case, however, and rejected the Evangelical approach to scripture which “with a scrupulous and religious jealousy would contend, that we should consider nothing as binding on the conscience, unless it can be supported by express warranty in the very words of Holy Scripture”.⁶³ Such a method of interpretation tended to focus on individual verses and parts of scripture in an isolated way, while the spiritual approach tended to view the Bible more holistically as reflecting divine revelation in its entirety.⁶⁴ This led Williams to claim that it was wrong to appeal to the literal sense of particular passages of scripture in order to justify specific Christian beliefs since these doctrines were composed by the church as a result of reflection on the spiritual meaning of scripture:

. . . they who expect warrant in the words of Scripture, as respecting the doctrine of the Trinity and the like, will find nothing of this kind promised in our Lord’s teaching; but on the contrary, dark insinuations thrown out, which He, by-and-by, in His Church . . . will solve to those who will obey Him, and to them alone.⁶⁵

The teaching of scripture, correctly interpreted, like that of Christ himself, was inextricably linked to the principle of reserve, since doctrines were not taught

⁶⁰ Ibid., 150; Origen, *On First Principles*, book 4, chapter 2, in Butterworth (ed.), *Origen on First Principles*, 269-77; Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, book 2, chapters 6, 9, 10 in Schaff, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (v. 2, series 1), 537-9; Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 44-8, 89-90, 103-8

⁶¹ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 149; cf. Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 6), 181-4

⁶² Ibid., 148

⁶³ Ibid., 150

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 162

explicitly but were veiled beneath its spiritual meaning.⁶⁶ In his unpublished “Lectures on Types and Prophecies of the Old Testament”, E.B. Pusey was also critical of the Evangelical emphasis on the literal interpretation of scripture which he believed ignored its spiritual meaning. Pusey named the Evangelicals “pseudo-spiritualists”, claiming that they attempted to view the archetypes of the New Testament without recognising the value of their types in the Old Testament.⁶⁷ Like Williams, Pusey taught that scripture could only be properly interpreted when it was read on both a literal and a spiritual level.⁶⁸

In his gospel commentary Isaac Williams reflected upon a number of occasions in the gospels where Jesus applied the law of spiritual interpretation to the letter of the Old Testament. In Matthew 22:32, for example, he interpreted Exodus 3:6, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” as teaching the doctrine of eternal life after death, since,

when these expressions, of Divine approbation and care, were used with respect to those who were out of human sight, to anything like an affectionate confidence in God it would have appeared almost impious to suppose, that such objects of God’s love could have ceased to exist; had lost their life and all, when God, in Whom there is life and no death, still spoke of them as of those who had obtained his particular favour.⁶⁹

Williams also pointed out that, in Matthew 22:41-5, Jesus interpreted Psalm 110:1 as referring to himself as the Son of David and as confirming his divine status.⁷⁰ In John 8:17-18 Jesus also presented the emphasis on the legal requirement of the evidence of two witnesses under the Jewish Law as pointing to “the twofold witness of the Father and the Son, before the Holy Ghost was yet given, Who was the third witness”.⁷¹

Jesus also interpreted the Old Testament scriptures spiritually by teaching that the fulfilment of the cultic law and the offering of sacrifices was less important than showing love and compassion for others (cf. Matthew 9:13; 12:7).⁷² This attitude had already been prefigured in the teaching of the Prophets and in the Psalms (cf. Amos

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Jasper, “Pusey’s ‘Lectures on Types and Prophecies of the Old Testament’”, 23

⁶⁸ Pusey, “Lectures on Types and Prophecies”, 23

⁶⁹ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 157-8; cf. Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 6), 190-1

⁷⁰ Ibid., 158-62; cf. Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 6), 206-11

⁷¹ Ibid., 163

⁷² Cf. Williams I., *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative: Our Lord’s Ministry (the Second Year)* (volume 4) (London, 1877 edition), 178-9; Williams I., *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative: Our Lord’s Ministry (the Third Year)* (volume 5) (London, 1878 edition), 7

5:21-4; Psalm 50) and was highlighted by Jesus' claim that the Old Testament law ultimately pointed beyond itself to the greater importance of love and charity:

. . . the end and object of all Scripture is to bring us to the knowledge of God; and God is love; so far therefore as it fails to bring us to this knowledge, it fails of its purpose, and is not rightly understood . . . So far, therefore, as any one has come to the knowledge of God, he will see that this law of mercy pervades, is throughout interwoven with, and is the very foundation of all the written law.⁷³

Jesus' emphasis on the written law being fulfilled in the law of love was illustrated in particular by the healing miracles which he carried out on the Sabbath. That he intended these miracles to be seen as demonstrating the written law's inferiority to the law of love is highlighted, in Williams' view, by the fact that he went out of his way to carry out such miracles openly.⁷⁴ Moreover, according to John 5:8, Jesus commanded the blind man whom he had healed on the Sabbath to carry his bed. This was a direct contravention of Nehemiah 13:19 and Jeremiah 17:21.⁷⁵ Such an obvious breaking of the Sabbath law by Jesus was intended to teach that he was in fact fulfilling the law "in the higher and diviner sense and reality"⁷⁶ even though he was departing from its literal sense. Moreover, Jesus was trying to demonstrate that he was in fact to usher in the 'true Sabbath' of rest for God's people through his redemption of the world:

Thus throughout the Old Testament this true Sabbath was foretold and signified by the Jewish Sabbath yielding to works of mercy . . . The substance was now come, the true Sabbath, He in Whom man might find rest for his soul. He Who was now present, as the Son of Man, had power to dispense with, remodel, or mould to His great purposes all the ceremonial institutions, which did but wait on Him as the Son of Man, in Whom and in Whose kingdom they had their true fulfilment; for the Sabbath was made for man: it waited on the Son of Man. Thus the Law and the Prophets, if rightly understood, did but set forth Himself.⁷⁷

Williams' belief that the Old Testament law and the Sabbath were fulfilled in Christ arose from his belief that Christ was foreshadowed throughout the whole of the Old Testament so that "all scripture points to Christ and His day".⁷⁸ Whereas the Evangelicals tended to concentrate solely upon the fulfilment of individual Old

⁷³ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 170-1

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 172-3; cf. Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 4), 8-12, 31-8

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 174

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 177

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 178

Testament prophecies by Christ, Williams claimed that “prophecy pervaded, and was imperceptibly interwoven throughout the letter of the Old Testament”.⁷⁹ Thus, according to the spiritual approach to the Bible advocated by Williams, the Old Testament spoke of Christ in its entirety and could only be truly interpreted in the light of the New Testament.

The belief that the coming of Christ was foretold not just in specific passages but throughout the whole of the Old Testament was reflected in Pusey’s “Lectures on Types and Prophecies”, where he claimed that,

H[oly] S[cripture] does not favour our mechanical view of prophecy, as containing so many items, as it were, as there are striking passages; as though prophecies admitted of being counted up, and the entire evidence of prophecy was to be weighed according to the number + contents + tangibleness of these several predictions. Rather the whole previous dispensation of the O[ld] T[estament], its people, its individual characters, its rites, its sayings, its history was one vast prophetic system, veiling, but full of the N[ew] T[estament].⁸⁰

In the eighteenth century Thomas Wilson had also claimed that, when interpreted spiritually, the Old Testament in its entirety was to be seen as pointing to Christ:

The Law and the Prophets give witness unto Jesus Christ, and scarce speak but of Him. In the prophetic and figurative parts of Scripture, we see nothing worthy of God, unless we consider them with Christ, and behold Him represented in those types and shadows.⁸¹

A similar view was also taken by William Jones of Nayland who claimed that throughout the Bible there was a “chain of prophecy” by which the events and characters of the Old Testament pointed to the coming of Christ.⁸²

It is interesting to note that Williams claimed that the only exception to Jesus’ spiritual approach to the Old Testament is to be found during his temptation in the wilderness by Satan (cf. Matthew 4:1-11) where he applied the teaching of scripture literally in opposition to the devil.⁸³ Such a literal approach was appropriate in Jesus’ conflict with Satan, Williams claimed, because the mystical meaning of scripture

⁷⁸ Ibid., 190

⁷⁹ Ibid., 189

⁸⁰ Pusey, “Lectures on Types and Prophecies”, 7-8

⁸¹ Wilson T., *Notes on the Holy Scriptures*, Keble J. (editor), *The Works of the Right Reverend Father in God, Thomas Wilson, D.D.* (volume 6) (Oxford, 1859), 3

⁸² Jones W., *A Course of Lectures on the Figurative Language of Holy Scripture*, Stevens W. (editor), *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of the Rev. William Jones* (volume 3) (London, 1810), 119-20

⁸³ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 197; cf. Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 3), 242-65

could only be discerned by those who possessed a right state of heart, since “the letter of Scripture is for the disobedient”.⁸⁴ This belief that a true interpretation of scripture was directly related to the individual’s moral state parallels Williams’ argument in *Tracts 80* and *87*, and highlights his belief that the principle of reserve was to be found throughout scripture:

. . . this subject of Scriptural exposition is an awful and mysterious one; that the saving knowledge of Scripture can only be learnt by a good life; that . . . this mode of interpretation is the true one; that the teaching of the Spirit alone can unfold the words of the Spirit.⁸⁵

Williams believed that the Bible could not be truly interpreted by the mind alone, but only by the heart led by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the author of scripture, to interpret divine teaching in the sacred text.⁸⁶ This point was also made by John Keble in *Tract 89* where he pointed out that the types and figures alluded to throughout the Old Testament could be properly interpreted only by those who possessed the right moral and spiritual state of heart.⁸⁷

Williams’ emphasis on the spiritual interpretation of scripture is also reflected in his approach to Jesus’ miracles. Although he always dealt with these as historical events which were literally true, he also claimed that they possessed a deeper, mystical significance. For example, he believed that the healing of the centurion’s servant in Luke 7:1-10 could be seen as pointing to Christ’s ability to heal the soul which was defaced by sin,⁸⁸ and that the resurrection of the widow of Nain’s son (Luke 7:11-7) emphasised the importance of dying to sin in order to rise to a new Christian life.⁸⁹ Jesus’ walking upon the sea of Galilee in Mark 6:45-52 suggested his concern for human difficulty and distress,⁹⁰ while his retiring to the mountain to pray immediately afterwards pointed to his intercession for the church during times of difficulty.⁹¹ A similar approach to Jesus’ miracles was also taken by Jones of Nayland. Like Williams, he accepted the miracles recorded in the gospel narratives as historic events, while claiming that they also possessed a deeper, spiritual meaning so

⁸⁴ Ibid., 198

⁸⁵ Ibid., 198

⁸⁶ Ibid., 198-9

⁸⁷ Keble, “On Mysticism (no. 89)”, 13

⁸⁸ Williams I., *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 4), 94

⁸⁹ Ibid., 102-3

⁹⁰ Ibid., 372

⁹¹ Ibid., 373

that they were “descriptive of something beyond themselves”.⁹² He claimed, for example, that all of Jesus’ physical healings pointed to his role as the saviour of souls.⁹³ Jesus’ feeding of the multitudes (cf. Luke 9:12-7) pointed to his feeding of mankind spiritually with his teaching and with his body and blood in the eucharist,⁹⁴ his raising of the dead (cf. Luke 7:11-7; John 11:1-43) to his ability to resurrect the dead in sin,⁹⁵ and his stilling of the storm (cf. Mark 4: 35-41) to his defence of the church against the opposition of the world.⁹⁶

2.The Beginning of the Book of Genesis with Notes and Reflections

Isaac Williams’ commentary on the first four chapters of the book of Genesis underlines a number of points which he had made about the interpretation of scripture in his gospel commentaries. *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis* was the result of many years of thought and was drawn from various sermons and essays which he had written. Williams pointed out that, like his other scriptural commentaries, the work was firmly based on the writings of the church fathers.⁹⁷ In an undated letter, probably written some time after 1848, Williams sought Pusey’s advice about his commentary and asked him to recommend books which might help with the work. A list of books which Williams claimed to have read on the subject reflects his dependence on patristic sources including Origen, Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory, Basil, Clement and Athanasius.⁹⁸

Williams’ commentary on the book of Genesis also has much in common with Augustine’s *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* and may have been influenced by it. Whereas in his earliest commentary on Genesis Augustine had suggested that the creation narrative could be read solely in allegorical terms,⁹⁹ this work aimed to interpret the biblical account of creation both historically and allegorically.¹⁰⁰ The first three chapters of Genesis were not presented in purely figurative terms but as an historic account of the creation of the world.¹⁰¹ Since the creation was ultimately a

⁹² Jones, *A Course of Lectures on the Figurative Language of Holy Scripture*, 149

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 150

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 154

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 155

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 163

⁹⁷ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, v

⁹⁸ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (no date), P.H. M.S. (L.B.V., no. 12)

⁹⁹ Fiedroicz M., “*On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees*, Introduction”, Augustine (edited by Rotelle), *On Genesis*, 28-31

¹⁰⁰ Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 103-5

¹⁰¹ Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 8:1-2, in Augustine, *On Genesis*, Rotelle (ed.), 346-7

mystery which could not be expressed in human language, Augustine believed that Genesis 1:1-2:4 was to be read figuratively even though the events it described were to be understood as being literally true.¹⁰² For example, Augustine saw the ‘days’ of creation as referring not to set periods of time but to categories according to which specific things were simultaneously created.¹⁰³ At the same time he interpreted the account of the creation and fall of humanity in Genesis 2:4ff. as being literally true in a historical sense. While he believed that Genesis 1:1-2:4a and 2:4b-25 formed one account of the creation, Augustine claimed that the second part of the narrative focussed specifically on the creation of humanity mentioned in Genesis 1:26.¹⁰⁴ Augustine’s emphasis on the literal and figurative interpretation of Genesis 1-2 can be seen as a middle-way between the approaches of the Alexandrian and Antiochene patristic writers.¹⁰⁵ As we shall see, Williams’ commentary on Genesis had much in common with his approach.

Isaac Williams began his commentary by emphasising the fact that scripture contains God’s revelation of himself and cannot be truly interpreted by the human intellect alone, a point which was also made by Origen, as well as by Pusey and Thomas Wilson.¹⁰⁶ At the beginning of his work Williams pointed out that, throughout scripture, revelation and mystery are always inextricably linked since “whatever [God] is pleased to let us know, suggests to us in connexion with it many things that we know not”.¹⁰⁷ Thus he believed that humility ought always to accompany the power of the human mind as it attempts to grapple with God’s revelation of himself in scripture.

As in his gospel commentaries, Williams emphasised the importance of the spiritual interpretation of scripture in his commentary on the book of Genesis.¹⁰⁸ Like the patristic writers, Williams believed that the account of creation and the Old Testament in its entirety, when interpreted spiritually, could be seen as pointing to

¹⁰² Fiedroicz, M., “*The Literal Meaning of Genesis: Introduction*”, 159-60; Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 5:16, 34, in Augustine, *On Genesis*, Rotelle (ed.), 284, 292-3

¹⁰³ Fiedroicz, “*The Literal Meaning of Genesis: Introduction*”, 159

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 163-4

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 165

¹⁰⁶ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 3-5; Origen, *On First Principles*, chapter 2:7-8, Greer, *Origen*, 185-7; Jasper, “Pusey’s ‘Lectures on Types and Prophecies of the Old Testament’”, 61-2 quoting Pusey, “Lectures on Types and Prophecies”, 45; Wilson, *Notes on the Holy Scriptures*, 1

¹⁰⁷ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 1

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 8

Christ.¹⁰⁹ In his view such a Christological interpretation required the guidance of the Holy Spirit but also required an element of effort in attempting to perceive a deeper level of meaning beyond the letter of scripture. He believed that this was the spiritual equivalent of man after the fall having to labour in order to extract his food from the earth (cf. Genesis 3:18-9).¹¹⁰ According to this analogy the earth yielding thorns and thistles can be seen as alluding to the literal meaning of scripture which when human effort (spiritual perseverance by the guidance of the Holy Spirit) is exerted upon it produces food (the spiritual meaning of scripture). He also compared the literal and spiritual interpretation of scripture to a succulent fruit (the spiritual meaning) encased in a hard shell (the letter of scripture).¹¹¹

Williams' emphasis on the spiritual interpretation of the Bible led him to perceive many Christological references in the first four chapters of the book of Genesis. The Holy Spirit 'brooding' over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2) for example was to be seen as prefiguring the Baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan (cf. Matthew 3:16-7) and God's redemption of humanity.¹¹² The act of creation as a whole, in Williams' view, prefigured God's redemption of humanity in the death and resurrection of Jesus since, "the first creation was marred that [God] might create it again. All broken and marred by man, all recreated and renewed of God, that man might have hope".¹¹³

In line with patristic exegesis,¹¹⁴ Williams claimed that Jesus had been present at the creation and that that the first chapter of Genesis presented God the Father as conversing with the Son. Thus the creation narrative highlighted "the ineffable mystery of the Three Persons in One God, dwelling in love and union inconceivable

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 16-7; Cf. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, 41-7 in Schaff P. and Wace H. (editors), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (volume 4, series 2) (Edinburgh, 1991), 26-30; Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, 33-8, Schaff and Wace (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (v. 4, series 2), 54-7; Ambrose, *On the Christian Faith*, book 1, chapters 3, 7, 8, 15 in Schaff P. and Wace H. (editors), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (volume 10, Series 2) (Edinburgh, 1997), 204-5, 208-10, 217; Wilken R.L., "Cyril of Alexandria as Interpreter of the Old Testament", Weinandy T.G. and Keating D.A. (editors), *The Theology of Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation* (London, 2003), 21 and passim

¹¹⁰ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 9

¹¹¹ Ibid., 8

¹¹² Ibid., 55

¹¹³ Ibid., 59

¹¹⁴ Cf. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, 3, Schaff and Wace (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (v. 4, series 2), 37-8; Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 1:12-14, in Augustine, *On Genesis*, Rotelle (ed.), 173-4

from everlasting, before the worlds were made".¹¹⁵ He also believed, like Augustine,¹¹⁶ that the mystery of the Trinity was alluded to before the creation of humanity in Genesis 1:26 where God said "Let *us* make humankind in our image" (N.R.S.V.). Williams interpreted the use of the second person plural here as presenting the three persons of the Godhead in consultation with each other. This suggested that the apex of creation had been reached since "an intellectual and moral being, which is beyond that of all material worlds" was about to be created.¹¹⁷ It also prefigured the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus in the New Testament, two occasions which had special significance for the redemption of humanity and in which the three persons of the Trinity all appeared together (cf. Matthew 3:13ff. and 17:1-8).¹¹⁸

The creation of the light on the first day (Gen. 1:3), according to Williams, pointed to Christ, "the Light of the glory of God".¹¹⁹ Just as the light had been created before the sun, so Williams believed that Christ was truly present in the world even before the incarnation. This led him to restate the belief which he had expressed in *The Christian Scholar* that the light of Christian truth could be discerned in the religion of pre-Christian Greece, Rome and Babylon.¹²⁰ Williams claimed that the sun, which remained the same despite all the changes of the natural world, was a symbol of Christ "Who is the same yesterday, and to-day and forever".¹²¹ The division between light and darkness (Gen. 1:4) pointed to the final separation between good and evil at the Last Judgment.¹²² God's creation of air on the second day (Gen. 1:6) was seen by Williams as referring to the Holy Spirit. Just as no physical life could exist without air, so there could be no spiritual existence without the gift of God's Spirit.¹²³ At the same time the sky is seen as alluding spiritually to the kingdom of Heaven since, "in sunrises and sunsets of every hue and form, and in the blue and white expanse of mid-day; yet it ever speaks of one place of light. It is the one stable Heaven, the mansion spread out before all, inviting all".¹²⁴

¹¹⁵ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 67

¹¹⁶ Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 3:29 in Augustine, *On Genesis*, Rotelle (ed.), 233-4

¹¹⁷ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 159

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 160

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 79

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 79-81; cf. Williams, *The Christian Scholar*, xiii-xxviii

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 138

¹²² *Ibid.*, 90-1

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 98

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 101

It could be argued that Williams' emphasis on the sun as representing Christ and the air the Holy Spirit presents a theological difficulty. Since the sun and the air are created elements, this argument, if pushed to its logical conclusion, could be seen to suggest that the Son and the Holy Spirit were created by the first person of the Trinity which was the heresy of Arius.¹²⁵ This would seem to be reading too much into Williams' comparisons, however. His references to the sun and the air are merely allusions by which the creation narrative can be understood in a Christological sense. Elsewhere he makes it clear that the Son is not a created being but is actively involved in the creation of the world.¹²⁶ What this point does suggest, however, is that Williams may have sometimes have lacked critical judgment in his tendency to quote from patristic sources and that he did not always consider fully the theological implications of the material to which he referred.

In accordance with his commentary on the gospels Williams claimed that the Sabbath day of rest prefigured Christ, an allusion which was also drawn out by Augustine.¹²⁷ Not only did God's rest on the seventh day point to the death of Jesus and his lying in the tomb,¹²⁸ but it highlighted the fact that humanity could ultimately find rest and fulfilment not in any created thing but in God alone.¹²⁹ The Sabbath law pointed to the hope of this rest and fulfilment in heaven,¹³⁰ and was fulfilled by Christ who,

brought us back to that sanctification of God which consisted not in rest, but in having that rest in the work of God; that true rest which is found not in cessation, but in love:- in love which never rests, yet in some sense is always at rest, finding rest in the object which it loves.¹³¹

Like Augustine, Williams believed that the Sabbath day of rest suggested that humanity's ultimate good was to be found in God and that human beings could find rest only in him.¹³²

Williams believed that it was as a result of God's entering into covenant with humanity at the establishment of the Sabbath that Genesis 2:4-25 referred to God as

¹²⁵ Cf. Hinson E.G., *The Early Church: Origins to the Dawn of the Middle Ages* (Nashville, 1996), 231-2 and ff.

¹²⁶ Cf. Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 20

¹²⁷ Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 4:21, in Augustine, *On Genesis*, Rotelle (ed.), 252-3

¹²⁸ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 196

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 197-8

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 200

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 203

¹³² *Ibid.*, 196-8; Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 4:27-30, in Augustine, *On Genesis*, Rotelle (ed.), 257-8

Yahweh (יהוה) and not as Elohim (אֱלֹהִים) as in Genesis 1. This stands in contrast to the now generally accepted view that the change of the divine name suggests that the two chapters form two different creation accounts which derive from separate sources.¹³³ Williams believed that, after God's having entered into a covenant with his people by creating man, the divine name יהוה ('I AM') pointed to the hypostatic union between the Father and the Son (cf. John 8:58) and prefigured the incarnation, pointing to the hope of Sabbath rest in Christ.¹³⁴

Williams also understood the creation of Adam and Eve in Christological terms. God's breathing of 'the breath of life' into Adam newly formed from the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7) was seen as pointing to Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit to the apostles (cf. John 20:22).¹³⁵ Like Augustine in his first commentary on Genesis,¹³⁶ Williams saw the relationship between Adam and Eve as paralleling that of Christ and the church. The creation of Eve from one of Adam's ribs was seen as speaking of Christ, "Who was wounded for us that we might have our being from Him; Who became weak that we in His strength might be strong".¹³⁷ The fact that Eve was created from Adam's side was seen by Williams as prefiguring the church which, metaphorically speaking, was born from the sacraments, represented by the blood and water which gushed forth from the wounded side of the crucified Christ.¹³⁸

The numerous references to the New Testament throughout Williams' commentary highlight his belief that, beneath the letter, scripture always pointed spiritually to Christ who was truly present throughout the whole of the Old Testament. This led Williams to claim that Christ's presence was to be discerned in the account of creation just as it was in the gospels, since,¹³⁹

[t]he covenant of Redemption is written up in large characters on the living theatre of the universe as it came from the hands of God; and the works of creation are but the preparations for the second Adam, in Whom and for Whom they were made.¹⁴⁰

¹³³ Brueggemann W., *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, 2003), 30, 34-9

¹³⁴ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 218-9

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 231

¹³⁶ Augustine, *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees*, 2:37, in Augustine, *On Genesis*, Rotelle (ed.), 96-7

¹³⁷ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 266

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 268

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 20

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 195

This is reminiscent of Athanasius' emphasis on the inextricable link between the creation and the incarnation in his *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*.¹⁴¹ The belief that Christological significance underlay the Old Testament was also reflected in John Keble's essay on "The Jewish Nation and God's Dealings with them" and in his *Tract* 89 where he claimed that, throughout the Old Testament, references to Christ were to be found "in innumerable places, which are neither express prophecies, nor alluded to as types in the New".¹⁴²

Despite Williams' emphasis on the spiritual interpretation of the first four chapters of Genesis he did not reject the importance of their literal truth and also emphasised the danger of going beyond, or falling below, the letter of scripture.¹⁴³ In his emphasis on the importance of the literal truth of the Bible, Williams was at one many of the early church fathers like Irenaeus who, according to Manilo Simonetti, were reticent to claim that the first three chapters of Genesis, even when read allegorically, were not also historically true.¹⁴⁴ The literal truth of the Genesis creation narrative was also emphasised by Daniel Waterland, William Van Mildert and Pusey.¹⁴⁵

In his commentary Williams claimed that the reference to specific rivers and the countries through which they flowed in Genesis 2:10-4, emphasised the literal truth of the creation account and the fact that the garden of Eden must have been a physical place.¹⁴⁶ Whereas biblical criticism during the nineteenth century claimed that the books of the Pentateuch were not written by Moses but derived from four different sources composed at different times,¹⁴⁷ Williams accepted the tradition which held that Moses personally composed each of the first five books of the Bible. He believed that Moses had received a personal revelation from God of things that were to be fully revealed after the coming of Christ, whether or not he was personally

¹⁴¹ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, 4, 5, in Schaff and Wace, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (v, 4, series 2), 38-9

¹⁴² Keble J., "The Jewish Nation and God's Dealings with them", *Occasional Papers and Reviews* (London and Oxford, 1877), 475-7; Keble, "On Mysticism (no. 89)", 14-5

¹⁴³ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 298-9

¹⁴⁴ Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 25-6

¹⁴⁵ Waterland D., *Scripture Vindicated, in answer to a book entitled, Christianity as Old as the Creation*, Van Mildert W. (editor), *The Works of the Rev. Daniel Waterland D.D.* (volume 6) (Oxford, 1823), 15; Van Mildert W., *An Enquiry into the General Principles of Scripture Interpretation in Eight Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford in the Year MDCCCXIV* (Oxford, 1831), 201-2; Jasper, "Pusey's 'Lectures on Types and Prophecies of the Old Testament'", 61-2 quoting Pusey, "Lectures on Types and Prophecies", 45

¹⁴⁶ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 242-3

¹⁴⁷ Gooder P., *The Pentateuch: A Story of Beginnings* (London, 2000), 11-8, 26-8

aware of the future significance of his writings.¹⁴⁸ Williams also treated characters like Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel as historical individuals, accepting it as literally true that many of the Old Testament figures enjoyed an abnormally long life-span.¹⁴⁹ His rejection of biblical criticism is also underlined by his belief that the account of the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:4-25 was not a different creation narrative from the seven day account of Genesis 1 – 2:4, as the biblical critics claimed, but was rather a ‘recapitulation’ of the seven day account, and that the “two chapters are so interwoven that they cannot be separated”.¹⁵⁰

It was Williams’ emphasis on the historical truth of the creation narrative which led him to attempt to reconcile the first chapter of Genesis with a scientific explanation of how the world was created, an issue which Augustine also attempted to deal with in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*.¹⁵¹ Isaac Williams’ concern with scientific explanation may have arisen from the fact that Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* had been published in 1859. Since his undergraduate days Williams had possessed a keen interest in geology and he appears to have given some thought to scientific theories concerning the creation of the world. This is reflected in his *Ars Geologica* where he presented the physical structure of the earth as pointing to God the creator.¹⁵² Williams’ interest in geology, which was also held by prominent pre-Tractarian High Churchmen including John Hutchinson, Jones of Nayland and William Van Mildert,¹⁵³ remained with him throughout his life and found emphasis in his commentary on Genesis where he claimed that God’s creation of the world from a ‘formless void’ referred to a point before the earth’s crust had been created,

when the expressive fires of the central earth with volcanic agency upheaved into high mountains the shelly bottom of the dark abyss of waters; or fused and liquefied those vast layers of stone with which the strong foundations of the earth are made; when lightnings and subterranean fires and dark waters contended together. Then out of that confusion order came forth; a succession of regulated nights and days; out of desolation a peopled world; out of darkness issued light; out of ruin the new world we behold.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁸ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 21-5

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 447

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 195

¹⁵¹ Fiedrowicz, “*The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Introduction”, 156-7

¹⁵² Williams, *Thoughts in Past Years* (1838 edition), 397

¹⁵³ Varley, *The Last of the Prince Bishops*, 15-6

¹⁵⁴ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 53-4

Williams also believed that geological evidence which had discovered different types of creatures in different levels of rocks agreed with the order of creation according to Genesis 1:

It has been said that the testimony of the different strata of the earth has been found by geologists to correspond with the order of creation; the older and lowest containing no remains of organic life; while the other strata in succession are according to these periods of their formation; the first having the vegetable world only; then the aquatic and winged creatures; and lastly, the animal remains; while man is not found at all in the fossil state.¹⁵⁵

The belief that scientific discovery could be reconciled with the seven day creation account of Genesis 1 reflects the influence of the nineteenth century geologist William Buckland (1784-1856). As a reader in Mineralogy at Oxford Buckland's inaugural lecture *Vindiciae Geologicae* had claimed that the historical truth of the Bible was confirmed by geological findings. His lectures were attended by a number of prominent Tractarians,¹⁵⁶ almost certainly including Isaac Williams. That such a view of the historical truth of the book of Genesis was widely accepted in Williams' day is reflected by a letter from the High Churchman Thomas Bowdler claiming that he was "given to understand that it is agreed by all parties that the opinions of geologists are perfectly reconcilable to what Moses has delivered".¹⁵⁷

Williams' attempt to question the timing of the creation narrative also suggests that he viewed it in historical terms. He pointed out, as Buckland had done in his *Geology and Minerology considered with Reference to Natural Theology*, that each 'day' in Genesis 1 could be seen as referring either to a period of twenty-four hours or to any indefinite span of time, even covering thousands of years.¹⁵⁸ When viewed in this sense it appeared more feasible to reconcile the creation account with scientific discovery.¹⁵⁹ Williams' reticence to question the truth of scripture is reflected, however, in his claim that it is best to accept the term as referring to a day in the literal sense.¹⁶⁰ This led him to suggest that the pre-historic creatures which geologists believed to have predated the creation of the world, according to the timing of scripture, must have lived as part of the chaos which existed before the creation (cf.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 146

¹⁵⁶ Haile N., "Buckland, Williams (1784-1856)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (v. 8), 519; O'Leary D., *Roman Catholicism and Modern Science: A History* (London, 2007), 10-11

¹⁵⁷ Bowdler T., to Williams I., (1 November 1853), L.P.L. M.S. 4473, ff. 27-9

¹⁵⁸ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*; cf. O'Leary, *Roman Catholicism and Modern Science*, 10

¹⁵⁹ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 212

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 213

Gen 1:2), and that it was not impossible for a seven-day creation to be reconciled with the discoveries of science.¹⁶¹ Williams' claim that each 'day' of Genesis 1 ought to be understood as a period of twenty-four hours was a more literalist understanding than that of Augustine who believed that the term 'day' was to be understood figuratively and that creation had occurred instantaneously.¹⁶²

The fact that Williams' commentary attempted to consider the question of whether the first Sabbath occurred before or after the fall of man also presupposes the literal truth of the creation narrative. He pointed out that, if the first Sabbath followed man's fall, then it marked "not so much the crowning close of the new creation" but rather one that had "been marred by the sin of man".¹⁶³ Such a difficulty would not have arisen had Williams accepted the theory of the biblical critics that the two creation accounts derive from different sources. Williams' attempt to uphold the literal truth of the biblical account of creation arose from his belief that an over-emphasis on scientific discovery brought with it a real danger "lest attempting to be wise beyond what is written, we fail of the due understanding of scripture".¹⁶⁴

It is interesting to note that, despite his belief in the historical truth of the Genesis creation account, Williams claimed to view scientific discovery in a positive light and did not argue that science and theology were mutually exclusive. On the contrary, he believed that they complemented each other as forms of revelation so that the discoveries of science could actually aid the interpretation of scripture. He pointed out, for example, that scientific experience of order and development in the natural world underlined the ordered nature of God's creation as taught in the book of Genesis.¹⁶⁵ Revelation through science was in some way comparable to God's revelation of himself through Christ:

. . . when Christ reveals Himself as the Son of Man in all lowliness, after a time He gradually withdraws the veil from the material heavens. By the means of scientific research, He bids the scale to fall from the eyes of the natural man, and he beholds the armies of God peopling the universal space with bright hosts of innumerable and immeasurable worlds.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 212

¹⁶² Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 4:51-2, in Augustine, *On Genesis*, Rotelle (ed.), 271-3

¹⁶³ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 377

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 147

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 12-3

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 15

Williams' emphasis on the 'veil' being withdrawn and the 'scale' falling from the eyes suggests that scientific discovery was closely connected to the principle of reserve. Just as those who possessed the necessary vision could perceive God's presence in nature, so the discoveries of science had enabled humanity to obtain knowledge of the created world beyond what the physical eye could see and thus helped to demonstrate "that there is a depth also as well as height in which the love of Christ surpasseth knowledge".¹⁶⁷ Since scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit who was present at the creation of the world, Williams claimed that God revealed himself through both science and scripture, and that

Holy Scripture may adopt and unite with science and experience to form one language of God; they may thus harmoniously combine, and so may form a three-fold cord not easily broken.¹⁶⁸

Williams followed Augustine in claiming that the Genesis creation account and scientific discovery could never contradict each other since it was not the purpose of scripture to provide a scientific explanation of how the world was made but rather to demonstrate that everything was created according to God's will and purpose.¹⁶⁹ Since science and scripture were both forms of divine revelation it was impossible that they could undermine each other and, if they did, then they only appeared to do so "on account of the infirmities and short-sightedness of men".¹⁷⁰ It is important to remember that Williams' reflection on the importance of scientific discovery for the Christian arose from his firm belief that God was the creator and upholder of the universe. Despite his emphasis on science he still believed that creation was utterly subject to the will and purpose of God.¹⁷¹

Williams' commentary underlines his emphasis on the spiritual interpretation of scripture through his attempt to read Christological significance into the first four chapters of the book of Genesis. In doing so he was following the tradition of patristic exegesis. From what has been said, however, it is clear that there was something of an ambivalence in how Williams viewed the connection between the spiritual and literal interpretations of scripture and how its literal interpretation could be reconciled with

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 15-6

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 15

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 131; Fiedrowicz, "On the Literal Meaning of Genesis, Introduction", 156-7; Augustine, *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 2:9, 20, 12:14, 30, in Augustine, *On Genesis*, Rotelle (ed.), 195-6, 201-2, 469-70, 479-80

¹⁷⁰ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 33

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 118

the scientific discoveries of the age. His emphasis in *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis* on the historic truth of the account of creation is difficult to reconcile with the claim which he made in his poetic work *The Seven Days*, published in 1850, that fewer difficulties would arise if the first chapter of Genesis was read “more as a divine language respecting the fall and regeneration of man” than as a factual account of creation.¹⁷² This can be seen as mirroring Augustine’s transition from an allegorical to a literal interpretation of Genesis.¹⁷³ It may be that Williams was more comfortable in holding a figurative view of the creation narrative in 1850 than in 1862 when, as a result of scientific discovery and biblical criticism, many had begun to question the historical truth of the creation narrative.¹⁷⁴

3. The Psalms Interpreted of Christ

Williams’ *The Psalms Interpreted of Christ* is a devotional commentary on the first twenty-six psalms together with a lengthy introduction in which he outlined his understanding of how they ought to be interpreted by the Christian.¹⁷⁵ Bearing in mind Williams’ own poetic mind it is not surprising that he had a great devotion for the Psalms and found them a source of great spiritual treasure.¹⁷⁶ In his review of Keble’s *The Psalter, or Psalms of David; in English Verse* he claimed that the Psalms were particularly sacred since they were God’s own poetry,

the poetry not of man, but of the Holy Spirit Himself; endowed with more than the power of human poetry, and the tone and character and sentiments of which cannot be other than hallowing and purifying, as being no less than living streams emanating from the very Fountain of holiness.¹⁷⁷

In this article Williams went on to claim that a devotion to the Psalms was something which had been upheld by the church fathers, including Jerome, Origen, Basil and Chrysostom, as well as by numerous High Church divines. He mentioned in particular Richard Hooker, William Laud, Anthony Sparrow, Henry Hammond, Jeremy Taylor, Nicholas Ferrar, George Herbert, Joseph Butler, William Beveridge and George Horne as having upheld the importance of the Psalms.¹⁷⁸ Williams also believed that

¹⁷² Williams, *The Seven Days*, 51

¹⁷³ Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 102-5

¹⁷⁴ Chadwick O., “Evolution and the Churches”, Russell C.A., *Science and Religious Belief: A Selection of Recent Historical Studies* (Suffolk, 1973), 283-4

¹⁷⁵ See Williams, *The Psalms Interpreted of Christ*, 1 - 71

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 27

¹⁷⁷ Williams, “*The Psalter, or Psalms of David; in English Verse*”, 5

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 19-20

the Psalms lent themselves particularly well to the principle of reserve since their true meaning was not initially obvious but had to be uncovered by a spiritual reading and interpretation of them. In his view this made them particularly appropriate for use in the church's liturgy:

The modern objection to the Psalms is, that they are not sufficiently explicit, which, in our opinion, contributes to their value for congregational worship, inasmuch as they have this peculiar property, not only to open and disclose, but also to withdraw and conceal the higher spiritual senses, according to the character of the persons who make use of them. For their very nature is . . . that they supply a language, imagery and sentiment, which applies to various states of Christian progress, and from this very circumstance they serve as a religious veil to withhold from some what they impart to others.¹⁷⁹

Isaac Williams' approach to the Psalms was reminiscent of his commentary on Genesis since his main purpose was to demonstrate that they pointed spiritually to Christ. While recognising that the patristic writers had made use of a broad spectrum of interpretation in reading the Psalms, seeing them as referring to the Christian soul and to the church, in order to restrict his commentary to a manageable size, Williams intended to deal only with the Christological interpretation of the Psalms.¹⁸⁰

From the outset of his commentary Williams made it clear that the interpretation of the Psalms as pointing to Christ was upheld by the New Testament. Apart from the fact that Jesus' disciples (and the devil during his temptation) saw them as speaking directly about him (e.g. John 2:17, Luke 4:10), Jesus himself claimed that they foretold his coming (e.g. Matthew 22:43-5, Luke 20:17).¹⁸¹ The fourth evangelist in particular emphasised the fact that Jesus had fulfilled the Psalms (e.g. John 13:18, 17:12, 15:25).¹⁸² Williams pointed out that there was nothing original about Jesus' interpretation of the Psalms as prefiguring himself since the Jews of his time had also seen them as looking forward to the coming of the Messiah.¹⁸³ Moreover, it was because the Psalms were seen as referring to Jesus as the promised Christ that they were so valued by the early church.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 7

¹⁸⁰ Williams, *The Psalms Interpreted of Christ*, 17-8

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 1-3

¹⁸² Ibid., 5

¹⁸³ Ibid., 4

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 7-8

This way of interpreting the Psalms was also upheld by the church fathers.¹⁸⁵

Hilary of Potiers, for example, claimed that

[t]he doctrines of the Gospel were well known to holy and blessed David in his capacity of Prophet, and although it was under the Law that he lived his bodily life, yet he fulfilled . . . the requirements of the Apostolic behest.¹⁸⁶

Williams believed that such a way of reading the Psalms was also underlined by the offices of the Breviary where New Testament verses functioned as antiphons recited before and after each of them. This helped to emphasise the psalm's fulfilment in Christ and his church.¹⁸⁷ In Williams' view the spiritual approach to the Psalms which had been upheld by the church fathers had been undermined over the course of time. He regretted, for example, that certain commentators had tended to treat them solely in historical terms and had neglected reflection on their spiritual meaning.¹⁸⁸ While Williams maintained that the literal and historical view of the Psalms was essential and formed the basis of their interpretation, he believed that, without also reading them Christologically, their interpretation lacked spiritual vigour and possessed little relevance for the Christian.¹⁸⁹ In his view the Psalms were more than poems composed by the Jews in the age of David and preserved for the sake of historical interest. Rather they contained "utterances throughout of the Divine Word Himself come 'to be among us, full of grace and truth'".¹⁹⁰ According to their different layers of meaning, each psalm could be understood as referring historically to the person of David in its literal sense, prophetically to Christ and mystically to the church and the individual Christian. Each of these senses was inextricably linked with each other and was essential for an authentic interpretation since, in Williams' view, "we should disparage the Word of God, if we set aside either the first historical sense, or that which is fulfilled in the Christian Church, and is for the edification and spiritual progress of the believing soul".¹⁹¹

It was fundamental to Williams' view of the Psalms that they should be seen as pointing to Christ holistically and in their entirety. This underlines the point which

¹⁸⁵ Augustine, *The City of God*, book 17, chapters 14-19, Schaff, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (v. 2, series 1), 352-7;

¹⁸⁶ Hilary of Potiers, *Homilies on the Psalms (Psalm LIII(LIV))*, in Sanday W. (editor), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (volume 9) (Oxford, 1899), 243

¹⁸⁷ Williams, *The Psalms Interpreted of Christ*, 10-2

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 12

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 12-3

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15

he made in his *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* that prophecy of Christ was to be seen throughout the Old Testament and not just in specific oracles of individual prophets.¹⁹² The same was also true of the Psalms since Williams believed that they “contain not the mere dry statement of articles of the faith, or points of doctrine; but they are themselves the breath and Spirit of God”.¹⁹³ As a whole, they pointed to the coming of Christ so that he was to be found throughout them:

It is not that we are thus enabled to point to an unbeliever and say “this or that speaks of Christ as God;” but it is that we have our life more intimately in Him though we know it not; we are made to abide in Him as the branch in the Vine; to partake of the sap of the Vine; through Him whose very words quicken and make clean, and are in themselves spirit and life.¹⁹⁴

The belief that the Psalms were fundamentally Christocentric was also upheld by George Horne in his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* where he claimed that, when the Psalms were interpreted spiritually, “a farther scene begins to open upon us, and all the blessings of the gospel present themselves to the eye of faith”.¹⁹⁵ Although in a literal sense the Psalms referred specifically to historic events concerning the people of Israel, Horne believed that, when interpreted Christologically, they also possessed spiritual significance for the Christian:

Assuredly we must mean a spiritual Jerusalem and Sion: a spiritual ark and temple; a spiritual law; spiritual sacrifices; and spiritual victories over spiritual enemies . . . By substituting Messiah for David, the gospel for the law, the church Christian for that of Israel, and the enemies of one for those of the other, the Psalms are made our own.¹⁹⁶

Williams claimed that, since the Psalms pointed to Christ they also referred directly to the doctrine of the incarnation,¹⁹⁷ so that their references to historical events were prophetic of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus:

Christ is the Key to the Psalms, because when interpreted of Christ they necessarily include and explain other senses; for it is Christ Who is persecuted in David; Who is risen from the grave in the return from captivity; Who ascends into Heaven with the going up of the Ark, and in David is enthroned as King on Mount Sion.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 19-20

¹⁹² Cf., Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v.1), 150

¹⁹³ Williams, *The Psalms Interpreted of Christ*, 29

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Horne G., *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Jones W. (editor), *The Works of the late Right Reverend George Horne D.D.* (London, 1831), xi

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., xiii

¹⁹⁷ Williams, *The Psalms Interpreted of Christ*, 30

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 101-2

This point was also emphasised in Williams' article on Keble's translation of the Psalter where he pointed out that, whereas to many people the Psalms can be seen as referring to the creation of the world or to human morality in general,

to the more advanced Christian [the Psalms are] ever full of the mysteries of Redemption; every part speaks of Christ suffering or glorified . . . here is every particular of his death more closely and vividly portrayed than could have been done by historian or painter.¹⁹⁹

The belief that the Psalms reflected the mystery of the incarnation is highlighted in Williams' commentary on them, which is reminiscent of Augustine's *Exposition on the Book of Psalms*.²⁰⁰ Psalm 1, which reflects upon the blessings which the morally upright man will receive is seen as prefiguring Christ who was without sin,²⁰¹ while Psalm 2, which considers the authority of God's anointed king over Israel, is seen as referring to the manifestation of the crucified Christ to all nations and his authority over them as the Son of God.²⁰² Psalm 8, which reflects upon the dignity of man and the fact that God has "put all things under his feet", and Psalm 24, which reflects upon David bringing the ark into the city of Jerusalem, are both interpreted by Williams as pointing to Christ's ascension into heaven.²⁰³

A number of the Psalms were believed to refer to Christ's passion and earthly sufferings. Williams claimed that Psalm 22 spoke directly about the crucifixion because Jesus had himself quoted it on the cross.²⁰⁴ Psalm 3, which spoke literally of David's fleeing from his son Absalom, was interpreted by Williams as pointing to the sufferings which Christ had to endure from his enemies.²⁰⁵ Again, in his commentary on Psalm 7, Williams saw David's struggle with his enemies as pointing to the sufferings of Christ's passion and also to those that Christians would have to undergo as the church faced opposition from the world. David's enemy Cush, who was alluded to in the title of the Psalm, can be seen as pointing to the devil, the adversary of Christ and of the church.²⁰⁶ Other psalms, for example, Psalm 18, which contained David's

¹⁹⁹ Williams, "The Psalter, or Psalms of David; in English Verse", 21

²⁰⁰ Augustine, *Exposition on the Book of Psalms*, book 1, Psalms 1-3, 7-8, 18, 22, 24 in Schaff P. (editor), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (volume 8, Series 1) (Edinburgh, 1996), 1-8, 20-32, 50-4, 58-60, 61

²⁰¹ Williams, *The Psalms Interpreted of Christ*, 74

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 86ff.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 178, 429-30

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 390

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 100-1

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 160-1

thanksgiving for deliverance from his enemies, are interpreted as referring to the resurrection of Christ. Williams believed that this psalm did not just refer to the resurrection of Jesus but claimed that it also contained the thanksgiving of the church, the body, which had been given a share in the resurrection and ascension of Christ who is its head.²⁰⁷ In his review of Keble's metrical Psalter Williams was critical of the Reformers who had claimed that, to meditate on Christ's passion was more spiritually beneficial than reading the Psalms, claiming that to read the Psalms, while being open to their spiritual meaning, was nothing less than to reflect on Christ's sufferings.²⁰⁸

In his commentary, Williams claimed that the mystery of the incarnation was also prefigured in the penitential Psalms which contained expressions of human guilt and sorrow for sin. Although these could not be interpreted as referring directly to Christ in a literal sense since he was without sin, Williams believed that they could be seen as referring spiritually to Christ who, as the incarnate Son of God, took upon himself the sins of humanity. This is underlined in his interpretation of Psalm 6 which began on a penitential note and ended by expressing sentiments of praise and thanksgiving:

[This Psalm] is spoken of the person of Christ . . . The grief is from Adam, the consolation of the New Man. The cup of mortification is full of bitterness; but it has a drop of sweetness all, which is the love of Christ. It is then Christ that speaks; in us and for us it is He that pleads.²⁰⁹

This suggests that, for Williams, the Psalms pointed to the incarnation at a far deeper level than just prefiguring the mysteries of Christ and his church. As Christian prayers which would have been found on the lips of Jesus himself, they are to be seen as the means by which Christ continues to pray to the Father in, with and through his church. Thus the Psalms taught the doctrine of the incarnation even more directly than the gospel narratives did,²¹⁰ since, through them,

Christ our Advocate with the Father takes our words and pleads for us, and gives us His own words of intercession, and puts them into our mouth; and we feel that in the Psalms He is Himself using our words for us with all-prevailing mediation, and we to the Father are using His words. For His Father has become our Father, and His God our God.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 316-8

²⁰⁸ Williams, *The Psalter, or Psalms of David; in English Verse*, 21

²⁰⁹ Williams, *The Psalms Interpreted of Christ*, 145-6

²¹⁰ Ibid., 33

²¹¹ Ibid., 40

The doctrine of the incarnation taught in the gospels is therefore experienced as a living reality by praying the Psalms. Whereas in the gospels Christ speaks to humanity as the Son of God, in the Psalms he continues to address the Father, through the church:

In the Gospels we behold God in Christ, having come down from Heaven . . . present with us to assist, to teach, to warn, to judge; in the Psalms we ourselves are, as it were, lifted up in Christ to God, as for us interceding and praying in all our infirmities and needs.²¹²

This was also the case with the Psalms which could be seen as pointing to the sufferings of Christ. Williams claimed that these Psalms did not just enable the Christian to reflect on Christ's passion but called them to share in his sufferings since the "Divine word sets forth the members of Christ, Him in them, and them in Him, partaking of his baptismal cup and bearing his cross after Him to the end of the world".²¹³ This was particularly the case with the Psalms which had been chosen for the service of commemoration of the martyrdom of King Charles I, in which,

in words similar to the dying words of our Lord from the Psalms . . . our Church [has], in a manner religious and edifying, put into our minds the Psalms concerning our Lord in the office for that day; teaching us thereby . . . to contemplate the sufferings of Christ crucified, as being himself ever present in the suffering members of his body.²¹⁴

Williams believed that the spiritual interpretation of the Psalms was necessary in order to resolve the difficulties which the Christian inevitably experienced in praying them. Although, as we have already noted, he did not reject the literal meaning of the Psalms, their frequent references to battle, violence and seeking vengeance from one's enemies could make it difficult for the Christian to read and pray them in a spirit of Christian love. Williams believed that this problem was removed when they were read spiritually so that expressions referring to the sword and violence are interpreted as referring to Christ's zeal for the salvation of souls, those to blood as pointing to the blood of Christ shed on the cross for the salvation of the world, and those to seeking revenge on foes as pointing to the Christian's battle against the forces of evil and to the last judgment.²¹⁵ Another problem which was

²¹² Ibid., 440

²¹³ Ibid., 21

²¹⁴ Williams, "The Psalter, or Psalms of David; in English Verse", 21-2

²¹⁵ Williams, *The Psalms Interpreted of Christ*, 44-7

raised against the Psalms concerns those which, like Psalm 1, seem to undermine divine grace in favour of human merit. In Williams' view this was resolved when it was recognised that such psalms refer to the sinless state of Christ.²¹⁶ He believed that a purely literalist interpretation of the Psalms was far less able to deal with such difficulties. There is something of a paradox in Williams' approach to what he saw as these difficulties in the Psalms, however. While claiming to uphold their literal truth his 'spiritualising' of them in Christian terms in fact gave them an interpretation which was completely divorced from their literal meaning. This raises the question of whether Williams really dealt with the problems posed by the Psalms or merely ignored them.

The spiritual approach to the Psalms led Williams to perceive the mystery of the Trinity within them.²¹⁷ Since they presented the Son of God addressing the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit the doctrine of the Trinity,

deeply underlines the Psalms, and is found in the devout use of them, not by definite statement, but by the secret influence of that one pervading doctrine – the foundation of love and principle of life. It necessarily must be the case throughout the Psalms from the Incarnate Word made One with us, and yet one with the Father and the Holy Ghost. For we know from the unspeakable union and love which there is in God, that if we are heard and accepted of the Father, we are heard and accepted of the Son; and as of the Son, so likewise of the Holy Ghost also.²¹⁸

Williams claimed that the doctrine of the Trinity which was “the foundation of love itself, the centre and circumstance of all; in that love has its being . . . in the very nature of God” was directly linked to the importance of love and prayer in the Christian life.²¹⁹ It was by love that Christianity had conquered the heathen world and it was also essential for any society to function properly.²²⁰ The love which was reflected in the nature of the Trinity was also an essential element of Christian prayer:

. . . with Christians prayer itself teaches union and love. For unto whom can we pray, but unto the Three Persons in One God . . . Thus prayer itself is the practice of love; for it is looking to Love itself from the very nature of God. It tends to fill the heart with love, from the unspeakable union which is in God.²²¹

²¹⁶ Ibid., 47-8

²¹⁷ Ibid., 57

²¹⁸ Ibid., 56

²¹⁹ Ibid., 59

²²⁰ Ibid., 58

²²¹ Ibid., 62

It is clear that, for Williams, the Psalms were thoroughly Christocentric and dealt, albeit in a veiled way, with the most important mysteries of the Christian faith, the mystery of the incarnation, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the importance of Christian love and prayer. The high regard in which he held the Psalms is reflected in his comparison of the Christian beholding Jesus in them to Philip who, at the Last Supper, asked Jesus to reveal the Father to him (John 14:9). Just as Philip, in seeing Jesus also saw the Father (cf. John 14:9ff.), so the Christian, in beholding him in the Psalms, also sees God the Father and is caught up into the mystery of divine love:

. . . when we are thus allowed to behold Christ in the Psalms, becoming for our sakes even as one of us, the effect is something like that of beholding His face in the flesh together with His disciples, so that in seeing Him we see the Father. Thus by right and doctrinal use of the Psalms is that love taught which is in God . . . as impressed upon the heart through faith, when we behold Christ as therein revealed . . . it cannot be but that habitually and reverentially to behold Christ in the Psalms, is to invest others therein with something of His light, and for ourselves to derive some of that love which is in God.²²²

4.The Apocalypse, with notes and reflections

Isaac Williams' approach to scripture is also highlighted in his commentary on the book of Revelation which was first published in 1851. In this work he claimed that it was only in the book of the Apocalypse that the prophecies of the Old Testament were truly interpreted²²³ as he attempted to apply its spiritual message to the church of his own day. In the preface to his commentary Williams claimed that all Christians ought to be familiar with this book.²²⁴

Williams believed that the seven churches to whom the book of the Apocalypse were addressed (Revelation 1:4) pointed to the catholic church in which Jesus had promised to remain until the end of time, the number 'seven' denoting fullness, perfection and universality.²²⁵ The "seven spirits" before the throne of God referred to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (cf. Isaiah 11:2)²²⁶ while the manifestation of Jesus "coming on the clouds" (Rev. 1:7-8) marked the fulfilment of the prophecy of Daniel 7:13-4.²²⁷ Williams also noted that the book of Revelation frequently linked the word "patience" with the coming of Christ's kingdom, thus

²²² Ibid., 64

²²³ Williams I., *The Apocalypse, with notes and reflections* (London, 1852), vi

²²⁴ Ibid., xv

²²⁵ Ibid., 5-7

²²⁶ Ibid., 8-9

²²⁷ Ibid., 11-2

suggesting that the kingdom was inextricably linked to the cross, since the coming of Christ's kingdom would be preceded by tribulation and suffering.²²⁸ The image of St. John turning to face Christ as he spoke to him (Rev. 1:12) emphasised the fact that the true meaning of the prophecies of the book of the Apocalypse could be fully understood only in Christ and not in any human speculation on future events.²²⁹ This implies a criticism of the rationalists of Williams' day who were seen as undermining the importance of obedience to divine revelation. Williams claimed that they are represented by the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6) and are described as "accepting Christianity, but explaining away its doctrines, and thereby making it compatible with licentiousness".²³⁰ Their failing, in Williams' view, was to approach religion according to the intellect and not according to faith, the antithesis of the principle of reserve.

Williams believed that the seven letters to the various churches of Revelation 2 and 3 contained a message for the church throughout the ages.²³¹ The fact that the churches of Sardis and Laodicea had grown cold in God's service, for example, can be seen as alluding to what Williams saw as the same state of spiritual malaise in the church of his own day. Reflecting on the letter to the church of Laodicea he wrote:

To the lukewarm Christ enters not: He knocks; but there must be within one to hear His voice and to open the door; something to be done on our part; if we constrain Him not to abide, He will depart . . . when He shall have risen up and shut the door – then to knock at the door without will be in vain.²³²

This suggests that Williams believed the Evangelical emphasis on salvation through faith alone to have undermined the importance of good deeds in the scheme of salvation which led, in turn, to a neglect of spiritual duty. The fact that the contemporary church had become influenced by rationalism also suggested that it had faltered in its fidelity to Christ.²³³ Williams pointed out that the spiritual state of a church also depended upon that of its bishop since "if the church should amend God will give a suitable Bishop; an evil Bishop is because the Church has become worthy of such. The labourers sent depends on the prayers of the people".²³⁴

²²⁸ Ibid., 12-3

²²⁹ Ibid., 15

²³⁰ Ibid., 26

²³¹ Ibid., 52

²³² Ibid., 50

²³³ Ibid., 54-5

²³⁴ Ibid., 53

Further references to the church were to be found in the prophetic visions of the seven seals and the seven trumpets of chapters 4-9. The twenty-four elders (Rev. 4:4) suggested the combination of the Old and New Testaments (the twelve tribes of Israel plus the twelve apostles) since “the courses of the Old Testament are made to represent the Christian church”.²³⁵ The “sea of glass” (Rev. 4:6) alluded to baptismal regeneration and the “four living creatures” to the four gospels.²³⁶ Williams believed that the song sung by the elders (Rev. 4:11) had formed part of an early eucharistic liturgy and therefore pointed to the fact that the worship of the church on earth was united to that of the church in heaven.²³⁷

The book which was sealed with seven seals (Rev. 5:1) for Williams suggested the mystery of Christ which was veiled spiritually beneath the literal sense of scripture.²³⁸ The first six seals referred to Christ’s judgement on Jerusalem and the last judgement at the end of time²³⁹ and are broken by Christ, whose appearance as a horseman suggests his kingly authority.²⁴⁰ The breaking of the seventh seal does not refer to the destruction of Jerusalem but to the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.²⁴¹ The seal which was placed on the foreheads of the servants of God (Rev. 7:3) was seen as pointing to the grace of baptism and to the gift of the Holy Spirit to God’s people.²⁴² The vision of the redeemed in heaven, according to Williams, was given to Christians in order to inspire them with hope during the course of their earthly pilgrimage.²⁴³ The “great tribulation” (Rev. 7:14) could be seen as alluding either to baptism or to martyrdom, which the early church had regarded as a form of baptism.²⁴⁴

The blasting of the trumpets following the breaking of the seventh seal, in Williams’ view, alluded to the church spreading the gospel throughout the world, just as the journey of the Israelites in the Old Testament had been accompanied by trumpets (cf. Joshua 6:4).²⁴⁵ At the same time, the seven trumpets represented the sufferings which the church militant would have to face from the destruction of

²³⁵ Ibid., 64-5

²³⁶ Ibid., 66-7

²³⁷ Ibid. 72

²³⁸ Ibid., 73

²³⁹ Ibid., 82

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 85

²⁴¹ Ibid., 112

²⁴² Ibid., 118

²⁴³ Ibid., 132

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 131

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 138

Jerusalem, the Roman persecutions, heresy, the defection of Christians and the opposition of Islam.²⁴⁶ This led Williams to distinguish between the church as a human organisation which often appeared to be impeded by sin and close to failure and as a spiritual reality whose final victory was certain:

. . . the history of the Church is always distressing, and to a worldly view, perplexing, because it is the account of sins and judgments; but to the eye of faith the unseen Jerusalem is present at the same time, it is but the earthly shadow deepening with the light.²⁴⁷

He also saw the falling star of Revelation 8:10 as pointing to heretical teachings like Arianism which by “denying the Son of God, turned the waters of Baptism into the wormwood of death”,²⁴⁸ and the locusts and scorpions to the spread of Islam.²⁴⁹ The vision of warfare on the blowing of the sixth trumpet pointed to the final consummation of the world and also to the fact that earthly conflicts were but reflections of greater spiritual battles, “the souls of men, their never-dying spirits, contending and contended for – the issue uncertain, the contest unceasing”.²⁵⁰

In the third part of his commentary Williams attempted to apply the imagery of Revelation 10-14 to the church. St. John’s eating of the book in 10:8-9 had been foreshadowed in Ezekiel 3, and pointed to the importance of human co-operation with the divine will in being willing “to receive that which was bitter to the heart within”.²⁵¹ The small size of the book suggested the “sacred remnant, of the little ones of God, of a narrow way, and confined entrance”, since it was only the humble who could receive the knowledge of God.²⁵² In Williams’ view the ‘two witnesses’ prophesied in Revelation 11:3 could be seen as referring to the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist and also to the divine and human nature of Christ in the mystery of the incarnation.²⁵³ That Williams saw a direct link between the incarnation and the sacraments was highlighted by the number ‘two’, a sacred number, speaking of “the heralding of Divine Comings, as signifying restoration and reunion – the reunion of mankind with God; and founded in the deep mystery of the Godhead and Manhood

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 133

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 145

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 147

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 152-3

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 167

²⁵¹ Ibid., 180

²⁵² Ibid., 181

²⁵³ Ibid., 190-2

made one in Christ”.²⁵⁴ Williams interpreted the ‘two candlesticks’ (11:4) which were equal in size as suggesting that the church, though divided by the great schism of 1054 and by the Reformation, still possessed a fundamental spiritual unity so that while “the outer garments of Christ [are] divided by the soldiers of the world, . . . the inner raiment is one and indivisible”.²⁵⁵ Despite the human failings and sins by which the church was scarred, Williams believed that it continued to be fundamentally holy, since it contained the presence of Christ, “for here is still the inner sanctuary and its worshippers, though the city and the Temple be in utter desecration”.²⁵⁶

The sun-clad woman of Revelation 12:1, in Williams’ view, was emblematic of the grace of the gospel and the fact that, for the Christian, the Jewish Law had become “not a yoke or a bondage, but yet the substratum or foundation” of their faith.²⁵⁷ She could be seen as representing either the Virgin Mary or the church, and her son either Christ himself or the martyrs of the church.²⁵⁸ Williams saw the account of the war in heaven in chapter 12 as underlining the fact that goodness and truth would always be subject to opposition. This was the work of the devil and had been confirmed by the execution of Socrates in the pre-Christian era and by the persecution of Christians in the days of the early church.²⁵⁹ Although such persecution was by its very nature evil, Williams believed that by it the church was able to grow in strength and in trust of God.²⁶⁰ The beasts which arose out of the sea and the earth (Revelation 13) and which would be worshipped by some, were seen as pointing to the compromise between Christian truth and worldliness and the deceit of ‘false religion’:

The object of every false religion, or corruption of faith, is to reconcile men to the world, or worship of the Beast; ministering to pride of intellect, or sensuality or self-righteousness; heresy and superstition, by lowering the object of worship; hypocrisy, by darkening it; all such manifold spiritual deceits bring men to substitute something else for Christ, and that is the worship of the ten-horned Beast.²⁶¹

In contrast the crowd of the redeemed in 14:3 pointed to those who “are in the world, but not of the world, having in their hearts the joy of the Holy Ghost”.²⁶²

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 192

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 194

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 199

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 214

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 217

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 227

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 230-2

²⁶¹ Ibid., 249

²⁶² Ibid., 255

Williams believed that the prophecy of Revelation 14-18 continued to speak of God's judgement on the church. The seven bowls containing the wrath of God (15:5-16:21) pointed to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit which were marred by the seven deadly sins.²⁶³ Williams' interpretation of the imagery of the second bowl (16:3) which turned the sea to blood, pointed to the regenerative power of Christian baptism through the merits of Christ's atoning blood.²⁶⁴ At the same time this imagery also pointed to the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and to the Red Sea which, while saving Israel, drowned the Egyptians (cf. Exodus 14:25 ff.). This underlined the fact that "Baptism in effect becomes twofold; either regeneration unto life, or as the Red Sea that buries the Egyptian host".²⁶⁵

According to Williams, the references in Revelation 17 to the harlot, who represented Babylon, applied the judgements of the Old Testament prophets to the apostasy of the Christian church.²⁶⁶ He claimed that the term πορνῆν (harlot) was used rather than μοιχαλῖς (adulteress) in order to suggest a state of continual infidelity as the "impure Church barter and prostitutes her faith to Christ for the advantages of the world".²⁶⁷ Williams noted that it is widely accepted in tradition that the references to Babylon as an evil and unfaithful city can be seen as referring to Rome. They can be taken as pointing either to pagan Rome, to the Roman Church or to the church universal.²⁶⁸ After considering the matter he suggested that the judgements ought to be seen as referring to the Roman Church as "a type and instance of the corruption of the Christian Church throughout the whole world, which is at the same time mainly indicated".²⁶⁹

Williams pointed out that, unlike the Johannine epistles, the book of Revelation does not refer to a personal antichrist but speaks of it in general terms, "under a variety of figures, according to the varied aspects of evil which he assumes".²⁷⁰ The author of Revelation also tended to refer to Jesus implicitly rather than explicitly as "His birth, His sufferings and ministry, His resurrection and ascension, are seen as set forth in His Body, the Church".²⁷¹ Williams claimed that the

²⁶³ Ibid., 282

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 288

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 289

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 313-4

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 315

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 335

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 339

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 414-6

²⁷¹ Ibid., 415

book of Revelation's general approach to the antichrist was in line with scripture and tradition, neither of which identified a personal antichrist.²⁷² The church fathers had claimed that the antichrist of Revelation meant that "this mysterious principle of evil, working in great multitudes of men, will at last be developed in a head or leader".²⁷³ Williams believed that the influence of the antichrist could be seen in contemporary rationalism and political liberalism.²⁷⁴

According to Williams the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21 was foreshadowed in Ezekiel 40. The fact that the sea no longer existed (Rev. 21:1) suggested that the "sacramental washing" of baptism and penance would not be necessary in heaven after life's hardships had passed.²⁷⁵ The fact that the names of the Apostles rather than of the tribes of Israel were written on the walls of the heavenly city (Rev. 21:14), suggested that the promises made under the Old Covenant were fulfilled spiritually in the Christian church and "put a stop to all carnal Judaizing conceits of an earthly Jerusalem to be rebuilt".²⁷⁶ Moreover, the fact that the city was built on the foundation of the apostles underlined the importance of the apostolic succession in the life of the church since "a Church must be built not only on Christ, but also on the Apostolic Twelve in doctrine and in discipline".²⁷⁷ The image of the river of life and the tree of life (Rev. 22:1), apart from having been prefigured in Ezekiel 47:1 and Zechariah 14:8 reflect the fact that "as the Holy Scriptures opened with Paradise and the fall of man, so do they end with his restoration to a better Paradise".²⁷⁸

Williams' commentary on the book of Revelation underlines the approach to scripture which is reflected in his other commentaries. For example, he frequently points out that particular prophecies in the book of Apocalypse were prefigured in the Old Testament and find their fulfilment in Christ. At the same time the book of Revelation with its use of complex imagery provided Williams with a suitable opportunity to apply the spiritual method of biblical interpretation. Throughout his commentary, he interpreted the prophecies of Revelation as pointing to both the church on earth and the church in heaven. Williams' commentary on the conclusion of

²⁷² Ibid., 424

²⁷³ Ibid., 419

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 424-5

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 445-6

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 455

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 461

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 470

the Apocalypse warns against adding to or taking away from the meaning of scripture and emphasises what he saw as the respective errors of the Evangelicals and rationalists of his day in failing to interpret the Bible correctly.²⁷⁹

Each of Isaac Williams' biblical commentaries attempted to popularise the method of biblical interpretation which had been upheld by the patristic writers and the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen as an alternative to what he saw as the literalist approach of the Evangelicals and the sceptical approach of the Neologists.²⁸⁰ Edward Paxton Hood, a Nonconformist minister in Stinchcombe who wrote to Williams in 1854 to congratulate him on his commentaries, claimed that his works had been highly successful in helping to defend the truth of scripture in a "sceptical age".²⁸¹ Though it is difficult to assess how widely they were read, it does seem significant that Williams was the only leader of the Oxford Movement to write so many commentaries on the Bible at this time. These works were all aimed at ordinary clergy and laity and attempted to propagate the spiritual method of interpreting scripture which was valued by all the Tractarians and reflected in Keble's *Tract 89* and Pusey's "Lectures on Types and Prophecies". Williams' attempt to revive the patristic approach to scripture, with its distinction between literal and spiritual interpretation, can also be seen as an application of the doctrine of reserve to the reading of the Bible.

Mary K. Williams claimed that Isaac Williams' approach to scripture reflected a "flexibility of Biblical understanding in a changing world".²⁸² In her opinion his Latin poem *Ars Geologica* had helped to make him "more open than the other Tractarians to the growing scientific challenges" while his commentary on the book of Genesis prefigured later developments in the interpretation of scripture by presenting both scripture and science as sources of revelation.²⁸³ These comments would seem to stand in need of reassessment. While Isaac Williams' emphasis on the spiritual meaning of scripture might be seen as providing a degree of flexibility to its interpretation, it is important to remember that he also upheld the literal and historical truth of the biblical narrative, for example, by claiming that the first two chapters of Genesis were a single account of the creation of the world. He would not have been prepared to accept that the biblical creation account could be understood simply as

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 486

²⁸⁰ Cf. Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 414-5, 429-30; Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 34-5; Williams, *The Apocalypse*, 486;

²⁸¹ Hood E.P. to Williams I. (1854), L.P.L. M.S. 4474, ff. 131-4

²⁸² Williams, *The Doctrine of the Church in the Writings of Isaac Williams*, 93

myth or allegory because science had disproved its historical significance. Williams' commentaries reflect his innate conservatism and therefore highlight the difference of understanding between his age and ours regarding how scripture ought to be interpreted. It may be that, had he been more prepared to combine the spiritual interpretation of scripture with some of the points that were raised by the biblical critics and been more prepared to question the literal and historical truth of the biblical narrative, then his commentaries would have been more widely read beyond the end of the nineteenth century.

²⁸³ Ibid., 98

Chapter Five: The Sacraments

The principle of reserve which found expression in Isaac Williams' tracts, poetry and biblical commentaries was also closely related to the Tractarian understanding of the sacraments. While the Evangelicals, in their attempt to emphasise the importance of salvation by faith alone, and the rationalists, in their attempt to undermine any sense of mystery in religion, saw them as being merely signs or figures of God's grace,¹ the Tractarians claimed that the sacraments were channels by which sacramental grace was dispensed directly through the physical elements of water, bread and wine.² In *Tract 87* Isaac Williams claimed that the church views the sacraments as "veils of the Divine presence, being not only the signs and tokens, but vehicles and conveyances, as it were, of Divine gifts".³ This understanding of the sacraments was also reflected in his *Hymns on the Catechism*:

Thou dost the earth renew,
By Thine enlivening dews;
So through these signs, thus given to view,
Thou dost Thy grace infuse.

It is the means whereby
Thy blessing we receive;
The gift thus comes down from the sky,
If we the same believe.⁴

For Williams, the sacraments were means of grace, not because of any virtue in the material elements, but because of the power of Christ working through them.⁵ In his sermon preached at the consecration of All Saint's church, Llangorwen, he taught that,

when by faith we look beyond the frail earthly vessel [i.e. the outward sign of the sacraments], and forgetting the presence of men in the performance of these things, we discern the presence of God, we press on from things earthly and visible, unto things invisible and heavenly.⁶

¹ Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 88-93

² See; Williams, "On Reserve (no. 87)", 88-93; Williams, *A Sermon Preached at the Consecration of the Church of Llangorwen*, 17-8; cf. Härdelin A., "The Sacraments in the Tractarian Spiritual Universe", in Rowell G. (ed.), *Tradition Renewed: The Oxford Movement Conference Papers* (London, 1986), 78-95

³ Williams, "On Reserve (no. 87)", 89

⁴ Williams, *Hymns on the Catechism*, 101

⁵ Williams I., *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (volume 2) (London, 1882 edition), 220; Williams, *Hymns on the Catechism*, 99

⁶ Williams, *A Sermon Preached at the consecration of the Church of Llangorwen*, 10

This view of the sacraments was closely connected to the principle of reserve since it was only those who possessed a right state of heart who could recognise Christ's presence in the sacraments by looking beyond the outward sign of the rite:

As seen by the good Christian in spiritual discernment, it is not Paul, it is not Apollos, it is not Cephas, it is Christ that baptizes; if we may say with awful reverence and caution, it is Christ who gives us with His own sacred hands, the memorials of His death, and the pledges of our life.⁷

Such an emphasis on the sacraments as the direct means of grace was also an important aspect of the pre-Tractarian High Church tradition.⁸ In line with this tradition, and in contrast to the Roman emphasis on seven sacraments, Isaac Williams claimed that baptism and the eucharist were the only sacraments which Christ had appointed.⁹ While accepting that other rites like confirmation and ordination were also in a sense sacramental, he believed that the early church recognised the existence of only two sacraments and had held baptism and the eucharist in far greater esteem than any of the other sacramental rites. This was a view which was also taken by the 'Z' High Churchman William Patrick Palmer.¹⁰ While claiming that the Church of England's recognition of only two sacraments was consistent with earliest ecclesiastical tradition, Williams also claimed that it was particularly apt since two was a sacred number which could be seen as alluding to the divine and human natures of the incarnate Christ, to the two-fold commandment to love God and one's neighbour and to the blood and water which flowed forth from the side of the crucified Christ (cf. John 19:34). The number of the sacraments therefore mystically signified the fact that baptism and the eucharist were extensions of the incarnation by which the individual was united to Christ:

And we may find out in Holy Scripture that the number Two also is not without its sacred significations. By two Sacraments we are united to Christ. This seems to flow from the great mystery of the Incarnation, whereby we acknowledge Christ to be both God and Man. We bear witness to His Godhead and Manhood: and in us the two Sacraments are for the healing of both body and soul. Again, there are two great commandments for the Christian, which include all others - the love of God, and the love of our neighbour, comprising the two tables of the Law: on these two hang all the Law and the Prophets.

⁷ Ibid., 10-11

⁸ Cf. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 26; Cornwall R.D., *Visible and Apostolic: The Constitution on the Church in High Church Anglican and Nonjuror Thought* (Newark, 1993), 116 ff.

⁹ Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic*, 118-9; Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 192-3; Williams, *Hymns on the Catechism*, 97

¹⁰ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 195-7; Palmer W., *A Treatise on the Church of Christ* (volume 1) (London, 1842), 399

Two great Sacraments, and two great commandments; these quite correspond together . . . The water and blood are at Baptism, the water and blood are at the Eucharist.¹¹

1. Baptism

The sacrament of baptism forms the theme of a number of Isaac Williams' sermons and poems. In his *Plain Sermons on the Catechism*, for example, he claimed that God had always intended water to be used as a symbol of this sacrament. Scripture therefore abounded with references to water which foreshadowed baptism, including the narrative of Noah and the flood (Genesis 7 ff.), God's saving of Israel through the Red Sea, the Israelites' crossing of the Jordan (Joshua 3), the molten sea of Solomon's Temple (2 Chronicles 4:2) and the water flowing from the threshold of the Temple (Ezekiel 47).¹² Williams also noted that, in the gospels, Jesus frequently referred to water as being the means of spiritual cleansing and new-birth (cf. John 3:1-21; 2:1-11; 9:1-12).¹³

Baptismal Regeneration

Isaac Williams' belief that forgiveness of sins and a new spiritual birth were directly linked to the act of baptism in the name of the Trinity,¹⁴ was typical of the Tractarian and High Church understanding of the sacrament. This doctrine of baptismal regeneration, which was seen as being reflected in the Book of Common Prayer, separated High Churchmen and Tractarians from the Evangelicals of their day who tended to view baptism as a sign of a real, internal regeneration which could accompany the administration of the sacrament, but did not necessarily have to do so.¹⁵ While the High Church and Tractarian understanding linked regeneration directly to baptism, the Evangelicals tended to deny that the two were inextricably linked, claiming that regeneration could be brought about later by a conversion experience. As was typical of traditional High Church teaching, Williams pointed out that, in baptism, water was not just a sign of regeneration but was in fact "the instrument of a matter so great as the new birth of the soul". It was particularly appropriate that water should be the means of regeneration in baptism since in daily

¹¹ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 198

¹² *Ibid.*, 239-42

¹³ *Ibid.*, 244-6

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 227, 255, 275; Williams I., *Sacred Verses with Pictures* (London, 1857 edition), Part I, no. 5 (no pagination)

¹⁵ See Toon, *Evangelical Theology, 1833-1856*, 188-95

life it was necessary both to sustain life and also for washing.¹⁶ The significance of baptismal regeneration was highlighted in *Hymns on the Catechism* where Williams used imagery of birth, nature, dawn and spring to present the sacrament as effecting the spiritual re-birth of the Christian by cleansing the heart from sin:

Thus Lord, in the Baptismal wave,
All sin within me dies;
And all that's holy from that grave,
Must to new life arise.

As morning daily comes to view,
From midnight's silent womb,
And as the year springs forth anew
From nature's wintry tomb, -

Thus in my heart, when touch'd by Thee,
A new creation springs;
And rays of love that fall on me
Breed love of holy things.

When Thou dost send the genial shower
And life imparting ray,
E'en mouldering walls shall bear the flower,
And all the fields be May.¹⁷

The direct link between baptism and regeneration was central to the pre-Tractarian High Church tradition and reflected in the writings of numerous individuals, including Richard Hooker, Lancelot Andrewes and Daniel Waterland, as well as the eighteenth century High Church bishop William Beveridge of St. Asaph.¹⁸ Beveridge claimed that the outward sign of water and the inward regeneration of the recipient of baptism were inseparable so that “[h]e that would be born of the Spirit, must be born of water too”.¹⁹ At the beginning of the nineteenth century baptismal regeneration was also upheld by High Churchmen such as Thomas Mant, Alexander Knox and bishop Christopher Bethell of Bangor.²⁰ The doctrine was taught in Pusey's

¹⁶ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 239, 246

¹⁷ Williams, *Hymns on the Catechism*, 108

¹⁸ Hooker R., *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (volume 5), Bayne R. (editor), (London, 1902 edition), 284-5; Neelands W.D., “Christology and the Sacraments”, Kirby T. (editor), *A Companion to Richard Hooker* (Boston, 2008), 377-82; Stevenson K., *The Mystery of Baptism in the Anglican Tradition* (Norwich, 1998), 59-60; Andrewes L., *Ninety-Six Sermons by the Right Noble and Reverend Father in God Lancelot Andrewes* (Volume 3) (Oxford, 1841), 242; Van Mildert (ed.), *The Works of the Rev. Daniel Waterland* (v. 5), 474

¹⁹ Beveridge W., *The Theological Works of William Beveridge, D.D. – Sometime Lord Bishop of St. Asaph* (volume 2) (Oxford, 1843), 181-2

²⁰ Thompson D.M., *Baptism, Church and Society in Modern Britain* (Milton Keynes, 2005), 33-7, 68-72

Tract 67 entitled “Scriptural Views on Holy Baptism,” and it was belief in baptismal regeneration which marked Newman’s transition from Evangelicalism to the High Church position.²¹ In his *Parochial and Plain Sermons* Newman claimed that baptism would possess little value for the Christian unless it was the guaranteed means by which regeneration was effected,²² and he described it as a gift of the Holy Spirit to the soul whereby “all guilt and pollution are burned away as by fire, the devil is driven forth, sin, original and actual, is forgiven, and the whole man is consecrated to God”.²³

Isaac Williams claimed that the regeneration effected through baptism brought about the forgiveness of original sin as well as a spiritual re-birth by which Christians were made children of God. This teaching, he argued, was upheld by scripture in the epistles of St. Paul and in the fourth gospel.²⁴ Referring to Augustine and Chrysostom, he claimed that the “washing of water by the word” alluded to by St Paul (Ephesians 5:26) referred to baptism in the name of the Trinity which brought about spiritual regeneration and fulfilled Christ’s command to baptise all nations in Matthew 28:19.²⁵ Williams also pointed out that the scriptures did not speak of regeneration as being something which Christians had to strive to obtain, but rather as something which they already possessed as a result of baptism.²⁶ The importance of baptismal regeneration was reflected in its baptismal service²⁷ and it was the first doctrine of the faith which children learned on reading the catechism.²⁸

In his gospel commentary Williams reflected on Jesus’ references to baptism in his conversation with Nicodemus in John 3, claiming that they presented baptism as a spiritual birth, prefigured in the Old Testament law and in the baptism of John the Baptist. This regeneration was brought about by “a sacramental and celestial washing, fulfilling in reality those types shadowed in figure, and without which there is no

²¹ Pusey E.B., “Scriptural Views on Holy Baptism, as Established by the Consent of the Ancient Church, and Contrasted with the Systems of Modern Schools (no. 67)”, *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford* (volume 2) (London, 1840), 23; Thompson, *Baptism, Church and Society*, 67

²² Newman J.H., *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (volume 3) (London, 1857 edition), 283

²³ Newman J.H., *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (volume 2) (London, 1868 edition), 223

²⁴ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 269-74

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 255-6

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 271-2

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 275-7

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 274-5

entering into the kingdom of Heaven”²⁹ which involved a spiritual change in the recipient of the sacrament “from darkness unto light, from Satan unto God”.³⁰ Referring to Augustine and Chrysostom’s homilies on the fourth gospel, Williams compared the waters of baptism to the waters of creation (cf. Genesis 1:2), thus implying that the sacrament brings about a re-creation of the individual in the image of Christ.³¹ This emphasis on the connection between baptism and creation and on the spiritual birth brought about through the sacrament was also reflected in the writings of Lancelot Andrewes, who claimed that, so important was the ‘new birth’ which the Christian received in baptism that it was “better not [to be] born at all, than not to be so born again”.³² Pusey also referred to baptismal regeneration in terms of a ‘new birth’ in *Tract 67*.³³

While emphasising the fact that baptismal regeneration brought about the forgiveness of sins and made the recipient a child of God, Williams also taught that it united the individual to Christ in a profound way, making him, or her, a member of the church (since the church was understood as being the ‘Body of Christ’, union with Christ and membership of the church were inseparable).³⁴ Williams described this union in terms of the parable of the vine and the branches of John 15 since, through baptism, the individual is “grafted into the Body of Christ’s Church” and becomes as much a part of Christ as a branch is a part of a tree.³⁵ The intimacy of this spiritual union was greater than the closest of human relationships, since,

it were not enough that we should be to Him as the nearest and dearest relation which a man has, He makes us the very parts of His own Body; as a man feels the pains and diseases in his own limbs, and the dangers they are liable to, so also Christ carries our sorrows and bears our sicknesses, as if they were His own: in all our afflictions He is afflicted, even as a man is for the parts of himself, as the head is for the whole body.³⁶

The belief that baptism united the individual spiritually with Christ was also an important aspect of Pusey’s *Tract 67* where he claimed that, in baptism, forgiveness of sin is brought about by uniting the individual with Christ and making him, or her, a

²⁹ Williams I., *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (volume 3): *Our Lord’s Nativity* (London, 1880 edition), 327

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 328

³¹ *Ibid.*, 327

³² Andrewes, *Ninety-Six Sermons* (v. 3), 242; cf. Stevenson, *The Mystery of Baptism*, 59-60

³³ Pusey, “Scriptural Views on Holy Baptism (no. 67)”, *Tracts for the Times* (v. 2), 28; Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (v. 2), 223

³⁴ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 1). 22-3

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 23

member of the church.³⁷ Making use of the Pauline imagery of Romans 6:4-5, Pusey claimed that baptism united the Christian to Christ's death so that he, or she, could be born again to a new life in Christ:

It were much, to be buried, to be crucified with Him, like Him, but it is more to become partaker of His Burial and Crucifixion; to be (so to speak) co-interred, co-crucified; to be included in, wrapt round, as it were, in His Burial and Crucifixion, and gathered into His very tomb.³⁸

Isaac Williams' belief in the importance of baptismal regeneration led him to express regret that many people failed to recognise the full significance of baptism and saw the sacrament as little more than an empty ceremony which, in the case of children, was no different to the registration of the names of new-born babies required by the state.³⁹ He was also particularly critical of the Evangelical belief that regeneration did not necessarily accompany baptism but was often brought about through a later conversion. Although he did not deny that individuals could fall away from the grace of baptism by failing to make good use of the gift which God had given them, he held that baptismal regeneration, once given, was irrevocable. A conversion in later life was therefore to be understood merely as a renewal of the grace that had already been given:

. . . even when repentance takes place in after life, in a manner that appears like a sudden conversion, what is it but the breaking in of light upon the soul; from the good Spirit vouchsafed at Baptism, - that light which had been before stifled and buried by bad passions? For the light of the Sun may break forth even late in the day, but this is no proof that it was not in the skies before, but only that it was hidden by clouds.⁴⁰

Isaac Williams and the other Tractarians also shared with the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen a strong belief in the importance of infant baptism. Since the sacrament was seen as the objective means of regeneration it made sense to administer it to infants and not just to adults. Like Newman and the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen,⁴¹ Williams claimed that infant baptism could be supported from

³⁶ *Ibid.*; Williams, *Hymns on the Catechism*, 7

³⁷ Pusey, "Scriptural Views on Holy Baptism (no. 67)", *Tracts for the Times* (v. 2), 23-4

³⁸ Brilioth, *The Anglican Revival*, 312 quoting Pusey, "Scriptural Views on Holy Baptism (no. 67)" (4th edition), 95

³⁹ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 1), 27-8

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 30

⁴¹ Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (v. 3), 273; Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic*, 129-30; Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (v. 5), 329-39; Beveridge W., *The Church Catechism Explained for use in the Diocese of St. Asaph* (London, 1704), 14; Van Mildert (ed.), *The Works of Rev. Daniel Waterland* (v. 4), 356-7; Varley, *The Last of the Prince Bishops*, 38 citing Van Mildert W.,

Jesus' welcoming of children in the gospels (cf. Luke 9:46 ff.), and he believed that, since infants were normally less acquainted with sin than adults, it was expedient for individuals to be baptised as infants before they had the chance to commit serious sins and ran the risk of displaying insincere repentance.⁴²

Although infants could not possess personal faith in Christ, Williams believed that this could be expressed on their behalf by parents and god-parents. This was reflected in the gospels where some of Jesus' miracles were carried out not on the basis of the faith of the recipient but upon that of an individual who approached Christ on his or her behalf (cf. Mark 9:24, John 4:53).⁴³ This led him to claim that, in bringing children to the font, parents and god-parents were in fact aiding their salvation since "it is the faith and confession of others which [Christ] makes cooperate with Himself in His Church in bringing helpless infants to Him".⁴⁴ The same point was also made by William Beveridge who claimed that, in bringing children to baptism, parents and god-parents became "the means of [their] being Regenerate, or born again of God".⁴⁵

While Williams recognised that neither the book of Acts nor the New Testament epistles taught explicitly that infants should be baptised, he claimed that there was good reason for this silence. Baptism, he argued, would have overtaken circumcision in the early church as the rite of entry into the people of God so naturally that the apostles would have felt little need to mention it.⁴⁶ St. Paul's reference to the 'sanctification' (1 Corinthians 7:14) of children in a marriage between a believer and a non-believer could also be seen as referring to infant baptism.⁴⁷ Assuming that the early church would have followed Jesus' welcoming approach to children by baptising infants,⁴⁸ Williams concluded that infant baptism could be justified on the grounds that it must have been the practice of the church since the earliest times.⁴⁹

"The Nature & Obligation of the Baptismal Vow. A Confirmation Sermon", Durham University Library Add. Ms. 274-207V21S4; Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (v. 3), 272-5;287-300

⁴² Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v.2), 298-300; Williams, *Hymns on the Catechism*, 111-2; Williams, *Sacred Verses*, part I, no. 5, no pagination

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 300-1

⁴⁴ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 1), 17

⁴⁵ Beveridge, *The Church Catechism Explained*, 7

⁴⁶ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 302-3

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 303

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 305

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 306

Baptism and Christian Living

Isaac Williams also emphasised the fact that baptism was inextricably linked to the pursuit of Christian holiness, something which is recognised as having been an important facet of the Oxford Movement.⁵⁰ Like William Beveridge,⁵¹ he taught that, at baptism the individual (or the parents and godparents on his, or her, behalf) made a solemn vow to avoid the temptations posed by ‘the world, the flesh and the devil’. The struggle against these temptations would continue after baptism and throughout life. The test of authentic Christian living, in Williams’ view, was whether or not the individual, by God’s grace, succeeded in overcoming these three opponents since, “the true Christian must gain the victory; he has renounced and forsaken these things, and left them behind him; he is not to be overtaken by them again and overcome”.⁵²

The relationship between baptism and the Christian life was a central theme of *The Baptistery*. In the ‘Frontispiece’ of the work Williams described how baptismal grace accompanies the Christian throughout the challenges of life:

The world doth know them not, and cannot know,
Nor understand their ways, nor see the ray
That comes from Heaven to light them, while they go
From strength to strength; along this vale of woe
A rainbow sprung from the Baptismal well
Surrounds them, raining freshness o’er their brow;
And Angels while they know not round them dwell,
Whence in their presence seems some Heaven-constraining spell.⁵³

Williams’ reference to the rainbow is a powerful image of baptismal grace which can be seen as referring to God’s covenant with Noah (cf. Genesis 9:13). Since the rainbow was caused by the light of the sun shining on the rain, Williams claimed that it pointed to Christ “the Sun of Righteousness looking on the waters of Baptism”, leading his people, by grace, to the kingdom of heaven (cf. Revelation 4:3).⁵⁴ In his later poetic work *The Seven Days*, Williams also presented the creation of the waters in Genesis 1 as evoking reflection on the importance of baptismal grace which was able to overflow into every area of life:

Well of Baptismal waters, Fount of Light
Dwelling with God; wash feet and hands and heart;

⁵⁰ Cf. Borsch F.H., “Ye Shall be Holy: reflections on the spirituality of the Oxford Movement”, Rowell G. (editor), *Tradition Renewed: The Oxford Movement Conference Papers* (London, 1986), 64-77

⁵¹ Beveridge, *The Church Catechism Explained*, 16

⁵² Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 1), 60

⁵³ Williams, *The Baptistery* (1858 edition), xiii

⁵⁴ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 246

Each hour of day, and after dreamy night;
Our hopes, our fears, affections, every part;
At home, abroad; in city, field, or mart;
Wash us and deep descend into our soul;
And thou, celestial Stream, whate'er thou art,
River at God's right hand, O gently roll
With Thine all-healing power upon our being whole!⁵⁵

Although he believed that regeneration was always brought about through the administration of baptism, Williams taught that the individual had a duty to cooperate with that grace by remaining faithful to God through faith, repentance and carrying out good works.⁵⁶ In his *Hymns on the Catechism* he claimed that a sacrament was

. . . a pledge and token,
Assuring our weak heart,
We have the thing that there is spoken,
If we but do our part.⁵⁷

This did not undermine the importance of grace in the Christian life, in Williams' view, since the Christian could only succeed in carrying out such good works as a result of the grace given through baptism:

How little do men consider, how much whatever good they may have done is owing, not to themselves, but to their being grafted at Baptism into the living Vine! We are but little aware how much the good thoughts that come into our mind may be owing to the unspeakable gift given us at Baptism; how much repentance in after years may be but the struggles of the Holy One, into whose Body we were grafted at Baptism!⁵⁸

The importance of remaining faithful to baptismal grace was emphasised in *The Baptistery* where Williams presented two different groups of baptised people making their journey through life,

. . . flowing free
Into the world through that Baptismal door:
Numbers innumerable, evermore,
Part on each side in endless destinies,
Some on advancing to light's blissful shore,
Some on the road where sorrow never dies,
Each as they choose their lot, the way before them lies.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Williams, *The Seven Days*, 65

⁵⁶ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 286

⁵⁷ Williams, *Hymns on the Catechism*, 103

⁵⁸ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 1), 30

⁵⁹ Williams, *The Baptistery* (1858 edition), xii

The poem goes on to present “Worldly Favour” and “Pleasure”⁶⁰ as being the way to eternal destruction, while the humble way of “down-bent looks” and “penitential robes” is seen as the road to salvation.⁶¹ For Williams it was necessary for the Christian to co-operate with the grace offered in baptism by choosing to follow the ‘narrow way’ of Christ rather than the ‘broad way’ of worldliness.

Williams’ belief that regeneration was a gift given once only through baptism with which the individual had to co-operate, as distinct from the Evangelical belief in conversion, was also reflected in the eighteenth century in the writings of Daniel Waterland who distinguished between regeneration and renovation as two effects of the sacrament. While regeneration always accompanied the administration of baptism and was not dependent upon the worthiness of the recipient, renovation referred to the way in which the individual co-operated with the grace of God offered through the sacrament. In adults this was “a capacity, or qualification for salutary regeneration” which ought to precede, accompany and follow baptism.⁶² Regeneration was a once-for-all event which evoked a permanent spiritual change which could never be lost or repeated, but renovation was a continual process which the individual could forfeit through sin.⁶³ Although Williams did not use the term, his emphasis on the individual’s duty to remain faithful to baptismal grace would seem to equate to Waterland’s definition of renovation.

In his sermons Isaac Williams alluded to the Christian’s duty to live a holy life after baptism by reference to the image of the vine and the branches of John 15. If a person was faithful to the grace given in baptism, then the union with Christ would be reflected in that person bearing fruit.⁶⁴ On the other hand it was possible to be a “dead and withered” branch by failing to respond to the grace of God.⁶⁵ Williams also claimed that the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3-23) suggested that the Christian’s ability to respond to divine grace and withstand temptation was dependent upon his, or her, state of heart.⁶⁶ He was particularly critical of the Evangelicals of his day for minimising the importance of the struggle with temptation in favour of what

⁶⁰ Ibid., xiii

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Van Mildert (ed.), *The Works of the Reverend Daniel Waterland* (v. 4), 349

⁶³ Ibid., 353

⁶⁴ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v.1), 25

⁶⁵ Ibid., 24

⁶⁶ Ibid., 60-5

he saw as “a kind of false devotional warmth, running on into enthusiastic fancies”,⁶⁷ probably an unbalanced criticism considering the strict moral and devotional emphasis of many nineteenth century Evangelicals.⁶⁸

The call to eschew the temptations posed by ‘the world, the flesh and the devil’ in baptism also required a dedication to a life of repentance and faith. This was stressed in the epistle to the Romans which taught that the baptised Christian ought to be “dead unto sin and alive unto God” (cf. Romans 6:11).⁶⁹ In the Christian life repentance was inextricably linked to baptism which gave the individual a share in the resurrection of Christ.⁷⁰ It was a pragmatic expression of the Christian’s new spiritual birth which was manifested by rejecting the human nature which had been received from Adam and by putting on the nature of Christ Himself.⁷¹

Although in a sense baptism presupposed an act of repentance which was to be a life-long commitment, human nature required that the Christian life be continually marked by a penitential turning to Christ in humility and seeking of forgiveness.⁷² The fact that baptism committed the individual to a life of penitence was highlighted metaphorically by the signing of the recipient of baptism with the sign of the cross in the church’s baptismal service:

. . . the sign of the cross, with which we are then [i.e. in baptism] signed, is a token . . . that, being buried with Christ in His death, the baptized Christian may crucify the old man, so that as he is made partaker of the death of the Son of Man, he may also be of His resurrection.⁷³

Not only was Christ’s atoning death the means by which the individual was given a share in divine grace through baptism, but the signing of the individual with the cross reflected the fact that the sacrament committed him to leading a life marked by penitence and the pursuit of holiness. These were the means and the end respectively of a person’s attempting to live the Christian life as a sharing in the sufferings of Christ and as a bearing of his cross after him.⁷⁴

⁶⁷ Ibid., 62

⁶⁸ Scotland N., *Evangelical Anglicans in a Revolutionary Age, 1789-1901* (Carlisle, 2004), 191-8, 342-65

⁶⁹ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 283

⁷⁰ Ibid., 284-5

⁷¹ Ibid., 284

⁷² Ibid., 286

⁷³ Williams “Sermon XL: The Cross of Christ”, in *Plain Sermons by Contributors to the Tracts for the Times* (v. II) (London, 1840), 27

⁷⁴ Ibid.

The importance of continual repentance in the Christian life was also emphasised by Pusey who claimed that baptismal grace could never be completely restored when one fell into sin after baptism.⁷⁵ So grave was post-baptismal sin, according to Pusey, that Christians should do everything possible to avoid it and to live a life marked by continual repentance and conversion.⁷⁶ The gravity of sin committed after baptism was also reflected in the seventeenth century High Churchman Jeremy Taylor's prayer for the anniversary of one's birth or baptism, found in his *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living*:

O dearest God, pardon the errors and ignorances, the vices and vanities of my youth, and the faults of my more forward years, and let me never more stain the whiteness of my baptismal robe.⁷⁷

Isaac Williams' understanding of the sacrament of baptism clearly had much in common with that of both the Tractarians and the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen. Like both groups he maintained the importance of baptismal regeneration and infant baptism. His belief that regeneration was brought about both through remitting original sin and uniting the individual to Christ had much in common with Pusey's understanding as reflected in *Tract 67*. Although Williams' writings do not deal with baptismal regeneration as a theological doctrine as Pusey did in *Tract 67*, they did contribute to the Oxford Movement by attempting to demonstrate that the doctrine was taught in scripture and by explaining the implications of baptismal regeneration for Christian living. His sermons and poetry are important since they attempt to show that, while regeneration was always given through the sacrament of baptism, this did not detract from the importance of seeking holiness in daily life.

2.The Eucharist

As baptism made the recipient a member of the church and committed him, or her, to a life of obedience and faith, so Isaac Williams repeatedly taught that the spiritual strength to live this life faithfully was provided through the sacrament of the eucharist.⁷⁸ He believed that the daily celebration of the eucharist had led to the profound zeal and faith of the early church⁷⁹ and, in accordance with the emphasis of

⁷⁵ Brilioth, *The Anglican Revival*, 308; Thompson, *Baptism, Church and Society in Modern Britain*, 80

⁷⁶ Chadwick O., *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* (London, 1960), 107 quoting Pusey, *Parochial Sermons* (v. 3), 20-2

⁷⁷ Taylor J., *The Works of Jeremy Taylor D.D.* (volume 5), (London, 1831), 315

⁷⁸ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 322

⁷⁹

a number of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen on frequent communion,⁸⁰ advocated the practice of receiving the sacrament frequently, even daily, if possible.⁸¹ This emphasis was consistent with the Tractarian attempt to bring about a more frequent celebration of the eucharist in an age where, in most parishes, it was celebrated only three or four times a year, or, at the most, monthly.⁸² The author of *Tract 6* claimed that the Church of England ought to recover the primitive practice of frequent communion while *Tract 26*, citing bishop William Beveridge, argued that the Church of England's rubrics demanded a weekly celebration of the eucharist and allowed it to be celebrated on weekdays also.⁸³ Whereas the normal Sunday service in most parishes at this time would have consisted of Morning Prayer, Litany and Ante-communion led from the pulpit,⁸⁴ Hurrell Froude's *Essay on Rationalism* argued that eucharist should "form the most prominent feature in the worship of the faithful" and should be "the daily, or at any rate, the weekly, sustenance of souls hungry and thirsty after righteousness".⁸⁵ Newman also encouraged the practice of frequent communion and began the practice at St. Mary's, Oxford, in 1837.⁸⁶

The importance of the eucharist is reflected in a number of Williams' poems. One of his verses from *Thoughts in Past Years*, for example, reflects on how the grace of the sacrament was able to impart the benefits of Christ's death, not just to the recipient, but also to others. The grace dispensed through the eucharist was able to re-invigorate those who were spiritually ailing:

O Saviour from Thy bleeding fount of woes,
 Thy cup of love o'erflows;-
 Not to me only these Thy dews,
 Which life and health diffuse,
 But unto mine in distance found,
 May this blest tide abound,
 Which creeps to roots of desert flowers half-dead,
 Woke by the touch they live, and bow the thankful head.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Ibid., 323-4; Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic*, 128; Beveridge, *The Church Catechism Explained*, 135-6

⁸¹ Williams I., *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (volume 6): *The Holy Week* (London, 1880 edition), 463

⁸² Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 224 – though some Evangelical incumbents held more frequent celebrations.

⁸³ 272-3 citing *Tract 6*, 4; *Tract 26*, 3

⁸⁴ Ibid., 224; Yates N., *Liturgical Space: Christian Worship and Church Buildings in Western Europe, 1500-2000* (Aldershot, 2008), 91-2

⁸⁵ Ibid., 273 quoting Newman J.H. and Keble J., *The Remains of the late Reverend Richard Hurrell Froude* (volume 2, part 1) (London, 1838-9), 10f.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 274

⁸⁷ Williams, *Thoughts in Past Years* (1848 edition), 169

Williams also reflected on the significance of the eucharist in *The Seven Days*, where he presented the fish created on the fifth day (cf. Genesis 1:21), which relied upon the providence of God to be fed, as an image of the Christian who was totally dependent on the grace of the sacrament.⁸⁸ He went on to claim that, through the eucharist, the Christian partook of Christ's body and blood in a real way and received spiritual strength and sustenance from it:

His death our life; His Body fills our veins
With spiritual blood, lifts up with eagle wings,
And the soul's flight above the world sustains.
Thus where her sternest shadow nature flings
The meek rejoice; to all their food He brings.⁸⁹

In *The Christian Seasons* Williams presented the eucharist as an extension of the incarnation which united the recipient more closely to Christ:

. . . our God Incarnate gives Himself
Upon the Cross to be our Living Bread,
The one true food of body and of soul,
And so our very senses to Himself
E'en in Himself hath sanctified, that they
Into Himself thus more and more may grow.⁹⁰

A more direct discussion of the nature and significance of the eucharist is reflected in a number of Williams' sermons. Here, in language similar to that used by Pusey in his 1843 sermon, *The Holy Eucharist a Comfort to the Penitent*, he portrayed the sacrament as a meal by which Christians were nourished with the spiritual benefits of Christ's sacrifice and united more closely to God:

Christ hath taken on Him our flesh, that the manhood might be joined to God forever; and we, by partaking of His flesh in faith, are made one with Christ, and thus have access to the Father".⁹¹

The fact that bread and wine formed the matter of the sacrament highlighted the fact that, just as the body could not survive without physical nourishment, so the spiritual food of Holy Communion was essential for the life of the soul and was able to provide the Christian with "supernatural recovery [and] strength above nature".⁹² Williams believed that the Christian Eucharist was prefigured in the references to bread and

⁸⁸ Williams, *The Seven Days*, 261

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 284

⁹⁰ Williams, *The Christian Seasons*, 56

⁹¹ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 341; Cf. Pusey E.B., *The Holy Eucharist a Comfort to the Penitent* (Oxford, 1843), 11

wine which were found throughout the scriptures, for example, in the bread and wine brought forth by Melchizedek (cf. Genesis 14:18-9), the feeding of the Israelites with manna in the wilderness (cf. Exodus 16:15) and in Jesus' feeding of the multitudes (cf. Matthew 14:13-21).⁹³ Bread and wine, being relatively cheap and ordinary commodities, reflected the fact that God's grace was available to all people, regardless of class or wealth since "there is nothing which God considers good that He gives to the rich in preference to the poor".⁹⁴

Williams also emphasised the belief that the eucharist provided Christians with the spiritual strength to live according to the "narrow way" of faith and obedience to which baptism had committed them.⁹⁵ As was the case with baptism, this grace was brought about through uniting the communicant spiritually to Christ, so that "from union with [His] flesh . . . we derive life, of both body and soul, as being made again after His image."⁹⁶ As baptism made the recipient a member of Christ and "grafted" him, or her, on to Christ's body,⁹⁷ so the eucharist sustained and strengthened his, or her, union with Christ. Like baptism, Williams described the eucharist in terms of the parable of the vine and the branches of John 15, since

in that mysterious Sacrament of unity it had been shown that they were to become one with Him and with each other by partaking of His Body and Blood; and if His Blood was the New Wine, then it did follow that He Himself was the Vine; and if they were one with Him, they also must be parts of the Vine.⁹⁸

Williams also taught that the union with Christ brought about through the eucharist conveyed the promise of eternal life.⁹⁹ This was emphasised in a verse of "The Sacramental Hymn" from *The Cathedral*:

Here there is a living cup-
Wells of water springing up
Unto life that cannot die,-
The pledge of immortality;
'Tis a fount of heavenly strength,-
A sea of love with breadth and length
Proportion'd to th' undying soul.¹⁰⁰

⁹² Ibid., 337-8

⁹³ Ibid., 329-34

⁹⁴ Ibid., 334-5

⁹⁵ Ibid., 344-5

⁹⁶ Williams I., *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 4): *Our Lord's Ministry* (the *Second Year* (London, 1877 edition), 439

⁹⁷ Cf. Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v.1), 23

⁹⁸ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 6), 494

⁹⁹ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 363-4

In Williams' view Jesus' references in John 6 to the person who ate his body and drank his blood being "raised up on the last day" confirmed that "the eating of . . . [the] spiritual bread, is especially connected with life and resurrection".¹⁰¹ This belief had also been upheld by the early church. The Nicene Council had described the sacrament as "the symbol of resurrection" while St. Ignatius had viewed it as "the medicine of immortality, the antidote against death".¹⁰² Williams believed that the grace offered by the eucharist during earthly life ought to point the Christian towards heaven, where there would no longer be any need for sacraments as he, or she, would be in the presence of God:

The more we think of the state wherein these [sacraments] will not be needed, the more shall we value their assistance now. And the more we desire to be with Christ after death . . . the more deeply sensible shall we be of His gracious condescensions to us below.¹⁰³

The Nature of the Eucharistic Presence

As the Tractarians emphasised the importance of the eucharist and called for it to be celebrated more regularly they also began to consider in what sense Christ could be said to be present in the sacrament. As time went on the understanding of the real presence advocated by the leaders Oxford Movement tended to move beyond focusing on the presence of Christ in the celebration of the eucharist as a whole, in the heart of the worthy communicant or from viewing the consecrated elements merely as powerful symbols through which Christ was virtually present on the altar. In place of such explanations of the eucharistic presence, the Tractarians, especially Pusey and Robert Isaac Wilberforce, began to explain the presence in terms of an objective and local presence within the consecrated elements themselves.¹⁰⁴ Since it was emphasised that the elements remained bread and wine in their natural states, and that the way in which this objective presence was brought about was a mystery, the Tractarians argued that their approach was not the same as the Roman Catholic understanding of transubstantiation which, they claimed, attempted to define the real presence in a rationalistic way.¹⁰⁵ However, as Peter Nockles has noted, the Tractarian

¹⁰⁰ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 224

¹⁰¹ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 4), 419

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 439

¹⁰³ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 365

¹⁰⁴ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 235-48

¹⁰⁵ Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 183-98

use of terminology became misleading as their emphasis on the objective nature of the ‘real presence’ of Christ in the consecrated elements was closer to Roman Catholic understanding than it was to that of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen. The Tractarians were often reticent to accept that their view of the eucharist was not consistent with that of many of the pre-Tractarian High Church divines.¹⁰⁶

Like the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen and his fellow Tractarians¹⁰⁷ Isaac Williams taught that Christ was truly present in the eucharist, though he was reticent to define the exact manner of this presence claiming that it was a mystery into which human beings ought not to delve. Commenting on Jesus’ institution of the eucharist in his gospel commentary, Williams claimed that, “with regard to the words ‘This is my Body’ we must adore in silence, knowing not their full import, . . . by calling it a mystery . . . God Himself forbids us to pry into it, lest we be overwhelmed with His presence”.¹⁰⁸ As was typical of the spirit of reserve, Williams claimed that, so unfathomable and so sacred was the presence of Christ in the eucharist, that it could not be adequately defined in human language. In his view the mystery was “lowered, and it must be said, in some degree profaned”¹⁰⁹ by any attempt to explain it precisely. This view of the real presence was reflected in *Hymns on the Catechism*:

“*This is my Body*”, Thou hast said,
Thy dying shewed the same;
“*This is my Body*”, of that Bread
Four preachers still proclaim;
“My Blood is drink, my Flesh is meat indeed”,
The antidote of death, of endless life the seed.

Mysterious words! like priests of old
We eat the sacrifice;
But half the meaning is not told,
Untold the countless price;
We hear and do Thy last command,
Our hearts adore Thy words, but cannot understand.

I eat Thy Flesh, I drink Thy Blood,

¹⁰⁶ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 242

¹⁰⁷ Andrewes L., *Responsio ad Apologiam Cardinalis Bellarmini* (L.A.C.T. edition), 13 in More P.E. and Cross F.L., *Anglicanism: The Thought and Practice of the Church of England, Illustrated from the Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1935), 464; Cosin J., *Historia Transubstantiationis Papalis* (L.A.C.T. edition), 155-7 in More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, 468-9; Varley, *The Last of the Prince Bishops*, 50 citing Van Mildert W., *Lincoln’s Inn Sermons* (volume 1) (Oxford, 1831), 102-3; Palmer, *A Treatise on the Church of Christ* (v. 1), 399-400; Wilson R.F. (editor), *Letters of Spiritual Counsel and Guidance by the late Reverend John Keble* (Oxford and London, 1875), 212-3

¹⁰⁸ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 6), 456-7

¹⁰⁹ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 343-4

I cannot tell the rest;
But this I know, 'tis very good,
And I therein am blest:
Thy priest, Thy word bring down the same,
I from their hands receive, and take it in Thy Name.¹¹⁰

Williams' writings suggest that, like John Keble, Pusey and R.I. Wilberforce,¹¹¹ he understood the 'real presence' in terms of an objective presence of Christ's body and blood within the consecrated elements. This set him apart from High Churchmen like Richard Hooker, Daniel Waterland, William Wake, Jeremy Taylor, William Beveridge, William Van Mildert, Charles Daubeny and bishop Henry Phillpotts, who, like many of the Evangelicals, claimed that Christ's presence was to be discerned not in the elements themselves but in the heart of the worthy receiver, a position which has been termed 'receptionism'.¹¹² In his gospel commentary Williams criticised Jeremy Taylor's argument that Jesus' comparison of his body and blood to the manna with which the Israelites were fed in the wilderness (cf. John 6) did not refer to a sacramental eating of his body and blood in the eucharist. Taylor had rejected such a comparison since it implied that the unworthy were capable of receiving Christ's body and blood, just as many of the unworthy Israelites had been fed with the manna.¹¹³ Williams' rejection of Taylor's argument¹¹⁴ confirms his belief that the real presence was brought about by the consecration and was located in the elements themselves and not merely in the heart of the communicant. In his sermons Williams also stressed the importance of preparing worthily for the reception of Holy Communion,¹¹⁵ not because Christ's presence in the sacrament depended upon the faith or repentance of the communicant, but because drawing near to the objective presence of Christ required spiritual preparation:

¹¹⁰ Williams, *Hymns on the Catechism*, 118-9

¹¹¹ Keble J., *On Eucharistical Adoration* (Oxford, 1867 edition), 57-8; Pusey E.B., *A Letter to the Right Rev. Father in God, Richard Lord Bishop of Oxford, on the Tendency to Romanism* (Oxford, 1839), 128; Pusey E.B., *The Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist* (Oxford and London, 1853), 21-2; Wilberforce R.I., *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (London, 1853), 150; Härdelin A., *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist* (Uppsala, 1965), 165-8; cf. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 242

¹¹² Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 237-8; See, for example, Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Book V), 376; Neelands, "Christology and the Sacraments", 382-5; Van Mildert (ed.), *The Works of the Rev. Daniel Waterland D.D.* (v. 5), 465; Wake W., *A Discourse of the Holy Eucharist, in the two great points of the Real Presence and the adoration of the Host* (London, 1687), 44-5; Beveridge, *The Church Catechism Explained*, 134

¹¹³ Taylor J., *The Real Presence and Spiritual of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament Proved against the Doctrine of Transubstantiation* (London, 1654), 44-5

¹¹⁴ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 4), 432

¹¹⁵ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 369-83

In coming to the holy Communion without such a repentance we are deceiving our own hearts; and losing the great benefits of Christ's presence therein. For how can our souls' wounds be healed by that divine medicine unless we take pains to ascertain what they are - how many, how grievous and offensive to God? . . .What an awful and serious matter it is to come unto Christ's nearer presence without repentance, may be seen in the Gospels; where so much care is taken to prevent it.¹¹⁶

Williams' belief that the Eucharistic presence was independent of the faith of the recipient is confirmed by his claim that it was both "real" and "substantial".¹¹⁷ Although he did not provide a definition of these terms they can be seen as pointing to belief in a presence in the consecrated elements which made them more than just signs representing Christ's body and blood. Since Williams emphasised the fact that the Church of England's definition of the real presence was not to be understood in the sense in which the Church of Rome had taught in its definition of transubstantiation,¹¹⁸ it would seem that his use of the terms 'real' and 'substantial' was not a specific reference to the Platonic dualism of substance and form.

Williams also claimed that the objective nature of the real presence was confirmed by Jesus' eucharistic discourse in John 6.¹¹⁹ The use of the Greek verb *τρῶγειν*, which referred literally to the communicant 'chewing' Christ's flesh, gave this passage a realist tone which, in Williams' view, emphasised the fact that Christ was truly present in the consecrated bread and wine.¹²⁰ The fact that Christ's body was described by the evangelists and by St. Paul as being both 'broken' and 'given' confirmed the fact that the consecrated bread was both bread and also Christ's body.¹²¹

While Isaac Williams upheld the objective presence of Christ in the consecrated elements he also rejected the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. This belief, which had been taught since the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), was confirmed at the Council of Trent in 1551 and claimed that "by the consecration of the bread and wine, there takes place the change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and the

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 372

¹¹⁷ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 350

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 350-1

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 346

¹²⁰ Ibid., 438

¹²¹ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 6), 456-7

whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood”.¹²² According to this understanding, after consecration the original substances of bread and wine were completely transformed since they were changed entirely into Christ’s body and blood, though the outward form, or accidents, of bread and wine remained unchanged. Williams claimed to be opposed to such an understanding of the real presence, which he believed went against the principle of reserve. In *Tract 80* he argued that the doctrine was an example of one of the forms of blindness which God had inflicted upon humanity as a punishment for attempting to gain knowledge of truth by speculation, while in *Tract 87* he described it as a “low and carnal deceit” which arose from the attempt to “bring out the doctrine of the Eucharist from the holy silence which adoring reverence suggests”.¹²³

Williams’ claim that the consecrated elements were both bread and wine *and* Christ’s body and blood¹²⁴ was not in keeping with the doctrine of transubstantiation, according to which, after the consecration, nothing remained of the original substances of bread and wine.¹²⁵ Even though the outward form of the elements remained, the fact that their substances changed meant that they ceased to be bread and wine. At the same time it is important to note that, while Williams claimed to reject transubstantiation, there is evidence to suggest that he did not fully understand the meaning of the doctrine. In his *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* he wrote that,

Our Church does not say that the inward part is a mere spiritual remembrance, as some inconsiderate persons might imagine, nor that the outward part is the Body and Blood of Christ, as the Romanists maintain, and this she has further guarded by adding “verily and indeed taken and received” not a mere figure of speech or symbol¹²⁶

This was a misinterpretation of classic transubstantiation which, as has been noted, did not claim “that the outward part” or accidents were changed but rather the substance.¹²⁷ Williams’ words would seem to suggest that he failed to perceive the distinction between substance and accident which is central to the doctrine of transubstantiation and it may be that he misinterpreted the Roman emphasis on transubstantiation as teaching something akin to a physical presence in the elements.

¹²² Tanner N.P., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (volume 2) (London, 1990), 695

¹²³ Williams, “On Reserve (no. 80)”, *Tracts for the Times* (v.4), 45; Williams, “On Reserve (no. 87)”, *Tracts for the Times* (v. 5), 101

¹²⁴ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 6), 456-7

¹²⁵ Cf. Aquinas T., *Summa Theologicae: Volume 58, The Eucharistic Presence* (3a 73-78), Barden W. (editor) (London, 1965 edition), 61-2

¹²⁶ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 343

This was ironic since part of the intention behind the definition of transubstantiation was to counter ultra-realist interpretations of the eucharistic presence by defining it in metaphysical as opposed to physical terms. The teaching of Thomas Aquinas had also made it clear that transubstantiation pointed not to a physical but to a sacramental presence in the elements.¹²⁸ Since the doctrine of transubstantiation was rejected by almost all of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen and the Tractarians,¹²⁹ it is possible that they also shared Williams' misunderstanding of the Roman position. According to Alf Härdelin the misinterpretation of terms such as 'corporal' and 'substantial' as being interchangeable with 'physical' and 'sensible' was common among the Tractarians.¹³⁰

Two of the more pro-Roman Tractarians, W.G. Ward and R.I. Wilberforce, claimed that the Anglican belief that the substances of bread and wine remained after consecration could be reconciled with the doctrine of transubstantiation. In their view the Roman belief that the accidents of bread and wine remained after the consecration of the elements was the same as the Anglican belief that the bread and wine continued to exist along with the objective presence of Christ's body and blood.¹³¹ When understood in this sense it seems likely that the distinction between Isaac Williams' understanding of the real presence and the Roman definition was primarily a difference of definition and expression rather than of fundamental principle.

Williams' reaction to what he understood as the meaning of transubstantiation led him to portray the real presence in spiritual rather than in physical or natural terms. Such an approach was common among the Tractarians. However, it is important to note that, in their view, the term 'spiritual' was not used in opposition to 'real' so that it implied that Christ was only figuratively present in the sacrament, as Evangelicals like J.B. Sumner understood the term. Rather, for the Tractarians, the

¹²⁷ Haffner P., *The Sacramental Mystery* (Leominster, 1999), 89-90

¹²⁸ O'Collins G. and Farrugia M., *Catholicism: The Story of Catholic Christianity* (Oxford, 2003), 261; Haffner, *The Sacramental Mystery*, 89 quoting Aquinas T., *Summae Theologiae* III, q.77, a.7

¹²⁹ See, for example, Andrewes, *Responsio ad Apologiam Cardinalis Bellarmini*, 265 in More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, 464-5; Cosin J., *A History of Popish Transubstantiation* (London, 1676), 3; Thorndike H., *Of the Laws of the Church*, in *The Theological Works of Herbert Thorndike* (v. 4, pt. 1) (Oxford, 1852, L.A.C.T. edition), 6; Beveridge, *The Church Catechism Explained*, 135; Johnson J., *The Unbloody Sacrifice and Altar* (volume 1) in *The Theological Works of the Rev. John Johnson* (volume 1) (London, 1847 edition), 516-7; Jones, *A Course of Lectures on the Figurative Language of Holy Scripture*, 97; Pusey, *The Holy Eucharist a Comfort to the Penitent*, 2; Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 167 quoting Pusey, *The Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist*, 42, 26

¹³⁰ Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 156-7

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 193-4

term ‘spiritual’ referred to “the most real and intense mode of presence, since it means a presence not merely external and visible, but an inward and life-giving presence to the regenerate man”.¹³² This is highly reminiscent of Isaac Williams’ emphasis on the spiritual rather than the literal meaning of scripture being its most true meaning, and points to the influence of the principle of reserve over the Tractarian approach to the sacraments, since the spiritual presence of Christ is able to nourish the Christian at a level beyond the merely physical. In *Tract 86* Williams claimed that understanding the real presence in spiritual terms was a means of avoiding “harsh definitions of [Christ’s] mysterious presence in the Eucharist”,¹³³ which would be to go against the principle of reserve. By defining the eucharistic presence in spiritual as opposed to physical terms Williams was able to emphasise the belief that, although Christ was objectively present in the consecrated elements so that they became inwardly and spiritually his body and blood, they physically remained bread and wine in their natural states:

. . . we consider all this to be in a Sacramental manner, having an outward sign of bread and wine, which our outward senses behold, while the inner man is spiritually made partaker of the Body and Blood of Christ by faith, in truth and effect.¹³⁴

Williams’ use of the word ‘sacramental’ would seem to be synonymous with the term ‘spiritual’, and suggests that the consecrated bread and wine contained the real and objective presence of Christ so that they became what they signified while remaining in their natural state, in contrast to the Roman belief that they were transformed in terms of their substance. For Williams and the Tractarians, the ‘sacramental’ presence in the eucharist would have been more ‘real’ than any metaphysical presence of substance which could be brought about by transubstantiation since the purpose of the sacrament was to nourish the communicant spiritually and not physically.

Isaac Williams’ emphasis on the ‘sacramental’ as opposed to ‘physical’ presence of Christ in the eucharist was echoed in the writings of a number of pre-Tractarian High Churchmen including Lancelot Andrewes, John Cosin and Herbert Thorndike as well as the Usager Nonjurors and John Johnson of Cranbrook.¹³⁵ While

¹³² *Ibid.*, 157

¹³³ Williams, “Indications of a Superintending Providence in the Preservation of the Prayer Book (no. 86)”, *Tracts* (v. 5), 35

¹³⁴ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 351

¹³⁵ More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, 464-5 quoting a translation of Andrewes L., *Responsio ad Apologiam Cardinalis Bellarmini* (Oxford, 1851 *L.A.C.T.* edition), 265; Thorndike, *Of the Laws of the Church*, in

these divines, whose understanding of the eucharistic presence has been termed ‘virtualism’, shared Williams’ rejection of transubstantiation in favour of a ‘spiritual’ presence in the consecrated elements, there was a subtle difference in how they understood the nature of the real presence. Unlike Williams and the Tractarians, who believed that the bread and wine were changed so that they contained the objective presence of Christ’s body and blood, the virtualists denied that the elements in themselves contained any presence of Christ but acted as vehicles which conveyed his sacramental body and blood to the recipient. Like the water used in baptism, the bread and wine of the eucharist were not changed in any way but were set apart for a special purpose so that they became Christ’s body and blood in “spirit, power and effect”.¹³⁶ The virtualist understanding of the real presence can be best summed up in the words of John Johnson who claimed that,

the Bread and Wine are not the Body and Blood, in themselves considered, nor merely by their resembling or representing the Body and Blood, but by the inward invisible power of the Spirit; by Which the Sacramental Body and Blood are made as powerful and effectual for the ends of religion, as the natural Body Itself could be if it was present.¹³⁷

The fact that the Nonjurors refused to accept that any substantial change took place in the elements of bread and wine was a severe obstacle to their seeking unity with the Greek Orthodox Church.¹³⁸ Pusey, John Keble and R.I. Wilberforce all believed that virtualism fell short of the true understanding of the real presence,¹³⁹ and it was for this reason that they began to use the term ‘objective’ to refer to a change brought about in the bread and wine at the consecration.¹⁴⁰ The understanding of the eucharistic presence expressed in Isaac Williams’ writings therefore seems to be

The Theological Works of Herbert Thorndike (v. 4, pt. 1), 34-5; Cosin, *The History of Popish Transubstantiation*, 2; Smith J.D., *The Eucharistic Doctrine of the Later Nonjurors: A Revisionist View of the Eighteenth-Century Usages Controversy* (Cambridge, 2000), 23 quoting Brett T., *A Collection of the Principle Liturgies, used by the Christian Church* (London, 1720), 169; Johnson, *The Unbloody Sacrifice* (v. 1), 266

¹³⁶ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 236-7; Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 126; Mackean W.H., *The Eucharistic Doctrine of the Oxford Movement: A Critical Survey* (London, 1933), 1-7

¹³⁷ Johnson, *The Unbloody Sacrifice* (v.1), 266

¹³⁸ Stone D., *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (volume 2) (London, 1909), 478-9

¹³⁹ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement*, 241; Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 165-7 quoting Keble, *On Eucharistical Adoration*, viii

¹⁴⁰ Pusey E.B., *The Doctrine of the Real Presence as contained in the Fathers* (Oxford, 1855), 719-20; Pusey E.B., *This is My Body: A Sermon Preached before the University at St. Mary’s* (Oxford, 1871), 40; Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 150

closer to that of the his Tractarian colleagues than it was to that of the virtualist High Churchmen and Nonjurors.

Williams' emphasis on the sacramental as against the corporeal presence of Christ in the sacrament also seems to be confirmed by his rejection of Roman Catholic practices which made the consecrated host a focus of veneration. This was the logical conclusion of his argument since, if Christ's presence in the elements is to be discerned only on a spiritual level, then venerating the consecrated bread would seem to serve little purpose. In *Tract 87* he claimed that the exposition of the host was opposed to the principle of reserve,¹⁴¹ while in one of his sermons he argued that such practices were a corruption of Christ's command that the consecrated bread was to be *eaten*:

Our Lord did not say, this is your God whom you must adore and worship under this Sacramental sign, and to which you must offer Prayers, as the new religion of Rome teaches and requires . . . The Church of Rome preserves the sacred bread to worship it as our Lord's Body, while the Church of England, by God's great mercy, protects against anything of this kind.¹⁴²

While this set Williams apart from some of the more advanced Tractarians and early Ritualists like John Mason Neale, who had begun to advocate practices like exposition and benediction of the blessed sacrament,¹⁴³ a similar view was taken by pre-Tractarian High Churchmen including George Bull, William Wake, John Johnson and William Van Mildert.¹⁴⁴ There is no evidence that Newman, Keble or Pusey were in favour of such practices. Although Keble and Pusey both advocated eucharistic adoration in the sense of showing reverence for the presence of Christ in the consecrated elements in the context of the eucharist itself,¹⁴⁵ Williams does not seem to have been condemning this but rather the practice of reserving the elements specifically to worship them outside the celebration of the eucharist. In *Hymns on the Catechism* he claimed that it was appropriate to "kneel", "bow" and "adore" before the presence of the Lord in the sacrament.¹⁴⁶ *Tract 87* suggests that Williams opposed

¹⁴¹ Williams, "On Reserve (no. 87)", *Tracts for the Times* (v. 5), 101

¹⁴² Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 352-3

¹⁴³ cf. Rowell, *The Vision Glorious*, 115, 132

¹⁴⁴ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 243 citing Mackean, *Eucharistic Doctrine of the Oxford Movement*, 156-7; Bull G., *A Vindication of the Church of England* (1671), 221 in Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (v. 2), 445; Wake, *A Discourse of the Holy Eucharist*, 118-120; Johnson, *The Unbloody Sacrifice* (v. 2), 25 in Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 477; Varley, *The Last of the Prince Bishops*, 37

¹⁴⁵ Keble, *On Eucharistical Adoration*, 57-9; Pusey E.B., *The Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ the Doctrine of the English Church* (Oxford, 1857), 335-6

¹⁴⁶ Williams, *Hymns on the Catechism*, 125

Roman Catholic devotion to the consecrated elements not because he believed that it was wrong to show reverence for them, but because he felt that practices which involved displaying the host in a monstrance were seriously lacking in reserve:

The want of reserve and reverence which attends the elevation of the Host, and the public processions connected with it, is very great indeed: these are indications . . . that it is *popular impression*, and *not a sense of God's presence*, which is considered: for here there can be no true veneration: and "where God is there must be the *fear* of Him". They are of the nature of religious frauds; it is *effect* which is more thought of than *truth*.¹⁴⁷

Bearing in mind the importance of reserve for Williams, it becomes apparent that his dislike for these practices did not necessarily arise from any scruples over the nature of the real presence. On the contrary, it was because he believed that Christ was truly present in the consecrated bread and wine that he felt that they ought to be treated with the utmost reverence. Any act which involved exposing the body and blood of Christ to the public gaze would therefore have been deeply distasteful for Williams. It may have been for the same reason that none of the leading Tractarians during the 1830-40s began to advocate practices like exposition and benediction of the blessed sacrament.

The understanding of the real presence expressed in the writings of Isaac Williams would appear to have been the same as that held by Pusey and the other Tractarians. This would seem to be confirmed by the fact that Williams wrote to Pusey to offer his support when his 1843 sermon on the Eucharist was condemned as teaching doctrine contrary to the Church of England.¹⁴⁸ This sermon had much in common with Williams' teaching in that it emphasised the fact that the Eucharistic presence was not brought about by a change of substance in the bread and wine and was a mystery which could not be completely fathomed by the human mind. Pusey attempted to support his understanding of the real presence by referring to the writings of the church fathers and the Anglican divines.¹⁴⁹ Williams' support for Pusey when he was condemned as teaching unsound doctrine suggests that the two men shared a common understanding of the real presence at this point. In a later letter he sought to discourage Pusey from seeking legal redress from the opposition which he had received in case the outcome of such proceedings led to the doctrine of the real presence being judged as contrary to the teaching of the Church of England:

¹⁴⁷ Williams, "On Reserve (no. 87)", 101

¹⁴⁸ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (no date, probably 1843), Pusey House Library (L.B.V., no. 10)

Is it desirable to press the subject of your sermon any further? It seems to me hardly fair to force the Church of England to a decision in her present state; is it not like putting a very great trial of strength upon a person who is beginning to recover from a serious sickness? And besides, the panic against extreme views which swelled the majority the other day greatly lessens the possibility of a fair judgement at all . . . The decision of our Ecclesiastical Courts is very important on matters of discipline, but it is not at all satisfactory in a matter of such high doctrine when, after all, it is but the opinion of a few individuals . . . And is it not at present doubtful whether they can be considered to have condemned any doctrine at all. Is it not an attempt to wound us all through you by seizing any opening for doing so? Do not their supporters generally through the country allow that there is no wrong doctrine in the sermon, but that it was injudicious, and that something must be done against us? I know of no one who condemns the doctrine. My notion is what Judge Coleridge says, that you cannot be placed in a better position than you now hold (but may be in a much worse). It has spread the true doctrine more deeply and extensively than anything else could have done.¹⁵⁰

Williams also wrote to R.W. Jelf, a traditional High Churchman who had been one of the doctors who sat on the board which had condemned Pusey's sermon. In his letter Williams asked Jelf that if, as he had suggested previously, he felt that Pusey's sermon did not contain any theological error, then he should make his feelings publicly known.¹⁵¹ It is significant that, among those who criticised Pusey's sermon and accused him of misrepresenting the teaching of the Anglican divines, were a number of 'Z' High Churchmen, including Henry Handley Norris and Joshua Watson.¹⁵² Williams' support of Pusey's sermon therefore confirms that his understanding of the nature of the real presence was consistent with Tractarian teaching and that he did not share the misgivings of the High Churchmen.

In 1855 Williams wrote to Pusey thanking him for his *The Doctrine of the Real Presence*, a large book which attempted to prove that the objective real presence had been taught by the church fathers.¹⁵³ The following year Pusey wrote a declaration to archbishop Tate of Canterbury to protest against G.A. Denison's prosecution and deprivation (a sentence which was subsequently reversed on appeal) for having preached a sermon which taught the objective nature of the real presence.¹⁵⁴ Along with Pusey, John Keble and others, this declaration was also signed by Isaac

¹⁴⁹ Forrester, *Young Doctor Pusey*, 193-4

¹⁵⁰ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (no date, probably 1844), Pusey House Library (L.B.V., no. 18)

¹⁵¹ Williams I. to Jelf R.W. (no date), Lambeth Palace Library M.S. 4476, ff. 73-4

¹⁵² Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 239-40; citing Norris H.H. to Perceval A.P. (28 July, 1843), P.H. Pusey Papers (transcripts); Churton, *Memoir of Joshua Watson* (v. 2), 153

¹⁵³ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (6 July, 1855), Pusey House Library (L.B.V., no. 28)

Williams. The declaration claimed that the real presence was brought about by the consecration of the bread and wine and was independent of the faith and worthiness of the receivers. It also claimed, as Lancelot Andrewes had done, that Christ's sacramental presence in the consecrated elements was worthy of adoration, though not the elements themselves. This understanding of the real presence was presented as being consistent with the thirty-nine articles and "in harmony with the Faith and Teaching of the Ancient Undivided Church".¹⁵⁵ According to John Keble the purpose of the declaration was for the subscribers "to liberate our own conscience by declaring publicly to our superiors that we must go on in our faith whatever penalties are incurred".¹⁵⁶ The fact that Williams was prepared to add his name to the petition suggests that he agreed with the objective understanding of the real presence held by Denison, Pusey and John Keble. Like his fellow Tractarians Isaac Williams' view of the real presence went beyond the doctrines which were held in the pre-Tractarian era by both the receptionists and virtualists and which continued to be held by 'Z' High Churchmen like Richard Bagot, Henry Phillpotts and Edward Churton, who rejected the more advanced Tractarian understanding.¹⁵⁷

The Eucharistic Sacrifice

Apart from emphasising his belief in the real presence, Isaac Williams' writings also upheld the belief that the eucharist was to be understood as being a sacrifice.¹⁵⁸ Whereas the Evangelicals of his day tended to claim that the eucharist was simply a recalling of Christ's sacrificial death on Calvary,¹⁵⁹ Williams held that celebrating the sacrament in remembrance of Christ was to be understood as a "memorial . . . of His death, as a solemn rite in commemoration of the New Covenant in His Blood".¹⁶⁰ His use of the words 'memorial' and 'commemoration' here seem to have been influenced by the Greek term *αναμνησις* (cf. Luke 22:19), which referred not just to a mental

¹⁵⁴ See Hylson-Smith, *High Churchmanship in the Church of England*, 197-8; Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 242

¹⁵⁵ L.P.L. "Tate Papers" 79, ff. 93-4

¹⁵⁶ Keble J. to Williams I. (5 November, 1856), Lambeth Palace Library MS 4474, f. 154

¹⁵⁷ Phillpotts H., *Letters to Charles Butler Esq. on the Theological Parts of his Book on the Roman Catholic Church* (Volume 3) (London, 1826), 235-6; Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 244 citing P.H. Denison Papers, B/5/69/ii, Bagot R. to Denison G.A. (10 June, 1853); Phillpotts H., *A Pastoral Letter to the Clergy of his Diocese, before His Triennial Visitation . . . 1857* (London, 1857), 66-7; Bethell C., *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Bangor . . . 1856* (London, 1856), 32; Churton E. (editor), *A Supplement to Waterland's Works*, xi

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 203-19

¹⁵⁹ Scotland, *Evangelical Anglicans in a Revolutionary Age*, 397

recalling of a past event, but to a re-living of it in a concrete way, so that it becomes a reality in the present.¹⁶¹ Belief in the eucharistic sacrifice was common to both the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen and the Tractarians.¹⁶² Like the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen, Williams believed that the sacrificial nature of the eucharist arose from the fact that Christ had offered his life to the Father not just on the cross, but primarily in the Last Supper when he had instituted the sacrament.¹⁶³ The eucharist was therefore the “New Passover instituted of Christ Himself, and having a reference to the great Paschal feast then about to take place [i.e. Christ’s death and resurrection]”.¹⁶⁴ It continued to make Jesus’ death a reality in the church until the end of time and was a bloodless sacrifice offered “not in beasts but in bread”.¹⁶⁵ In his *Hymns on the Catechism* Williams emphasised this belief that the eucharist was a “memorial sacrifice” which was prefigured by the sacrifices of the old covenant and commemorated Christ’s death on the cross:

Of old when men to Thee drew nigh,
They gave the goat and sheep to die;
But when before Thee we have stood,
'Tis with a nobler Victim’s blood.

And when of old those offerings bled,
The priests upon the victim fed;
So this memorial sacrifice
The Spirit’s life to us supplies.¹⁶⁶

The relationship between Christ’s death on the cross and the sacrifice of the eucharist was also emphasised in *The Altar* through Williams’ presentation of the images of a priest celebrating the Communion service as being connected to different

¹⁶⁰ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 313

¹⁶¹ Cf. Kittel G. (editor), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (volume 1) (Michigan, 1964), 348-9

¹⁶² More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, 464-5, citing a translation of Andrewes, *Responsio ad Apologiam Cardinalis Bellarmini*. 250 ff.; Thorndike, *Of the Laws of the Church* in *The Theological Works of Herbert Thorndike* (v. 4, pt. 1), 106-9; Forbes W., *Considerationes Modestae et Pacificae Controversiarum* (Oxford, 1856 L.A.C.T. edition), 577, 579; Stevens (ed.), *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of the Rev. William Jones* (v. 5), 23; Hicke G., *Two Treatises on the Christian Priesthood and on the Dignity of the Episcopal Order* (volume 1) (Oxford, 1847, L.A.C.T. edition), 15-17; Johnson, *The Unbloody Sacrifice* (v. 1) 305; Palmer, *A Treatise on the Church of Christ* (v.1), 400; Pusey E.B., “Catena Patrum No. IV (no. 81)”, *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford* (volume 3) (London, 1838), 5; Keble, *On Eucharistical Adoration*, 70-1.; Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 351

¹⁶³ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 6), 382, 509; cf. Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic*, 137-8

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 387

¹⁶⁶ Williams, *Hymns on the Catechism*, 114

aspects of Christ's passion. Here, for example, the priest uncovering the bread and wine for the celebration of the eucharist was seen as alluding to Christ being stripped of his garments, the offering of the oblation in silence to his being scourged, the priest placing the bread and wine on the altar to Christ being placed on the cross, the broken bread to his death on the cross and the covering of the consecrated elements to his body being wrapped in the linen shroud.¹⁶⁷ The subtitle of the work, *Meditations in Verse on the Great Christian Sacrifice*, is also significant since the "Great Christian Sacrifice" carries a double meaning and implies a direct link between Christ's death on the cross and the celebration of the eucharist. This was also highlighted by Williams' inclusion of a quotation from the writings of Thomas á Kempis in the advertisement to the work which claims that the celebration of eucharist makes Christ's sacrificial death a living reality in the present moment:

So great, so new, and so joyful ought it to seem unto thee, when thou celebratest or partakest in these Holy Mysteries, as if on this same day Christ hanging on the cross did suffer and die for the salvation of mankind.¹⁶⁸

The fact that Williams quoted from a Medieval Roman Catholic theologian here is interesting, since his references are normally restricted to the writings of the church fathers and the Anglican divines. It is likely that he wished to stress the fact that the sacrificial understanding of the eucharist was a tradition which could be traced through the medieval as well as the patristic period.

Williams' belief that the eucharist was a real sacrifice of bread and wine to God as a memorial offering of Christ's body and blood was explicitly stated in his commentary on the book of Genesis:

We too have an altar, an oblation, and a sacrifice; it combines both offerings which God appointed; the fruits of the ground in the Bread and Wine, and therefore called the "unbloody sacrifice," and Eucharistic; but the Body and Blood are also there in memorials of Christ's death.¹⁶⁹

This understanding of the eucharistic sacrifice was also reflected in his *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* where he taught that the sacrament is to be understood as "the Christian sacrifice or oblation, in memorial of the true sacrifice on the Cross".¹⁷⁰ His use of the term "unbloody sacrifice" to describe the eucharist would seem to suggest that his understanding was influenced by both the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen

¹⁶⁷ Williams, *The Altar*, images 12, 13, 20, 26, 29 (no pagination)

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, v (quotation unreferenced)

¹⁶⁹ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 417

and his fellow Tractarians since this was a term which was used to describe the eucharist not just at the Council of Trent but also by John Johnson of Cranbrook and John Keble.¹⁷¹ The use of this term by the High Churchmen and Tractarians does not necessarily imply that they fully accepted the Tridentine understanding of the eucharistic sacrifice, however. Since they believed that Rome, as a result of the doctrine of transubstantiation, taught that the eucharist was an offering of the natural body and blood of Christ,¹⁷² the term “unbloody sacrifice” can be seen as pointing to an understanding of the eucharist which saw the bread and wine as representing, or as containing the sacramental as opposed to the physical presence of, Christ’s body and blood.

While the sacrificial nature of the eucharist was reflected in the writings of Froude, John Keble and Pusey,¹⁷³ the belief that the sacrament was a real offering of the consecrated elements in memory of Christ’s death was also upheld by those High Churchmen who maintained the virtualist understanding of the real presence.¹⁷⁴ William Forbes, for example, described the eucharist as a

. . . commemoration and representation of that which was performed once for all in that one only Sacrifice of the Cross . . . by which ministers of the Church most humbly beseech God the Father on account of the perpetual Victim of that one only Sacrifice.¹⁷⁵

Jones of Nayland also termed the sacrament the “commemorative Sacrifice of the New Testament”,¹⁷⁶ while the Nonjuror George Hicke claimed that the consecrated elements were offered in order “to commemorate, and represent the oblation of Christ upon the cross, in this holy Sacrament”.¹⁷⁷

A clear point of contact between Williams and his High Church predecessors was the belief that the eucharist was prefigured by the Jewish sacrifices of the Old Testament. John Johnson, for example, claimed that the necessary criteria for offering

¹⁷⁰ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 316

¹⁷¹ O’Collins and Farrugia, *Catholicism*, 265-6; Johnson, *The Unbloody Sacrifice and Altar* (vv. 1-2), passim; Keble, *On Eucharistical Adoration*, 66-7

¹⁷² Johnson, *The Unbloody Sacrifice* (v. 1), 5

¹⁷³ Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 203-4; Keble, *On Eucharistical Adoration* (1857 edition), 66-71; Pusey, “Catena Patrum No. IV (No. 81)”, *Tracts for the Times* (v. 3), 5; Pusey, *This is My Body*, 40-1 quoting *Nouvelle explication donnée par l’Abbé Bousset au Ministre Ferry, sur le sacrifice de l’Euchariste Œuvres*, t.xxv, 112-4

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Johnson, *The Unbloody Sacrifice* (v. 1), 305

¹⁷⁵ Forbes, *Considerationes Modestæ*, 577, 579

¹⁷⁶ Stevens (ed.), *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of the Rev. William Jones* (v. 5), 23

¹⁷⁷ Hicke, *Two Treatises on the Christian Priesthood* (v. 1), 15

sacrifice under the old law were all fulfilled in the eucharist.¹⁷⁸ Williams claimed that the sacrificial nature of the eucharist was implicit in the fact that the consecrated elements were both bread and wine and also Christ's flesh and blood, since under the Old Covenant, sacrifices were offered of both flour and meat.¹⁷⁹ The eucharist therefore fulfilled the sacrifices of the Jewish Law,¹⁸⁰ and combined the former offering for sin with the sacrifice of thanksgiving:

The new rite therefore which our Lord was ordaining at this Last Supper was to partake of both of these. Surely, in connexion with Christ's death, there must ever be on our part the bitter humiliation and sense of sin . . . and yet at the same time a thankful remembrance of His death . . . And therefore it is called the Eucharist, a thank offering, or, as our Church describes it, "a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving".¹⁸¹

Just as the Old Covenant had been ratified by the sprinkling of the blood of animals, so the New Covenant was confirmed by the shedding of Christ's blood upon the cross. The continuance of the New Covenant required that the blood of Christ be offered until the end of time by the spiritual priesthood of the church.¹⁸²

Isaac Williams was at one with both the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen and the Tractarians in rejecting the understanding of the eucharistic sacrifice put forward by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent which had taught that "in the Mass, the very same Christ is contained and offered in a bloodless manner who made a bloody sacrifice of himself once for all upon the cross".¹⁸³ For the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen and the Tractarians such an understanding of the eucharistic sacrifice was anathema. They claimed that, because the doctrine of transubstantiation taught that Christ was present in the elements in a physical and not just in a sacramental sense, the Roman Church had come to believe that the priest re-sacrificed Jesus by offering his natural body and blood to the Father.¹⁸⁴ In *The Unbloody Sacrifice*, John Johnson wrote that,

¹⁷⁸ Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic*, 137; Cf. Johnson, *The Unbloody Sacrifice* (v. 1), 72 ff. and 86 ff.

¹⁷⁹ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 4), 411

¹⁸⁰ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 6), 456-7

¹⁸¹ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 317-8

¹⁸² Williams., *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 6), 486-8

¹⁸³ Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (v. 2), 733

¹⁸⁴ More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, 465, citing a translation of Andrewes, *Responsio ad Apologiam Cardinalis Bellarmini*, 250 ff.; Thorndike, *Of the Laws of the Church in The Theological Works of Herbert Thorndike* (v. 4, pt. 1), 112-3; Johnson, *The Unbloody Sacrifice* (v. 1), 5; Palmer W., *A Treatise on the Church of Christ* (v. 2), 347; Pusey, "Catena Patrum No. IV (no. 81)", *Tracts for the Times* (v. 3), 7-11

when we say we offer the Body and Blood, we do not mean what is commonly called the Sacrifice of the Mass, not the substantial Body and Blood of Christ . . . but the Bread and Wine substituted by the Divine Word for His Body and Blood.¹⁸⁵

The belief that the doctrine of transubstantiation implied that Christ was somehow re-sacrificed each time the eucharist was celebrated appears to have been a misinterpretation of the Tridentine understanding of the eucharistic sacrifice, however. In reality the Roman Church never taught that the eucharist was a new sacrifice but that it was a renewal of the sacrifice of Calvary made present and offered in the form of bread and wine,¹⁸⁶ a position closer to the understanding of the High Churchmen and Tractarians than they seem to have realised. Regardless of this, the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen attempted to distance themselves from what they saw as the errors in the Roman approach by referring to the eucharist in terms of a “representative offering” or a “commemorative sacrifice”.¹⁸⁷ John Johnson objected to the Roman belief that the sacrifice of the eucharist was identical “in substance” to Christ’s death on the cross and held that the two sacrifices were distinct from each other since the eucharist was an offering which represented the one sacrifice of Calvary before God.¹⁸⁸ The Eucharistic sacrifice was therefore not the same sacrifice as that of Calvary, but commemorated it sacramentally. Although the High Churchmen believed that, in applying the merits of Christ’s death to the worshipper, the eucharist could bring about the forgiveness of sins, they denied that it was propitiatory in itself, as Rome did.¹⁸⁹

The fact that Isaac Williams rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation suggests that he also shared the typical High Church objection to the Tridentine understanding of the eucharistic sacrifice. In his gospel commentary he pointed out that the priest did not repeat the sacrifice of Calvary in the eucharist but that Christ, acting through his priest, offered his body and blood to the Father.¹⁹⁰ In accordance with the pre-Tractarian High Church belief that such was the understanding of the

¹⁸⁵ Johnson, *The Unbloody Sacrifice* (v. 1), 305

¹⁸⁶ Cf. O’Collins and Farrugia, *Catholicism*, 265-6; Haffner, *The Sacramental Mystery*, 97-9

¹⁸⁷ Cf. More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, 465, citing a translation of Andrewes, *Responsio ad Apologiam Cardinalis Bellarmini*, 250 ff.; Laud W., *The Works of William Laud* (volume 2) (Oxford, 1853 L.A.C.T. edition), 340

¹⁸⁸ Johnson, *The Unbloody Sacrifice* (v. 1), 5

¹⁸⁹ Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic*, 137; Thorndike, *Of the Laws of the Church*, in *The Theological Works of Herbert Thorndike* (v. 4, pt. 1), 109; Forbes, *Considerationes Modestæ*, 578-9; Johnson, *The Unbloody Sacrifice*, in *The Theological Works of the Rev. John Johnson*, 5

eucharist held by the early church fathers,¹⁹¹ Williams quoted John Chrysostom who had claimed that, “we do not offer another sacrifice, as the high priests of old but we ever offer the same, or rather we make the memorial of the sacrifice”.¹⁹² Although Williams did describe the eucharist in explicitly sacrificial terms, as the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen had done, he seems to have shared their belief that it was not the same sacrifice as that offered by Jesus on Calvary but rather an “ever-continued and perpetual memorial” of it as an “ever-present sacrifice unto the end” of time.¹⁹³ Williams’ description of the eucharist in terms of a commemoration, representation and memorial help distance his references to the eucharistic sacrifice from the Tridentine understanding and emphasise the fact that, while he believed that the eucharist was inextricably linked to the sacrifice of the cross, it was not a repetition of it:

The sacrifice is a commemoration. The breaking of the bread, represents our Lord’s Body broken for us; and the pouring out of the wine sets forth the pouring out of His Blood. And this memorial we make not only before men, as a setting forth of His death for us, but also before God.¹⁹⁴

Williams’ understanding of the eucharist as being a ‘commemorative’ sacrifice seems to deviate from the view of the eucharistic sacrifice taken by Pusey and R.I. Wilberforce during the 1850s. In *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* Wilberforce claimed that, since it was essential to believe in the ‘objective’ presence of Christ in the consecrated elements in order to believe in the eucharistic sacrifice as taught by the primitive church, the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen had not really accepted the doctrine.¹⁹⁵ Pusey also claimed that the Nonjurors had seen the eucharist merely as a sacrifice of bread and wine and not as an offering of Christ’s body and blood.¹⁹⁶ Since, as we have seen, numerous High Churchmen had understood the eucharist in sacrificial terms, this suggests that Pusey and Wilberforce’s understanding had developed beyond the pre-Tractarian High Church understanding of the commemorative and representative nature of the eucharistic sacrifice.

¹⁹⁰ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 6), 462-3

¹⁹¹ Cf. Forbes, *Considerationes Modestæ*, 577. 579; Johnson, *The Unbloody Sacrifice* (v. 1), 5; Hickeys, *Two Treatises on the Christian Priesthood* (v. 1), 16-7

¹⁹² Ibid. citing St. John Chrysostom; cf. Wiles M., *The Christian Fathers* (London, 1966), 132

¹⁹³ Williams I., *Sermons on the Epistles and Gospels for the Sundays and Holy Days throughout the Year* (volume 1) (London, 1880), 363

¹⁹⁴ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 316

¹⁹⁵ Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 347-351

¹⁹⁶ Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 212-3

Whereas Isaac Williams' writings, like those of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen, tended to distinguish between the commemoration of Calvary in the eucharist and that sacrifice itself,¹⁹⁷ Pusey and Wilberforce identified the eucharist with the cross in terms which were much closer to the Tridentine understanding. For Pusey the eucharist was not just a commemoration, representation or memorial of Calvary, but the means by which Christ's sacrificial death continued to be offered by the church through its priesthood.¹⁹⁸ In a university sermon of 1871, Pusey's use of a quotation from the Roman Catholic Abbé Bousset suggests that his understanding had become almost indistinguishable from that of the Tridentine definition:

“The essence of the Sacrifice of the Eucharist,” Bousset has said, “consists precisely in the Consecration, whereby . . . His Body and Precious Blood are placed really upon the Holy Table, mystically separated under the species of bread and wine. By this action, taken precisely, and with out anything added by the priest, Jesus Christ is really offered to His Father, inasmuch as His Body and Blood are placed before Him, actually clothed with the signs representing His Death.”¹⁹⁹

Wilberforce saw the Eucharist not just as an offering of Christ but also as an offering of the church alongside and with his offering. It was “the offering up of the collective Church, Christ's mystical Body” as well as “the offering up of Christ Himself, by whom that Body is sanctified” so that, through the eucharist, “[t]he Church, which is the mystical Body of Christ, is accepted through the perpetual pleading of His Body natural”.²⁰⁰ This was clearly a more developed understanding of the eucharistic sacrifice than that of it being a commemoration and representation of Calvary, found in the writings of Isaac Williams and the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen.

Through a number of his poems and sermons Isaac Williams contributed to the Tractarian attempt to emphasise the importance of the eucharist. Like the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen and the other Tractarians, he rejected the Roman Catholic understanding of transubstantiation while also claiming that Christ was truly present in the sacrament. Although his language may have been more cautious than that of Pusey and Wilberforce, Williams' writings taught that the real presence was to be understood in terms of an objective, spiritual presence within the consecrated elements which was independent of the faith of the recipient and worthy of

¹⁹⁷ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 315

¹⁹⁸ Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 212-3

¹⁹⁹ Pusey, *This is My Body*, 40-1, citing *Nouvelle explication donnée par l'Abbé Bousset au Ministre Ferry, sur le sacrifice de l'Eucharistie* Œuvres, t.xxv. pp. 112-4

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 392

veneration, although he rejected Roman Catholic forms of devotion which involved worshipping the consecrated bread outside the celebration of the eucharist. This makes it clear that Williams' understanding of the real presence, like that of Keble, Pusey and Wilberforce, went beyond the virtualism which had been taught by a number of High Churchmen and the Nonjurors. With regard to the eucharistic sacrifice, however, Williams seems to have been more in line with the thinking of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen. Like them he stressed the fact that the eucharist was to be understood as an "unbloody sacrifice" in which the consecrated bread and wine were offered to God, not in the sense that the priest offered the actual body and blood of Christ to God, but in the sense that the eucharist was a representative sacrifice offered as a memorial of Calvary. This implied that the eucharist was a commemorative sacrifice which was distinct from, though directly connected with, Jesus' sacrificial death. Williams does not seem to have shared Pusey and R.I. Wilberforce's emphasis which, in terms highly reminiscent of the Tridentine definition, saw the eucharist as being one and the same offering as the sacrifice of Calvary.

Chapter Six: Isaac Williams and High Church/Tractarian Spirituality: Fasting and Asceticism, Liturgy and Auricular Confession

1. Fasting and Asceticism

One aspect of Isaac Williams' spirituality which highlights his connection with his fellow-Tractarians and also a number of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen was his emphasis on fasting. According to his autobiography Williams scrupulously observed the Friday fast prescribed by the *Book of Common Prayer* and did not dine in college on Fridays when he was a fellow of Trinity.¹ He also fasted rigorously until sunset on Good Friday, even when he was seriously ill.² Williams' writings also emphasise the importance of the practice and reflect his concern that fasting had fallen into general disuse in the contemporary church.³ In *The Cathedral* a poem entitled "Fast Days" was included among the verses on the oratories of the church building which symbolised the church's "Consolations and Strongholds". This claimed that fasting was a means of training the Christian to accept the inevitable sorrows of life⁴ as well as helping him, or her, to grow spiritually by following the example of self-denial reflected in the life of Christ and the saints. By overcoming the desires of the flesh, fasting helped the Christian to become spiritually liberated and prepared him, or her, for heaven:

Nor deem such penance hard---thence from the soul
The cords of flesh are loos'd, and earthly woes
Lose half their power to harm, while self-controul
Learns that blest freedom which she only knows.

Thence is our hope to manlier aims subdued,
And purg'd from earthly mists the mental eye,
To gird herself with growing fortitude,
To see the gates of immortality,

Beyond the vale of woes; while far between,
In watchings and in fastings train'd of yore,
Martyrs and Saints, in glorious order seen,
Follow the Man of Sorrows gone before.⁵

¹ Unpublished manuscript of Isaac Williams' autobiography, L.P.L. M.S. 4477, pp. 22-3.

² Williams, *The Doctrine of the Church in the Writings of Isaac Williams*, 63 quoting a note by Isaac Williams' grand-son, Isaac Williams (1885-1967)

³ See Williams, *Thoughts in Past Years* (1848 edition), 54-6

⁴ Williams, *The Cathedral* (Oxford, 1839 edition), 73

⁵ *Ibid.*, 74-5

In an unpublished sermon Williams claimed that fasting was “recommended to us both by scripture and by the Church and by the example of all good men”.⁶ He also wrote that self-denial “even from food and other things innocent . . . are as it were the very secret of a holy life, by disposing the heart to prayer”.⁷ In another sermon preached during a cholera epidemic in 1849, Williams claimed that “[f]asting, and alms, and prayer . . . are the only means by which we can call upon the Great Priest to stand between the dead and the living that the plague may be stayed”.⁸

Isaac Williams also emphasised the fact that fasting had always enjoyed a valued place in Christian tradition and expressed regret that the fast days prescribed by the *Book of Common Prayer* were at that time virtually ignored.⁹ It was not the act of fasting in itself which was pleasing to God, he explained, but the fact that the practice was “a natural expression of repentance, and an instrument which, if properly used, is a most powerful one to a holy life”.¹⁰ Although Jesus had not commanded his disciples to fast, his teaching implied that they would continue to observe the practice. Its importance was also upheld by prominent biblical characters like David, Daniel, Peter and Paul, as well as by a number of the church fathers and Anglican divines.¹¹ Williams claimed that fasting served as an expression of humility and could bring about spiritual blessings as it trained the individual in self-discipline and self-denial. The practice was directly linked to prayer and enabled the soul to grow closer to God:

the greatest of all benefits to be obtained from the practice of fasting, is an accompaniment to meditation and prayer; prayer is the secret of a divine life; and the secret of prayer is self-denial . . . [they are] the wings of the soul. If there be any thing which can render the spirit heavenly-minded and steadfast in faith and the love of God, and can render prayer effectual, it is fasting.¹²

Williams was critical of the temper of the age which tended to ignore the requirement to fast since “[w]e are naturally inclined, especially in these days, to dwell on the bright side of Religion; its blessings and comforts, and to forget its equally merciful duties and mortifications”.¹³

⁶ Unpublished sermon preached at Oakridge (6 November, 1842), L.P.L. M.S. 4478, ff. 7-8

⁷ Unpublished sermon on Revelation 22:12 (1832), L.P.L. M.S. 4478, f. 117

⁸ Unpublished sermon on Revelation 3:3 (1849), L.P.L. M.S. 4479, f. 53

⁹ Williams I., “Sermon CCCXIX: Fast Days of our Church”, Williams and Copeland (ed.), *Plain Sermons by Contributors to the ‘Tracts for the Times’* (v. 10) (London, 1848), 73

¹⁰ Williams, “Sermon CCCXIX: Fast Days of our Church”, 73

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 73-4

¹² *Ibid.*, 76

¹³ *Ibid.*, 80

Some of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen were critical of fasting and asceticism. Thomas Le Mesurier, for example, included “painful acts of penance and voluntary mortification” amongst his virulent criticisms of Roman Catholicism. In his view such practices were responsible for inculcating

ideas of Christian perfection, not only erroneous in themselves but in their consequences highly pernicious; as they almost inevitably lead to great dissoluteness of manners, and at least divert mankind from the essential duties of faith and charity, to practices the most useless and trifling, and even ridiculous.¹⁴

Despite such criticism, the importance of fasting was upheld by numerous High Church figures including George Herbert, Nicholas Ferrar, Thomas Ken, Robert Nelson, William Law and Thomas Wilson as well as by the Hutchinsonians, George Horne and William Stevens. Isaac Williams’ emphasis on fasting as a means by which the Christian could partake of Christ’s sufferings was also in line with that of Newman and Pusey, who wrote two tracts (numbers 18 and 66) on fasting.¹⁵

Fasting was but one element of Isaac Williams’ emphasis on the importance of asceticism in the Christian life. In his poem “Religious Retreats” from *The Baptistery*, for example, he reflected on the example of Sts. Anthony, Athanasius, Augustine and Basil, who had renounced the pleasures of life and withdrawn from the world, in order to seek a closer union with God:¹⁶

But this I know, to give up all
Which here on earth men treasure call,
With firm resolve to bid depart
Home ties, with earthly promise rife,
And things that lie most near the human heart;-
To spend the days of this short life
In prayers and alms and charities;-
This in its fulness daily is to store,
For ever more and more,
Where nothing dies.¹⁷

This positive view of asceticism was also reflected in Williams’ poetic description of St. Basil from the *Lyra Apostolica*, where the contrast between the austerity of the

¹⁴ Le Mesurier T., *The Nature and Guilt of Schism considered, with particular Reference to the Principles of the Reformation* (London, 1808), 204-5; Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 185-6

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 184-5; Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 322-326

¹⁶ Williams, *The Baptistery* (1844 edition), 117-119

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 122

saint's cell and the beauty of nature outside helps to emphasise the radical call to withdraw from the world in order to seek God:

Beautiful flowers round Wisdom's secret well,
Deep holy thoughts of penitential lore,
But dressed with images from Nature's store,
Handmaid of Piety. Like thine own cell
By Pontic mountain wilds and shaggy fell,
Great Basil! there, within thy lonely door,
Watching and Fast and Prayer and Penance dwell,
And sternly nursed Affections heavenward soar.
Without are setting suns and summer skies,
Ravine, rock, wood and fountain melodies;
And Earth and Heaven, holding communion sweet,
Teem with wild beauty. Such thy calm retreat,
Blest Saint! and of thyself an emblem meet,
All fair without, within all stern and wise.¹⁸

In his sermons Williams claimed that such austerity was also reflected in the life of John the Baptist who possessed neither “house, nor home, nor any of what are considered the comforts of life”.¹⁹ The state of celibacy as reflected in the life of John the Baptist and the Beloved Disciple was, in Williams' view, “the very highest and best kind of life; for this . . . withdrawing from the world was drawing near unto God”.²⁰ At the same time, however, he pointed out that John the Baptist had not demanded that others should follow his way of life, but had merely called them to renounce sin and remain faithful to God.²¹ This suggests that, while Williams greatly admired those who sought to completely renounce the things of the world in an attempt to grow closer to God, he also recognised that this was a special vocation which not everyone was called to emulate. Williams also claimed that dedicated virginity was a superior state in the Christian life in his commentary on the book of Revelation.²²

Isaac Williams shared his high view of celibacy and asceticism with the majority of the Tractarians and a number of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen. Newman claimed that, from the age of fifteen, he had felt drawn to lead a single life, while Froude also emphasised the value of celibacy.²³ Pusey remained unmarried

¹⁸ Williams I., “Basil (XCIV)”, Newman (ed.), *Lyra Apostolica*, 115

¹⁹ Williams I., “Sermon CCCXIII: On the Preaching of Austerities (*St. John the Baptist's Day*)”, Williams and Copeland (ed.), *Plain Sermons* (v. 10), 20

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 21-3

²¹ *Ibid.*, 21-2

²² Williams, *The Apocalypse*, 256-7

²³ Newman, *Apologia*, 5, 16

following the death of his wife Maria in 1839 and committed himself to a rigorous programme of penance and austerity.²⁴ Like Williams, John Keble, though a married man, claimed that celibacy was a higher state of life.²⁵ The value of celibacy had also been upheld by many of the Laudian High Churchmen in the seventeenth century and also by the eighteenth century Hutchinsonians George Horne, William Stevens and Jones of Nayland, following the example and teaching of William Law, Thomas Ken and George Herbert.²⁶ In his *Memoir of Joshua Watson* Edward Churton claimed that William Stevens had from a young age resolved to remain unmarried.²⁷

After Williams left Oxford in 1842 he received a number of letters from Pusey regarding a plan to establish a type of female religious community at Bisley. Pusey, who from 1840 onwards was the most prominent Tractarian advocate of the restoration of religious communities in the Church of England,²⁸ wished to found an orphanage in the parish which would consist of “a few ladies living a more self-denying life, & simpler than ordinary, & given to works of charity, possibly under a few simple rules, & using more devotion than others but scarcely distinguishable outwardly, except by God”.²⁹ Since Williams was, in Pusey’s words, “more fitted for contemplation than for practical life”, it was believed that he would be an appropriate person to attend to the spiritual needs of such a community.³⁰ Although Williams’ reply to Pusey’s suggestion was somewhat cautious, pointing out that it would be necessary to consult the bishop of Gloucester about the plan, he followed Pusey’s advice and went to Torquay to visit a Miss Moore who it was felt would have been a suitable superior for the new community.³¹ For some reason, however, the project did not succeed. In 1843 Thomas Keble became interested in the proposal and suggested that a Mrs Foljambe, a relative of his friend Charles Anderson, would be a suitable person to run the orphanage. She visited Bisley but it was decided to delay the project because the new church had not yet been built.³²

²⁴ Rowell, *The Vision Glorious*, 79-80; O’Donnell G., “The Spirituality of E.B. Pusey”, Butler P. (editor), *Pusey Rediscovered* (London, 1983), 231-37

²⁵ Wilson (ed.), *Letters of Spiritual Counsel and Guidance by the late Reverend John Keble*, 233-4

²⁶ Hylson-Smith, *High-Churchmanship in the Church of England*, 43, 90-1

²⁷ Churton E., *Memoir of Joshua Watson* (Oxford and London, 1863), 13

²⁸ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 188-9

²⁹ Pusey E.B. to Williams I. (December, 1842), L.P.L., M.S. 4475, f. 185

³⁰ Pusey E.B. to Williams I. (1842), L.P.L. M.S. 4475, f. 181; Pusey E.B. to Williams I. (December, 1842), L.P.L. M.S. 4475, f. 186; Pusey E.B. to Williams I. (no date), L.P.L. M.S. 4475, f. 205

³¹ Pusey E.B. to Williams I. (7 February, 1842), L.P.L., M.S. 4475, f. 176; Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 84-5

³² Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (15 December, 1844), P.H. M.S. (L.B.V., no. 24)

The fact that Pusey had to write repeatedly to Williams about his plan to establish the orphanage gives the impression that Williams did not share his enthusiasm about the proposal. It may be that Williams' caution was a factor in the failure of the project. A letter which Williams wrote to Thomas Keble in February 1860 also suggests that he was not totally at ease with attempts to re-establish the religious life within the Church of England:

This morning at 10 o'clock a card was brought for me from "the Mother Superior, St. Margaret's, East Grinstead," which was followed by the Lady herself, applying for assistance for her sisterhood and orphan school. She said she had been at Bisley and seen you. What is your opinion about the matter? One is so perplexed with a Lady Superior walking in without any notice or introduction of any sort.³³

Although it is not clear whether the Mother Superior in question had merely sought a financial donation, or whether she had asked Williams to become involved in the running of the convent, the tone of the letter, as well as the fact that Williams felt that he had to seek Thomas Keble's advice on this matter, suggests that he may have been uncomfortable with such religious communities. While Williams did not directly oppose attempts to re-introduce the religious life in the Church of England, it may be that he shared the fear of some High Churchmen, including bishop Henry Phillpotts, that the restoration of the religious life could be seen as having dangerous connotations with Roman Catholicism. Although attempts had been made to restore the religious life by High Churchmen in the pre-Tractarian era like Nicholas Ferrar and William Law, such communities were a 'reformed' expression of religious life. The community founded by Ferrar at Little Gidding in the seventeenth century, for example, was not a true religious community in the Roman sense since members did not make vows and were free to leave at any time. Habits were not worn and some members were married.³⁴ The type of religious life which came to be advocated by the Oxford Movement and which involved the use of vows and the wearing of habits, was much closer to the Roman ideal.³⁵ This may explain why Isaac Williams was somewhat uneasy with Pusey's attempts fully to restore the religious life in the nineteenth-century Church of England.

³³ Williams I. to Keble T. (13 February, 1860), "Letters from Isaac Williams to Rev. Thomas Keble", L.P.L. Box 779

³⁴ Hylson-Smith, *High Churchmanship in the Church of England*, 47-8

2. Ceremonial, Ritualism and Liturgy

Isaac Williams' view of ceremonial and liturgy seems to have been in line with the thinking of both the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen and the Tractarians. The images of *The Altar*, which portrayed a priest celebrating the communion service, depict an east-facing altar covered with a white cloth, with flowers and two candles placed upon it and a cross behind it.³⁶ The priest is vested in a cope, which Williams regarded as "the ecclesiastical garb required by our canon in Cathedral and Collegiate Churches, and still in use at our coronations".³⁷ The priest begins the service at the north side of the altar, turns towards the people for the epistle and gospel readings, but faces east for the consecration.³⁸ Both these images and *Tract 86* make it clear that Williams was a strong advocate of the east-ward position.³⁹ His view of ceremonial is also reflected in his support for the building of the church of All Saint's, Llangorwen, in 1841 near the Williams' family home in Cardiganshire. Although the building of the church was overseen by Isaac Williams' elder brother Matthew Davies Williams,⁴⁰ as a prominent writer of the *Tracts for the Times* it is probable that the younger man had a degree of influence over the project. Like the depictions in *The Altar* the new church at Llangorwen contained a prominent stone altar raised on three steps, which emphasised the importance of the celebration of the eucharist.⁴¹ Behind the altar was a reredos depicting a cross.⁴² The clergy stalls were in the 'returned' position which made it easier for the offices to be recited facing east.⁴³ The periodical of the Cambridge Camden Society, a society which aimed to build churches which accommodated catholic worship, spoke highly of the completed church:

The style is Early English: there is a nave 72 by 33 feet, and a chancel 29 by 27 . . . The interior fittings are perfect: low open stalls of oak and chestnut (all free); a carved eagle and Litany desk; a rood screen; an altar of Bath stone, with an arcaded reredos behind it, and a table of Prothesis; and a small raised platform is railed off on the north side of the chancel-arch for a reading pew. The chancel is paved with Painswick stone, and is entered by a step, while the

³⁵ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 188-90; Rowell, *The Vision Glorious*, 92-5; Reed, *Glorious Battle*, 50;

³⁶ Williams, *The Altar*, images, no pagination

³⁷ *Ibid.*, vi

³⁸ *Ibid.*, images, no pagination

³⁹ Williams, "Indications of a Superintending Providence in the Preservation of the Prayer Book (no. 86)", 76

⁴⁰ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 96-7

⁴¹ Yates N., "Ecclesiology and Ritualism in Wales", *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, volume CXLIX (2000), 59-60

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 76, 97

altar is elevated on three more. In the lower part of the chancel, against the walls, are plain but handsome benches for the Clergy when present, and for communicants at the holy Eucharist.⁴⁴

When Isaac Williams was curate of Bisley he became involved with his fellow-curate Robert Gregory in a plan to remove a large chancel gallery which obscured the view of the altar from the nave and made it necessary to read parts of the service from a reading desk and not from the altar. According to Gregory's *Autobiography*, Williams gave him money to pay for two carpenters to remove the gallery.⁴⁵ This underlines Williams' belief in the importance of the altar, which he felt should be the focal point of the church building. This was also reflected in an undated letter from Williams to Thomas Keble, but which must have been written while Williams was Newman's curate at Littlemore:

I should like to know how you are managing at Oakridge – have you got a desk like places as is usual, or is the minister to turn to the Altar for the prayers, for we have the better way at Littlemore.⁴⁶

As was typical of the Tractarians,⁴⁷ Williams clearly believed that the liturgy should focus on the altar and not on the pulpit or the reading desk. This was in line with his belief, directly related to the principle of reserve, that the heart of Christian worship was not preaching but the celebration of the sacraments.⁴⁸

The fact that the other Bisley Tractarians felt uneasy with the level of ceremonial advocated in *The Altar*⁴⁹ would seem to suggest that Williams' approach to ceremonial was somewhat radical for the time. Although he recommended the use of the cope as a vestment which was permitted by the canons of the Church of England, in practice copes had not even been worn regularly in cathedral churches since the beginning of the eighteenth century and the normal vestment in Anglican churches was the white surplice.⁵⁰ However, it would appear that Williams' approach was in line with that of the Laudian High Churchmen who had reached a position of influence in the Church of England by the 1630s and attempted to restore the altar to greater prominence by fixing it to the east wall of the church, surrounded by a

⁴⁴ *The Ecclesiologist*, no. 3 (January 1842), 47

⁴⁵ Hutton W.H. (editor), *The Autobiography of Robert Gregory* (London, 1912), 38-9

⁴⁶ Williams I. to Keble T. (no date), L.P.L., Keble Dep. 9/43

⁴⁷ Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 268-71

⁴⁸ Williams, "On Reserve (no. 87)", 73-6

⁴⁹ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*

⁵⁰ Yates, *Liturgical Space*, 92

communion rail.⁵¹ This was a reaction to the post-Reformation practice of using a movable communion table which was placed in the chancel or the nave for the service of Holy Communion so that communicants could sit around it.⁵² Williams' view of ceremonial also appears to have been in line with that of Charles Daubenny, who placed a cross over the altar of his church in Bath in the 1800s, and of George Horne and Thomas Wilson who advocated the use of lighted candles during the celebration of the eucharist.⁵³ Although Newman celebrated the eucharist with lighted candles on the altar, he did not use the east-ward position.⁵⁴ While Pusey held that churches should be beautifully adorned, he did not believe that it was essential that clergy should wear vestments.⁵⁵ This would seem to suggest that Williams' portrayal of the celebration of the eucharist in *The Altar*, while drawing on High Church precedent, was advocating a more ritualistic form of ceremonial than that employed by either Newman or Pusey during the 1830s and 1840s. While it is likely that such ceremonial, with its emphasis on awe, reverence and symbolism, would have appealed to Williams' poetic mind, we can but speculate as to whether he personally made use of it in celebrating the eucharist or whether he was merely advocating what he saw as an ideal.

Williams also shared with Newman a belief in the importance of the recitation of the daily offices of Morning and Evening Prayer. Although this practice was required by the *Book of Common Prayer*, it had fallen into general disuse. In his *Autobiography* Williams claimed that the daily service had been held by Thomas Keble at Bisley since he became vicar of the parish in 1827.⁵⁶ Newman began the daily service in his parish in 1834,⁵⁷ under the encouragement of Isaac Williams.⁵⁸ That Williams was a keen advocate of the daily service is also confirmed by his review of Keble's *Psalter* in *The British Critic*, where he claimed that the preservation of the practice in cathedral churches during the eighteenth century had been "a tower

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 74-5

⁵² *Ibid.*, 71-4

⁵³ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 210-11 citing Butler J., *The Analogy of Religion . . . with a Preface and Memoir by Samuel Halifax, Lord Bishop of Gloucester* (London, 1802), xlvi; Middleton R.D., *Newman and Bloxam* (London, 1947); Wilson T., *The Ornaments of Churches Considered; a Sermon Preached before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary's . . . 1761* (Oxford, 1761), 97

⁵⁴ Reed, *Glorious Battle*, 16-7

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 21

⁵⁶ Unpublished manuscript of Williams' autobiography, L.P.L., M.S. 4477, p. 22

⁵⁷ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 24

of strength and refuge” against what he saw as the rationalistic spirit of the age.⁵⁹ The daily service was to become an important feature of the Oxford Movement. When he was preparing to move to Chalford, for example, Williams’ friend H.A. Jeffreys wrote to him expressing his concern that there might be no daily service in the parish.⁶⁰ *Tract 84* written by Thomas Keble and George Prevost also taught that clergymen of the Church of England were bound to observe the daily service. Their argument was supported by quotations from various High Church divines including George Herbert, William Beveridge and Joseph Butler.⁶¹

The attempt to revive the daily service was accompanied by a greater emphasis on the observance of the saints’ days prescribed in the Church of England’s calendar.⁶² In his *Autobiography* Williams claimed that, during the early years of the movement, he made an effort to attend the university sermon on all saints’ days, even though he was often the only person present.⁶³ He also provided sermons for each of the saints’ days in his *Sermons on the Epistles and Gospels for the Sundays and Holy Days Throughout the Year*. In one of his contributions to the *Plain Sermons* Williams claimed that the Prayer Book attributed the same importance to the feast days of the saints as it did to Sundays, and that Christians therefore had a duty to attend church on these days.⁶⁴ In his view these celebrations did not obscure the worship owed to Christ since “[o]n other Festivals we commemorate our Lord in His Birth, in his Manifestation, in His Coming to Judgment – in these His Indwelling in each of His Members”.⁶⁵ Since the saints commemorated by the Church of England were “as lights attendant on our Lord, and deriving their radiance from him”, their celebration helped to provide an example of Christian holiness.⁶⁶ Such an emphasis on the importance of the daily service and the observance of saints’ days was a common trend among the Tractarians and was also found among the pre-Tractarian High

⁵⁸ Williams I. to Newman J.H. (2 July, 1834), Ker I. and Gornall T. (editors), *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* (Oxford, 1980), 290

⁵⁹ Williams, “*The Psalter, or Psalms of David in English Verse*”, 4

⁶⁰ Jeffreys H.A. to Williams I. (no date, probably, 1837), L.P.L. M.S. 4474, f. 137

⁶¹ Keble T. and Prevost G., “Whether a Clergyman of the Church of England be now bound to have Morning and Evening Prayers Daily in his Parish Church (no. 84)”, *Tracts* (v. 5), passim

⁶² Keble T., “Saints’ Days and Daily Service (Sermon V)”, Williams and Copeland (ed.), *Plain Sermons by Contributors to the Tracts for the Times* (v. 1), 37-43; Bowden J.W., “Holy Days Observed in the English Church (no. 56)”, *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford* (volume 2) (London, 1835), passim

⁶³ Unpublished manuscript of Williams’ autobiography, L.P.L. M.S. 4477, p. 16

⁶⁴ Williams I., “Sermon CCCXVII: Saints’ Days of our Church”, Williams and Copeland (ed.), *Plain Sermons* (v. 10), 55-6

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 60

Churchmen, including Robert Nelson and Samuel Glasse.⁶⁷ Nelson's *Companion to the Feasts and Festivals of the Church of England*, for example, was written in an attempt "to rescue the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England . . . from the contempt and neglect of such as profess themselves her obedient members".⁶⁸ Like Isaac Williams, Nelson believed that saints' days should be observed like Sundays by attending church and abstaining from work.⁶⁹ Glasse expressed regret that the daily service, as well as the saints' festivals, were seldom observed. In an attempt to correct this imbalance he had delivered a special evening lecture to his parishioners on Sundays which were also saints' days.⁷⁰

3. Auricular Confession

While Isaac Williams' emphasis on fasting, asceticism and ceremonial was something which he held in common with the other Tractarians, his view of auricular confession and spiritual direction would appear to have been something which set him apart from them.⁷¹ Although the practice of private confession before a priest had been maintained since the Reformation in subsequent revisions of the *Book of Common Prayer* and in canon 113 of the ecclesiastical canons of 1603,⁷² the Tractarian attempt to revive it proved one of the most controversial aspects of the Oxford Movement because of its innate secrecy and obvious allusion to Roman Catholic practice.⁷³

The issue of human sinfulness and repentance is a prominent theme in Isaac Williams' writings. Like Pusey, he emphasised the gravity of post-baptismal sin claiming that forgiveness for sins committed after baptism could only be brought about by true repentance and that, after baptism, one could not be completely certain of God's forgiveness until the day of judgement.⁷⁴ The importance of daily penitence,

⁶⁶ Ibid., 62

⁶⁷ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 211

⁶⁸ Nelson R., *A Companion to the Feasts and Festivals of the Church of England* (Oxford, 1843 edition), ix

⁶⁹ Ibid., xi

⁷⁰ Glasse S., *Course of Lectures on the Holy Festivals* (London, 1802 edition), viii

⁷¹ Cf. Jones, *Isaac Williams*, 78-9

⁷² Frere W.H., *A New History of the Book of Common Prayer with a Rationale of its Offices* (London, 1951), 371-2, 489; Randolph B.W., *Confession in the Church of England since the Reformation* (London, 1911), 12-4; *The Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical* (London, 1960 S.P.C.K. edition), 48-9

⁷³ Reed J.S., *Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism* (Nashville, 1996), 47-8

⁷⁴ Williams I. (and completed by Pusey E.B.), "Temper of the Returning Prodigal", Pusey E.B. (editor), *A Course of Sermons on Solemn Subjects, chiefly bearing on Repentance and Amendment of Life*, (Oxford, 1845), 130; Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 1), 254-5

he claimed, was underlined by the general confession which preceded the offices of Morning and Evening Prayer.⁷⁵ Williams' moral seriousness was also reflected in his belief that the society of his day tended to view sin too lightly and that the penitential system of the early church, in which sinners were made to undergo long periods of excommunication, would be the most appropriate way of dealing with human sinfulness.⁷⁶ This view was also taken by John Keble in his *Sermons Occasional and Parochial*.⁷⁷

Williams' reflection on the gravity of human sinfulness was accompanied by an emphasis on the importance of ministerial absolution. In his gospel commentary he taught that, according to John 20:23, Jesus gave authority to the apostles to forgive sins in his name.⁷⁸ Furthermore, he claimed that Matthew 16:19 taught that, via the apostolic succession, the church also possessed divine authority to excommunicate or absolve sinners.⁷⁹ Williams emphasised the belief that the authority of absolution was committed to priests at ordination,⁸⁰ a belief which he held in common with eighteenth-century High Churchmen like John Oxlee, Edward Nares and Jones of Nayland.⁸¹ For Williams priestly absolution was essential in order for the sinner to receive reassurance of God's forgiveness. In his poem on the season of Lent from *The Christian Seasons*, for example, he implored the sinner to

Seek the absolving keys, of comfort sweet,
The Church's seal of pardon,⁸²

while, in *The Altar*, he claimed that the priest's declaration of absolution was able to restore the sinner to the grace of baptism from which he or she had fallen:

. . . when the golden keys retrieve the stain,
. . . the mingled stream of blood and tears
Flows to the Baptism of our earlier years;
And the regenerate soul, by sin defiled,
Come[s] from the stream again a little child.⁸³

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 123

⁷⁶ Williams, "Temper of the Returning Prodigal", 128-9

⁷⁷ Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 328 quoting Keble J., *Sermons Occasional and Parochial*: XXIX (1835), 353 ff.

⁷⁸ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 8), 238-44

⁷⁹ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 5), 147-8

⁸⁰ Williams I., *Sermons on the Epistles and Gospels for the Sundays and Holy Days throughout the Year* (volume 2) (London, 1882 edition), 235

⁸¹ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 248-9; see, Jones, "A Short view of the present state of the argument between the Church of England and Dissenters", Stevens (ed.), *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of the Rev. William Jones* (v. 5), 71

⁸² Williams, *The Christian Seasons*, 60

⁸³ Williams, *The Altar*, 68

A sermon on the epistle and gospel readings for the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity suggests that Williams saw the power of these ‘absolving keys’ as residing more in the general absolution pronounced by the priest in the liturgy than in the practice of private confession before a priest, since he refers to the “[a]bsolution, pronounced daily in the Name of Christ, in that assembly in which He has Himself promised to be present”.⁸⁴ In an unpublished sermon Williams claimed that confessing one’s sins to another person was a means of overcoming the oppressive guilt of sin.⁸⁵ It is not clear from the context, however, whether he was referring specifically to auricular confession before a priest or simply to the practice of admitting one’s sins to other people in the spirit of James 5:16. In one of his *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* Williams stated that the normal means of pronouncing absolution was in the church’s public liturgy, i.e. at Morning and Evening Prayer and during the celebration of the eucharist.⁸⁶ This is the only place in his writings where he dealt directly with the subject of auricular confession, and he did no more than to state that the *Book of Common Prayer* permitted the practice for those who were sick or who were preparing to receive Holy Communion and were troubled in conscience. He did not claim that confession was obligatory⁸⁷ nor did he recommend it as an optional practice. Such an attitude to auricular confession had much in common with that of High Churchmen like Richard Hooker, Lancelot Andrewes, George Herbert, Jeremy Taylor, Thomas Ken, John Cosin and Henry Phillpotts who, in line with rubric of the *Book of Common Prayer*, tended to see the practice as being something optional which ought to be restricted to specific occasions.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Williams, *Sermons on the Epistles and Gospels* (v. 2), 235

⁸⁵ Williams I., unpublished sermon on John 18:38, L.P.L. M.S., 4479, f. 156

⁸⁶ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 1), 250

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 250; cf. *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments*, 294-6, 368

⁸⁸ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 249-50; Rowell G., “The Anglican Tradition: From the Reformation to the Oxford Movement”, Dudley M. and Rowell G. (editors), *Confession and Absolution* (London, 1990), 106; Hooker R., *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Book 6), Walton I. (editor), *The Works of that learned and Judicious Divine Mr. Richard Hooker* (Volume 3) (Oxford, 1793 edition), 48-9; Andrewes L., *Two Answers to Cardinal Perron and other Miscellaneous Works* (Oxford, 1854 *Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology Edition*), 131; Herbert G., *A Priest to the Temple, or, The Country Parson, his Character, and Rule of Holy Life* (London, 1652 edition) reproduced in Palmer G.H. (editor), *The English Works of George Herbert* (volume 1) (New York, 1915 edition), 253-4; Hughes T.S. (editor), *The Works of Jeremy Taylor* (volume 5) (Oxford, 1831 edition), 277-8, 286, 525ff.; Ken T., *A Manual of Prayers for Scholars of Winchester College* (Oxford, 1840 edition), 45; Cosin J., *A Collection of Private Devotions in the Practise of the Ancient Church* (London, 1655), no pagination; Phillpotts H., *A Letter to the Very Rev. the Dean of Exeter* (London, 1852), 14

Williams' somewhat cautious approach to auricular confession stood in contrast to the importance which the other Tractarians assigned to the practice. Newman heard his first private confession in 1838 and John Keble became Pusey's confessor in 1846.⁸⁹ As vicar of Hursley Keble recommended regular confession as the best way for him to become acquainted with the spiritual concerns of his parishioners and he also recommended private confession as a means of remitting post-baptismal sin.⁹⁰ H.E. Manning and J.M. Neale also became well-known as confessors.⁹¹ While most of the Tractarian leaders came to emphasise the importance of confession, it was Pusey who became its most prominent pioneer. Although his *Tract 67* and *Letter to the Bishop of Oxford* maintained the traditional High Church view of confession and condemned the Roman discipline of habitual confession,⁹² Pusey's university sermon on "The Entire Absolution of the Penitent" made it clear that, by 1846, he had come to support the practice of confession on a regular basis.⁹³ In this sermon Pusey claimed that, although the Church of England recommended auricular confession in specific circumstances it did not thereby discourage habitual confession since "she who encouraged it in these cases would have recommended it in any other, if the need had then arisen, when she was free to recommend anything".⁹⁴

Conservative High Churchmen in the nineteenth century were highly uncomfortable with the Tractarian attempt to popularise habitual confession, and Peter Nockles suggests that by 1848-50 this had become an issue which divided them from the Tractarians.⁹⁵ In 1852 bishop Henry Phillpotts wrote to the dean of Exeter that,

the *habit* of going to confession, without some special reason, is likely to produce very grave mischief in many cases – to impair the healthy tone of a Christian conscience, just as a constant and unnecessary recourse to medicine weakens the constitution of the body.⁹⁶

⁸⁹ Rowell, "The Anglican Tradition", Dudley and Rowell (ed.), *Confession and Absolution*, 108-9; Rowell, *The Vision Glorious*, 37

⁹⁰ Rowell, *The Vision Glorious*, 37; Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 328

⁹¹ Reed, *Glorious Battle*, 47-9

⁹² Forrester, *Young Dr Pusey*, 198-200 quoting Pusey, "Scriptural Views on Holy Baptism (no. 67)", *Tracts for the Times* (London, 1836 edition), 58-9

⁹³ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 249-50

⁹⁴ Pusey E.B., *The Entire Absolution of the Penitent* (Oxford, 1846), x

⁹⁵ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 151

⁹⁶ Phillpotts, *A Letter to the Very Rev. Dean of Exeter*, 24

Phillpotts feared that regular confession might lead the penitent to become “so unstable, so light minded, so utterly incapable of all self-control, that, after such absolution, he is continually re-lapsing into sin”.⁹⁷

Although Isaac Williams did not directly criticise the practice of habitual confession in his writings, the fact that he chose not to mention a practice which was held in such high esteem by most of the Tractarians could be seen to suggest that, like Phillpotts and the High Churchmen, he was somewhat suspicious of its value. It could be argued that, given his belief in reserve, Williams would not have wanted to mention what was essentially a private practice. However, Pusey was prepared to encourage habitual confession and, given Williams’ emphasis on the gravity of personal sin and the importance of penitence, it is difficult to believe that he would not also have used his sermons to counsel people to make a regular private confession if he had believed that this would have benefited them spiritually.

A letter which Williams wrote to Pusey in 1844 also suggests that he was uncomfortable with auricular confession. Williams wrote that he had received a visit from a clergyman earlier that year who wished to confess to him. He was uneasy with this request, however, and suggested that the penitent should make his confession to Pusey instead, writing that “I would rather that he should confess himself (which he is very desirous to do) to someone else rather than to me, and have been thinking of yourself, if it would not be troublesome to you”.⁹⁸ Pusey’s reply to Williams’ letter would seem to suggest that he was unsure as to Williams’ experience regarding auricular confession and whether or not he heard confessions regularly at all:

Unless you have a particular reason for delaying the confession, it is surely very much better that it should be made to you. I suppose you are in the habit of receiving them; you must have had them; it is one of the subjects I am anxious about, that our clergy should prepare to receive them; I have been anxious about it for years.⁹⁹

This letter should be treated with some caution since the fact that the clergyman in question had been one of Williams’ pupils at Trinity¹⁰⁰ could explain why he did not wish to hear his confession. However, an early controversy in the movement arose from the fact that Newman and Froude saw the office of college tutor as a position

⁹⁷ Ibid., 40

⁹⁸ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (24 July 1844), P.H., M.S. (L.B.V. no. 15)

⁹⁹ E.B. Pusey to I. Williams (27 July 1844), L.P.L. M.S. 4475, f. 239

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Jones, *Isaac Williams*, 78

which gave them spiritual, and not just academic, responsibility for their pupils.¹⁰¹ The letter was written two years after Williams had ceased to be a tutor of Trinity so it is hard to see how his former relationship with the penitent would have made it improper for him to have heard his confession even if he did not share Newman and Froude's view of the pastoral nature of the office of a college tutor. Had he been at one with Pusey's belief in the value of auricular confession and been as eager to encourage others to avail themselves of it, then it is unlikely that Williams would have been unsure about hearing the confession.

It is likely that Williams' reticence on the subject of auricular confession may have arisen from fear that an over emphasis on the practice could lead to the priest's absolution being seen as something distinct from the contrition of the penitent as the means of bringing about forgiveness. In *The Altar*, Williams emphasised the importance of both heartfelt penitence and absolution as the means of receiving God's mercy,¹⁰² while, his poem on 'The Forgiveness of Sins' from *Hymns on the Catechism*, referred not just to absolution, but also to baptism and repentance expressed through the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer as the means by which sins were forgiven:

Within the Church a fountain lies,
By human eyes unseen,
A fountain flowing from the skies,
To wash the leper clean.

I have been wash'd; but ah, in vain!
Still Thou dost bid me pray;
Lord wash me o'er and o'er again,
Whene'er Thy prayer I say.

Still day by day in Church I hear
How Thou dost sins forgive;
And there Thy Priest, in accents clear,
Bids me repent and live.¹⁰³

This fear that auricular confession and absolution could undermine the importance of contrition and penitence is also closely linked to Williams' rejection of the practice of spiritual direction which was becoming increasingly popular as a result

¹⁰¹ See Ker I., *John Henry Newman: A Biography* (Oxford, 1988), 38-9

¹⁰² Williams, *The Altar*, 31-2 and 67-8

¹⁰³ Williams, *Hymns on the Catechism*, 31-2

of the Oxford Movement.¹⁰⁴ He claimed that spiritual direction was contrary to scripture (he mentions Galatians 6:4-5 in particular) since it could minimise the individual's personal responsibility for the state of their soul and become a subtle way of seeking to ease the conscience.¹⁰⁵ While not denying that individuals required spiritual guidance at times, he claimed that there was a danger of this becoming a regular practice

. . . lest Conscience lose
Self-guiding judgment, needing exercise,
Leaning on aid external to itself.¹⁰⁶

Each person also had to accept personal responsibility for the state of his or her own soul since

. . . no one else
Can sit within the soul upon the seat
Which God has made for conscience . . .¹⁰⁷

It is likely that Williams' unease with spiritual direction and auricular confession were based on the same principle. A dependence on either could pose a threat to the individual's responsibility for his or her own soul and undermine the importance of personal penitence. The value of spiritual direction was upheld by pre-Tractarian High Churchmen like Jeremy Taylor¹⁰⁸ as well as by Pusey and John Keble.¹⁰⁹ It would appear that Pusey was also aware of the dangers posed by the practice since he argued that good direction should guide the individual to rely upon his, or her, own spiritual resources rather than becoming over-dependent upon the director, a danger of which Keble was also very aware.¹¹⁰ Williams' approach to spiritual direction would seem to suggest that he saw these dangers as being far more real and serious than Pusey did.

Williams' caution on the subject of auricular confession and his clear dislike of spiritual direction suggest that his thinking was more in line with that of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen on these issues. It is possible that his suspicion of these practices was directly linked to his emphasis on the importance of reserve. Although it

¹⁰⁴ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 78-9

¹⁰⁵ Williams I., *The Female Characters of Holy Scripture* (London, 1884 edition), 188-9

¹⁰⁶ Williams, *The Christian Seasons*, 60

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Jones, *Isaac Williams*, 78-9

¹⁰⁹ Reed, *Glorious Battle*, 47

could be argued that spiritual direction and private auricular confession would be appropriate ways of guiding the individual progressively in his, or her, journey of faith as the *Disciplina Arcani* required, the essence of Williams' understanding of reserve was the mystery of the faith. It is likely, therefore, that he would have felt that practices which interfered directly with the soul's relationship with God were opposed to the principle of reserve. Whatever the reason for Williams' opposition to confession and spiritual direction, his approach makes it clear that he possessed an independence of mind which was not always swayed by the influence of the other Tractarian leaders. It may be that Williams' caution on these issues helped to maintain a sense of balance in the movement by his being prepared to point to what he saw as the potential dangers in some of its developments.

¹¹⁰ Pusey E.B., *Advice for those who Exercise the Ministry of Reconciliation through Confession and Absolution being Abbé Gaume's Manual for Confessors* (Oxford, 1878), clix, clxii, clxv; Rowell, *The Vision Glorious*, 37-8

Chapter Seven: The Church and the State

1. The Political Aspect of the Oxford Movement

The traditional belief that the Oxford Movement was primarily a religious revival¹¹¹ has been questioned by recent scholarship which has suggested that its roots were largely political, and that the movement arose initially as a conservative reaction to the reforming measures of the 1820-30s.¹¹² The repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 and the granting of political emancipation to Roman Catholics in 1829 had removed restrictions which prevented non-Anglicans from sitting as members of parliament.¹¹³ Four years later, the Irish Church Temporalities Bill reorganised the structure of the Anglican Church in Ireland and re-distributed its wealth in order to benefit the general populace, about ninety percent of whom were Roman Catholic.¹¹⁴ The cumulative effect of these acts was that parliament could be comprised of those who were not necessarily members of the Church of England or even Christians. This proved theologically problematic for many conservative Anglicans since the traditional belief that parliament was to be understood as a lay-synod of the established church became increasingly difficult to sustain. As a result many people came to believe that the church's sacred prerogatives were being usurped by the secular government which, in taking it upon itself to reform the Irish church, had abused its authority.¹¹⁵

Despite E.B. Pusey's denial that the Tractarian movement had any political basis,¹¹⁶ it was these political reforms that led John Keble to preach his 1833 assize sermon on *National Apostasy* which Newman, and many subsequent Tractarian scholars, saw as marking the start of the movement.¹¹⁷ More recently, Peter Nockles

¹¹¹ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 67-8 citing Peck W.G., *The Social Implications of the Oxford Movement* (London, 1933), 48-98; Pitt V., "The Oxford Movement: A Case of Cultural Distortion?", Leech K. and Williams R. (editors), *Essays Catholic and Radical* (London, 1983), 205-24

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 67-72.; Nockles P.B., " 'Church and King': Tractarian Politics Reappraised", Vaiss P. (editor), *Newman: From Oxford to the People* (Leominster, 1996), 93-123; Skinner S.A., *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England': The Social and Political Thought of the Oxford Movement* (Oxford, 2004), 87-138; Gibson W., *Church, State and Society, 1760-1850* (New York, 1994), 137-143; Rowlands J.H.L., *Church, State and Society: The Attitudes of John Keble, Richard Hurrell Froude and John Henry Newman, 1827-1845* (Worthing, 1989), ix-x

¹¹³ Brown S.J., *The National Churches of England, Ireland and Scotland, 1801-1846* (Oxford, 2001), 136-49

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 160-7

¹¹⁵ Hylson-Smith, *High Churchmanship in the Church of England*, 124; Fraught, *The Oxford Movement*, 1-5; Avis P., *Anglicanism and the Christian Church: Theological Resources in Historical Perspective* (Edinburgh, 1989), 158-63

¹¹⁶ Nockles, " 'Church and King': Tractarian Politics Reappraised", 95

¹¹⁷ Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, 23

has suggested that the beginning of the Oxford Movement could more accurately be dated to 1829 when the University of Oxford failed to re-elect Robert Peel as its member of parliament because of his *volte-face* on the issue of Roman Catholic emancipation. For Nockles it was this event rather than Keble's assize sermon which "first brought together the future Tractarian constellation on the basis of political discontent underpinned by moral principle".¹¹⁸ Whether one sees the movement as having begun in 1829 or 1833, it is clear that, from the start, it was inextricably linked to political concerns.

That the Oxford Movement can be understood as containing both political and spiritual elements is hardly surprising bearing in mind the fact that the importance of the established link between church and state had been emphasised by High Churchmen for centuries.¹¹⁹ This is reflected in Paul Avis' claim that,

the dynamics of the church-state nexus are the key to understanding three centuries of Anglicanism and particularly those momentous events of the 1830s and 40s that have had such an impact on the subsequent history of the Anglican church.¹²⁰

In contrast to latitudinarian divines like William Warburton and William Paley, who believed that the church/state relationship was ordered not to the defence of Christian truth but to securing political expediency,¹²¹ eighteenth century High Churchmen tended to follow the theory put forward by Richard Hooker in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.¹²² In Hooker's view, since England was a Christian nation, the church and state were inextricably linked so that the monarch had authority over the laws of the church and the bishops had an influence over the affairs of the state.¹²³ The state had a duty to protect the church and to provide it with financial aid while the

¹¹⁸ Nockles, " 'Church and King': Tractarian Politics Reappraised", 96-7

¹¹⁹ Keble J., *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine Mr Richard Hooker: With an Account of his Life and Death* (volume 3, part 1), (Oxford, 1836), 411-2; Sacheverell H., *The Perils of False Brethren in Church and State set forth in a Sermon Preach'd before the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor Alderman and Citizens of London* (London, 1709), 11-12; Jones W., *A Short View of the Present State of the Argument between the Church of England and the Dissenters*, in Stevens (ed.), *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of the Rev. William Jones* (v. 5), 83; Jones W. (editor), *The Works of the Right Reverend George Horne D.D.* (volume 5) (London, 1809), 396

¹²⁰ Avis, *Anglicanism*, 158

¹²¹ Cf. Paley W., "Moral and Political Philosophy", *The Works of William. Paley D.D.* (volume 2) (London, 1837 edition), 25; Warburton W., "The Necessity and Equity of an Established Religion and a Test Law Demonstrated (Book 1)", *The Works of the Right Reverend William Warburton* (volume 4) (London, 1738 edition), 25-8 and ff.

¹²² Cf. Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, 20-5

¹²³ Walton I. (editor), *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine Mr Richard Hooker: With an Account of his Life and Death* (volume 3, part 1) (Oxford, 1836 edition), 411-2

church, in return, helped to secure the moral and spiritual good of the nation.¹²⁴ The fact that the Church of England was established meant that it could never be completely separated from political issues. Nockles claimed that the Oxford Movement, in its early phase, can be seen largely as a continuation of the Tory politics of the pre-Tractarian High Church tradition into the nineteenth century.¹²⁵ The passing of the reforming measures during this period, however, meant that the traditional High Church view of the state became increasingly difficult to justify and, as a result, the Tractarians became more sympathetic to the idea of disestablishment than their High Church predecessors had been.

2.Non-Resistance, the Divine Right of Kings and Political Liberalism

Isaac Williams' consideration of the relationship between church and state cannot be separated from his innate political conservatism which was reflected in his emphasis on the importance of established order in society.¹²⁶ For example, one of his sermons taught that Koran, Dathan and Abiram, who were destroyed for challenging the authority of Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16), represented all who committed the sin of resisting established authority in church and state.¹²⁷ Such resistance was sinful even if it was aimed at undermining the power of evil rulers or tyrants, since God always gave people a leader who was appropriate for their spiritual and moral state. Thus, although the Roman emperors were tyrannical rulers, so depraved were their subjects, according to Williams, that they "required an iron rod" in order to control them and to "protect them from one another".¹²⁸ The importance of submission to established authority was reflected in Williams' *Hymns on the Catechism*, where he claimed that,

The rich in grace, in spirit poor,
Shall bring good angels down;
'Tis meekness is Thy Kingdom's door,
It is submission wins the crown.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 53-4; Avis, *Anglicanism*, 158-9; Sacheverell, *The Perils of False Brethren*, 11-12; Jones, *A Short View of the Present State of the Argument between the Church of England and the Dissenters*, 83

¹²⁵ Nockles, " 'Church and King': Tractarian Politics Reappraised", 94

¹²⁶ Williams I., *Sermons on the Epistles and Gospels for the Sundays and Holy Days throughout the Year (volume 2)*, 270-1

¹²⁷ Williams I., *The Characters of the Old Testament* (London, 1887 edition), 114

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 117

¹²⁹ Williams, *Hymns on the Catechism*, 63

This understanding of the importance of non-resistance and passive obedience was fundamental to the attitude of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen. Jones of Nayland, for example, had claimed that “nothing is more detestable to the God of peace than the sin of rebellion” while George Horne taught that, since deference to authority was essential if society was not to fall into anarchy, “[w]illingly or unwillingly, the people must be governed . . . [t]heir well-being, nay their very being as a people, depends upon it”.¹³⁰ The principle was also reflected in the writings of John Keble and Hurrell Froude.¹³¹

An important aspect of Isaac Williams’ political conservatism was his emphasis on the role of the monarch in secular and religious affairs. Since the Old Testament referred to the king of Israel as “the Lord’s Anointed” (cf. 2 Samuel 1:14) he believed that earthly monarchs were “shadows or figures” of Christ himself.¹³² In his *Hymns on the Catechism* he claimed that all Christians ought to respect the monarch since Kings and Queens acted on behalf of God to protect their subjects and defend the faith:

They now, so great is Thy sweet care,
To us like “nursing Fathers” are,
To keep us safe from wicked men,
That we unharmed may sleep and then,
Seeing Thy power o’er earthly things,
May think of Thee, the King of kings:
So shew we kings allegiance due,
As we are Christ’s own subjects true.¹³³

In *The Altar* Williams emphasised the importance of kingly rule in a poem reflecting on Jesus’ judgement before Pilate. Here he claimed that earthly monarchs ruled on God’s behalf and were to be seen as the instruments by which he carried out his will in the temporal realm:

. . . hearts of Kings are in Thy Hand Divine,
Which Thou as streams of water dost incline,
To fertilise, to freshen and sustain,
Or to destroy.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Jones, *Essay on the Church*, in Stevens (ed.) *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of the Rev. William Jones* (v. 5), 20; Jones (ed.), *The Works of the Right Reverend George Horne* (v. 5), 282

¹³¹ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 70-1 ; Keble J., “Resignation the School of Piety” (Sermon CXCII), Copeland W. and Williams I. (editors) *Plain Sermons by Contributors to the Tracts for the Times* (volume 6) (London, 1844), 213-4; Froude R.H., “The Exchange (CLVII)” in Newman (ed.), *Lyra Apostolica*, 201

¹³² Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 1), 348

¹³³ Williams, *Hymns on the Catechism*, 62-3

¹³⁴ Williams, *The Altar*, 33

Williams' emphasis on the importance of obedience to the established authority of the monarch led him to express antipathy for political liberalism, of which he claimed that the execution of Charles I in 1649 was a stark example. The fact that none of Williams' writings made any attempt to justify this view reflects the depth of his conservatism and his failure to appreciate the value of democracy. In a poetic description of Christ being condemned to death, he claimed that grave disorder in society always resulted when people attempted to overthrow the ruler set over them by God:

When kings are by their subjects doom'd to die,
 All Christian hearts strange horror doth appal
 And boding expectations on them fall
 Of some unwonted and dire tragedy, -
 Embodied evil seems itself so nigh.¹³⁵

The belief, common to the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen and the Tractarians, that Charles I was to be considered a Christian martyr,¹³⁶ was also upheld by Isaac Williams. In his poem on the monarch, which included him among "The Churchman's Friends" of *The Cathedral*, he claimed that, by following the example of Christ and suffering death for the divine right of kings, the royal martyr had merited a "crown of glory" in heaven.¹³⁷

Isaac Williams' poetry also expressed antipathy for the spirit of liberalism which, by rejecting established order in society, had led to King Charles' execution. His verse on the central door of *The Cathedral*, symbolising obedience, included a powerful attack of such liberalism:

If thou art one whose cry is Liberty,
 Pass not the portal of our hallow'd shrine,
 We in a holier freedom would be free.¹³⁸

True freedom, in Williams' view, was to be found not in democracy but in obedience to God's revealed truth and established order in society. His antipathy for liberalism can also be seen in his view of the French revolution as a grave social disorder which could be attributed to the work of the antichrist.¹³⁹ Such a view was also typical of

¹³⁵ Ibid., 61

¹³⁶ Jones (ed.), *The Works of the Right Reverend George Horne*, 279, 412; Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 72-9

¹³⁷ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 59

¹³⁸ Ibid., 6

¹³⁹ Williams, *The Christian Seasons*, 96-7

eighteenth century High Churchmen like Jones of Nayland and William Van Mildert.¹⁴⁰

Williams also saw the threat of liberalism in the political situation of England during the early decades of the nineteenth century. The fact that the government had allowed the passing of the reforming measures of the 1820s-30s was symptomatic of an erastian liberalism which had failed to defend the church's spiritual autonomy and even threatened to usurp its prerogatives. In an unpublished sermon on Revelation 22:12, preached in 1832, Williams claimed that,

the great want of principle in Public matters, the great want of principle in Public men, openly avowed and so generally supported and countenanced must prove to every thinking Christian that the Judgement of God cannot be far behind.¹⁴¹

One of Williams' contributions to the *Lyra Apostolica* entitled "The Angel of the Church", which was first published in *The British Magazine* in 1835, also reflected a negative view of the contemporary government. Here the angel who had been given guard over the church was portrayed as mourning because the church's spiritual authority was being usurped by Parliament:

Why is our glorious Angel seen to mourn,
With earth-bent brow forlorn?
Why hangs the cold tear on his cheeks?
Ah me! his silence speaks;
It is the Spoiler's parricidal hand,
And the apostate land,
Which would herself God's candlestick displace,
And put aside her cup of grace.¹⁴²

The 'Spoiler' and the 'apostate land' are a reference to the secular government and the nation which had lost sight of its Christian duties and sought to undermine the authority of the church.

The same view was also expressed in a poem entitled "Political Changes", from *The Cathedral*, where Williams claimed that the state of political transition which had been witnessed over the previous years was even greater than the

Huge Ocean, on his bed with thunders strewn,
Rocking from pole to pole".¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 47-8, 52; Van Mildert W., *An Historical View of the Rise and Progress of Infidelity* (volume 1) (London, 1820), 404

¹⁴¹ Williams I., unpublished sermon on Revelation 22:12 preached in 1832, L.P.L., M.S. 4478, f. 118

¹⁴² Williams I., "The Angel of the Church (no. CXI)", *Lyra Apostolica*, 138

¹⁴³ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 26

His poem “Prayer for the Parliament” also claimed that the contemporary government had become so infected by liberalism that it was no longer worthy of God’s guidance. Rather than guiding the church and defending Christian truth parliament was a “dread sword unsheath’d in God’s right hand”¹⁴⁴ through which he was attempting to punish the church and call it back to obedience to himself. The final couplet of this poem emphasised the fact that the church of Williams’ day ought to

. . . learn her true panoply,
And lift above the clouds her tranquil brow”.¹⁴⁵

This reflects Williams’ belief that the church’s strength ought to derive, not from temporal power, but from its own innate spiritual authority. The church was therefore the superior partner in the union with the state. This point was also emphasised in his poem on St. Ambrose who forced the emperor Theodosius to do penance in 390:

I see thee stand before the injur’d shrine,
While Theodosius to thy stern decree,
Falls down, and owns the keys and power divine:
For kings that fain her nursing-sires would be,
To the Eternal Bride must bow the knee.¹⁴⁶

Earthly kings did not, in Williams’ view, have unlimited authority over ecclesiastical affairs, but had a solemn responsibility to guard and defend the church.

Isaac Williams’ emphasis on the church’s spiritual independence from the authority of the secular state was typical of the approach of the Nonjurors, a point which he admitted in his *Autobiography*.¹⁴⁷ This would seem to be confirmed by the fact that he described the Nonjuring bishop Thomas Ken as being “a mirror of filial obedience to the Church”.¹⁴⁸ The Nonjurors had a high understanding of the divine right of kings and subsequently refused to swear an oath of allegiance to William IV since they believed that they were still bound by their existing oath to James II. The result of the Nonjuror’s schism was that they came to emphasise the church’s independence from the secular state.¹⁴⁹ Thomas Brett claimed that the monarch had a duty to defend the church within the realm but not to interfere in its internal affairs,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 28

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 287; see also Williams, *The Baptistery* (1844 edition), 333

¹⁴⁷ Unpublished manuscript of Isaac Williams’ autobiography, L.P.L. M.S. 4477, p. 15

¹⁴⁸ Williams, “*The Psalter, or Psalms of David; in English Verse*”, 4

¹⁴⁹ Goldie, “The Nonjurors, Episcopacy, and the Origins of the Convocation Controversy”, 19-20; Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic*, 75

while Charles Leslie argued that church and state each “ought to assist the other, without encroaching upon one another’s province”.¹⁵⁰

Like Isaac Williams and the Nonjurors, John Keble also maintained the church’s spiritual autonomy from the state claiming that the king or queen had a solemn duty to protect the church.¹⁵¹ Whereas some people interpreted Isaiah 49:23 (“Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers”) as supporting erastianism and pointing to the monarch’s absolute authority over the church, Keble believed that the true image evoked by this verse was of the church entrusting the king or queen with the duty of defending the faith on its behalf:

. . . it is plain on consideration of the context . . . that when the church is told, Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, it is not meant that the church is an infant lodged in the arms of the civil power, but that as a mother she lodges her children in its arms. The monarchs and princes of this world are as foster fathers and foster mothers in the family of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of His Spouse, the Holy Church Universal.¹⁵²

For Keble the church and the state were not just independent bodies, since the church was the superior party in spiritual matters. In his review of W.E. Gladstone’s *The State in its Relations with the Church*, he criticised the use of the term “alliance” to describe the relationship between church and state claiming that this implied that they were to be seen as two independent parties, which would limit the church’s spiritual authority. Keble suggested that the term “incorporation”, the same word which had been used by Charles Leslie in his *The Case of the Regale and of the Pontificate Restated*,¹⁵³ was a better way of describing the relationship since this implied that the church took the nation under its spiritual authority and remained the superior party in the union.¹⁵⁴ This emphasis on the church’s spiritual superiority over the secular state was also held by Newman and Froude.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Brett T., *The Independency of the Church upon the State* (London, 1717), 3-4; Leslie C., *The Case of the Regale and of the Pontificate Stated* (London, 1838 edition), 12-13

¹⁵¹ Keble J., “*The State in its Relations with the Church*”, *A Paper reprinted from the “British Critic”, October 1839* (Oxford and London, 1869), 26-7

¹⁵² Keble J., *Sermons Academical and Occasional* (Oxford, 1848), 151-152

¹⁵³ Cf. Leslie, *The Case of the Regale and of the Pontificate Stated*, 13

¹⁵⁴ Keble, “*The State in its Relations with the Church*”, 6-7

¹⁵⁵ Newman, *Sermons bearing on Subjects of the Day*, 245, 286; Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 81 citing *The British Magazine* (2 September, 1832), 334-5

3. The Church's Superiority to the State

In his poetry Isaac Williams argued that the state's influence over the church had led to her becoming lax in her spiritual observances. This is reflected in his poem "O Lord, to whom shall we go?" from *Thoughts in Past Years*, which laments the fact that the church no longer maintained the regular celebration of the eucharist, the recitation of the litany or the observance of fast days. Williams also claimed that bishops and priests were failing to teach and defend the Christian faith.¹⁵⁶ In *The Baptistery* he claimed that the political developments of the 1820-30s had led to the church becoming spiritually negligent by allowing the influence of worldliness to undermine the integrity of the faith:

she opes
Her altars unto all, the mingled crowd
Of Vice and Fashion, - and all alike allowed;
No golden keys, no sacred Discipline
To hinder, or preserve the hallow'd shrine.
Meanwhile to the admir'd admiring crowd
The platform and the pulpit ring aloud
With popular ignorance, to feed the ear
Of feverish partizans; no godly fear,
No awful modesties of reverend care;
Be sure, where fear is not, God is not there.¹⁵⁷

This suggests that, as a result of the church's connection with the state, clergy sought to promote their own worldly honour rather than attempting selflessly to shepherd Christ's flock. By seeking popularity at any cost they were following their people rather than leading them.¹⁵⁸ Williams' emphasis on the lack of "godly fear" and "awful modesties" in the contemporary church also implies that the state's influence over the church had undermined the spirit of reserve.

In Williams' view, it was because so few of the clergy upheld the apostolic faith and provided a good example for their people that many people had left the Church of England and joined Nonconformist denominations. Despite the negative view of Nonconformity reflected in *The Cathedral*,¹⁵⁹ in one of his poems from *The Baptistery* Williams did not seek to blame individual dissenters for rejecting the communion of the church, but rather the pastors of the Church of England who had

¹⁵⁶ Williams, *Thoughts in Past Years* (1848 edition), 179-80

¹⁵⁷ Williams, *The Baptistery* (1858 edition), 108-9

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 112

¹⁵⁹ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 23

failed in their spiritual duty to teach the faith and to provide a good example for their people:

Blame not the poor
Who long have flock'd around the Church's door,
Finding no entrance and return no more.
No for Christ's little ones doth Pity bleed,
For His lost flock that wander without heed,
From the true fold; how could they else, when none
Was found to guide them, or their wanderings own?
No, no, Church-teachers ye from age to age,
Ye State-disposers of God's heritage,
Of you will God require it . . .¹⁶⁰

The fact that the church's union with the state had brought about such a regrettable level of spiritual malaise led Williams to emphasise its independent spiritual prerogative which was distinct from the secular power of the state:

By no rude laws by statesmen given
Her willing souls she wins to Heaven,
But by the hearts and voice of men,
For hearts are all she claims again:
It is the heart she strives to teach, -
With lives far more than laws to preach;
Bishops and Pastors sends to each.¹⁶¹

Williams' emphasis on the negative influence of the church/state relationship as it had existed since the Reformation is also reflected in his *Tract 86* on the development of the Prayer Book. Here he claimed that the church had been spiritually strongest when persecuted by the secular power and not when it was an established part of the state. Although the connection with the state did give the church some temporal benefits, these were of little value since they inevitably led to a state of worldliness.¹⁶² When the church was most prosperous in temporal terms, Williams claimed, then her theologians became "characterised by cold and low views".¹⁶³ On the contrary, when she was actively persecuted by the state and deprived of worldly prosperity then she grew in spiritual strength:

it appears that a lower position, as Christians, an humbler position, as a Church, are so far from being incompatible with the favour and protection of the world, that they mutually imply and conspire to produce each other. The latter has necessarily an enslaving and enfeebling influence, imprisoning and

¹⁶⁰ Williams, *The Baptistery* (1858, edition), 109

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 351

¹⁶² Williams, "Indications of a Superintending Providence in the Preservation of the Prayer Book and in the Changes which it has Undergone (no. 86)", 71-2

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 72

enchaining, imperceptibly, the free spirit of sons: whereas oppression from without has immediately the effect of putting the Church in the situation and attitude of an enemy, leaning upon her own inherent spiritual strength and weapons that are not carnal, mighty to the pulling down of strongholds; she stands immediately as an armed foe, walking upon earth, but hiding her head in Heaven.¹⁶⁴

Temporal benefits bestowed by the state led to “the captivity of the church”,¹⁶⁵ but, in the days of Charles I and of the Nonjurors, its persecution by the state had enabled it to develop a “more exalted temper” and to become more like the primitive church.¹⁶⁶ The fact that Williams quoted at length from the works of Charles Leslie,¹⁶⁷ and that two poems included in *The Cathedral* are dedicated to the Nonjuror divines like Thomas Ken and John Kettlewell,¹⁶⁸ confirms his sympathy for them and his belief that the church’s spiritual authority ought not to be usurped by the state.

Williams’ belief that the church’s union with the state was spiritually disadvantageous was the direct antithesis of the understanding of the ‘Z’ High Churchmen who believed that the Tractarian emphasis on the church’s independence from the state was a schismatic rejection of established order.¹⁶⁹ They continued to believe that the relationship between the church and the state was mutually beneficial and that, as Hugh James Rose wrote to Arthur Perceval in 1836, whatever disadvantages arose as a result of it, the relationship was “on the whole advantageous”.¹⁷⁰ In his *A Narrative of Events connected with the publication of the “Tracts for the Times”*, William Palmer of Worcester claimed that, since the beginning of the movement, he had been eager to maintain the church’s connection with the state since it could not be severed “except by sacrificing the endowments of the Church, on which . . . the dissemination of religious truth throughout the land, [was] practically dependent”.¹⁷¹ This belief that establishment placed the church in the

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 73

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 78 (f.n. 1)

¹⁶⁸ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 58, 60, 196

¹⁶⁹ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 90

¹⁷⁰ Hook F.W., *Two Plain Sermons on the Church and the Establishment* (London, 1834), 55; Nockles, “Continuity and Change in Anglican High Churchmanship in Britain, 1792-1850” (D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 1982), 38 quoting Pusey MS at Pusey House Library, Rose H.J. to Perceval A.P. (9 April, 1836); see also Faussett G., *The Claims of the Established Church* (Oxford, 1820), 309-14

¹⁷¹ Palmer W., *A Narrative of Events connected with the publication of the “Tracts for the Times”* (Oxford, 1843), 7; see also Palmer, *A Treatise on the Church of Christ* (v. 2), 246-7

best position to sanctify the nation in religious truth was also upheld by W.F. Hook and W.E. Gladstone.¹⁷²

In *Tract 86* Williams argued that the union between the church and the state meant that the church had become “debarred from all free agency, or power of correcting, or regulating, [her] internal constitution” since the secular state had interfered in her spiritual affairs.¹⁷³ Like Thomas Brett, Williams rejected Henry VIII’s claim to have been the “Head of the Church”, describing this claim as “preposterous”.¹⁷⁴ Erastianism was also reflected in the changes which Edward VI had introduced into the Prayer Book, the laws of *præmunire* (according to which the church was obliged to consecrate a bishop chosen by the state) and the suspension of convocation in 1717.¹⁷⁵ For Williams the corrupting influence of secularism on the church was reflected in the fact that clergy had begun to depend not upon their spiritual authority, but rather upon worldly credentials¹⁷⁶ and also by the fact that priests no longer faced eastwards when celebrating the eucharist. He believed that the loss of the east-ward position involved giving up a powerful symbol and suggested that,

even in our religious worship we are to turn not to the East, the place where God has shown His countenance, but to the West; not to the light of the ancient Church, but to the eyes of the world; not to Angels assembled round the altar, but to the great men of our congregation; not to the place of Paradise, our lost inheritance, but to the flock in whose hands our interest lies; not to the Cross of Christ, but to that supposed utility which worldly wisdom suggests; not to our judge coming from thence, but to the judgment of the world.¹⁷⁷

While Williams believed that the relationship between church and state as it had stood since the days of the Reformation was a negative development which had resulted in the church’s prerogatives being usurped by the state, he did not directly advocate disestablishment. This set him apart from the more radical Tractarian Hurrell Froude who claimed that, as a result of the reforming measures of the 1820-30s and the monarch’s failure to fulfil his coronation oath by defending the church,¹⁷⁸ the link

¹⁷² Hook, *Two Plain Sermons on the Church and the Establishment*, 56-60; Gladstone W.E., *The State in its Relations with the Church* (London, 1839), 289

¹⁷³ Williams, “Indications of a Superintending Providence in the Preservation of the Prayer Book (no. 86)”, 73

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 73; cf. Brett, *The Independency of the Church*, 14

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 73-4

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 75

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 76

¹⁷⁸ Keble and Newman (ed.), *The Remains of the Late Reverend Richard Hurrell Froude* (pt. 2, v. 1), 207, 212-3

between church and state ought to be severed. Froude's call for disestablishment was reflected in the third volume of his *Remains* in his radical claim that the time was ripe to "give up a national Church and have a real one".¹⁷⁹

Whereas Froude saw the issue primarily in political terms, believing that full independence would benefit the church,¹⁸⁰ Williams approached the issue from a more spiritual angle. He claimed that the negative elements of the state's influence over the church were to be seen as a divine punishment which could prove spiritually beneficial to the church by purifying it and to leading it back to God¹⁸¹ and that the state's erastian influence over the church should be borne patiently.¹⁸² Isaac Williams was not the only Tractarian to emphasise this belief, which was essentially an expression of the High Church doctrine of non-resistance. Writing to Williams in 1850, for example, Copeland described the state's encroachment of the church's prerogatives as a "judgement . . . upon the church herself, for the many sins and negligences and ignorances of ourselves and our forefathers".¹⁸³ An echo of Williams' argument is also to be found at the end of Keble's sermon on *National Apostasy* where he claimed that, despite the erastianism of the state, "submission and order are still duties".¹⁸⁴ Pusey also taught that, while the church had a duty to oppose the erastianism of the state, it ought to do so not by using the weapons of worldly power but by non-resistance and trust in God's mercy.¹⁸⁵ For Williams, because the Church of England was being rebuked by God for its spiritual shortcoming, it was essential that its flaws should be corrected before it could exist independently of the state since "the only way to obtain higher privileges, higher degrees of grace, is to show ourselves worthy of them".¹⁸⁶ In his view it was naïve to claim that any real improvement in the religious life of the Church of England could be brought about solely by disestablishment without a sincere spiritual renewal.

Isaac Williams' approach to the relationship between the church and the state owed much to the influence of the pre-Tractarian High Church tradition and also his fellow Tractarians. Like the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen he possessed a highly

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 274

¹⁸⁰ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 80-3

¹⁸¹ Williams, "Indications of a Superintending Providence in the Preservation of the Prayer Book (no. 86)", 79

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 79

¹⁸³ Copeland W.J. to Williams I. (13 July, 1850), L.P.L., M.S. 4473, f. 220

¹⁸⁴ Keble, *Sermons Academical and Occasional*, 144

¹⁸⁵ Pusey E.B., *Patience and Confidence the Strength of the Church* (Oxford, 1841), 55-6

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 82

conservative view of society and emphasised the importance of obedience to established authority, the divine right of kings and a veneration for ‘King Charles the Martyr’. His emphasis on the church’s spiritual independence and his belief that its connection with the state was something that weakened the church, was more in line with the thinking of the Nonjurors and the Tractarians. There does appear to be something of a tension in Williams’ conclusion that, although establishment was spiritually disadvantageous to the church, it would not be expedient to dissolve the link between church and state. Underlying this tension must have been a conflict between Williams’ political conservatism and respect for established authority and his belief that the church’s spiritual mission was being hindered by the civil government. Williams’ reticence to argue for the disestablishment of the church, and his belief that the solution to its problems was to be found in a renewal of spiritual life rather than in political antagonism, suggests that his thinking on this issue was influenced by the principle of reserve. His approach would seem to be consistent with his claim in *Tracts* 80 and 87 that true holiness of life could be brought about by “nothing else but a sense of the Divine presence”¹⁸⁷ and that it was wrong “to seek to remedy by external effects, that which can only be from within; to think less of appearance, more of the reality”.¹⁸⁸ For Williams, disestablishment would only heal the symptoms of the problem without going to the root of the issue, i.e. the fact that the church had lost its sense of devotion and failed to recognise God’s presence in its midst. What was necessary, therefore, was a true renewal of the church’s spiritual life which, in turn, would counter the state’s erastian influence over it. In emphasising the belief that the issue of disestablishment was inseparable from the call to grow in holiness, Isaac Williams demonstrated that the political and spiritual aspects of the Oxford Movement were in no way mutually exclusive.

¹⁸⁷ Williams, “On Reserve (no. 80)”, *Tracts* (v. 4), 40

¹⁸⁸ Williams, “On Reserve (no. 87)”, *Tracts* (v. 5), 102-3

Chapter Eight: The Appeal to Antiquity

A prominent aspect of High Church and Tractarian conservatism was their emphasis on the authority of Christian antiquity as reflected in the writings of the church fathers.¹ Seventeenth-century High Churchmen including Lancelot Andrewes, William Laud and James Ussher had a wide knowledge of the patristic writings and used them to defend the status of the Church of England on the basis of antiquity,² while Joseph Bingham's *Origines Ecclesiasticæ* (1708) drew heavily on the works of the church fathers in an attempt to describe the practices and customs of the early church.³ In contrast to the Latitudinarians, who emphasised the authority of scripture and reason alone, High Churchmen like William Wake, Jeremy Collier, Nathaniel Marshall and Henry Dodwell pointed to the value of tradition and were responsible for translating and publishing various editions of the patristic writings.⁴ During the eighteenth century Daniel Waterland also referred to the works of many of the church fathers in his "Use and Value of Ecclesiastical Antiquity with Respect to Controversies of Faith".⁵

The appeal to the patristic writings was also central to the work of the Tractarians as was reflected in the publication, in fifty volumes, of the *Library of the Fathers* between 1838 and 1885, initially under the editorship of E.B. Pusey.⁶ Although they claimed that their emphasis on the writings of the church fathers was a re-discovery of patristic theology, the Tractarians were in fact building upon the approach of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen.⁷ Patristic theology was particularly

¹ See Cornwall R.D., "The Search for the Primitive Church: The Use of Early Church Fathers in the High Church Anglican Tradition, 1680-1745", *Anglican and Episcopal History*, v.59, no. 3 (September, 1990), 303-329

² Barnard L.W., "The Use of the Patristic Tradition in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries", in Bauckham R. and Drewery B. (editors), *Scripture, Tradition and Reason, A Study in the Criteria of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Richard P.C. Hanson* (Edinburgh, 1988), 186

³ *Ibid.*, 176-85

⁴ Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic*, 47-8 – For example, Collier J. (editor), *A Panegyrick Upon the Maccabees, by St. Gregory of Nazianzen: Of Unseasonable Diversions, by Salvian: A Description of the Pagan World; A Consolatory Discourse to the Christians of Carthage Visited by a Mortality; Of the Advantage of Patience; these three by St. Cyprian: Done into English by Jeremy Collier* (London, 1716); Marshall N. (editor), *The Genuine Works of St. Cyprian* (London, 1717); Wake W. (editor), *An English Version of the Genuine Epistles of the Apostolic Fathers, With a Preliminary Discourse Concerning the Use of those Fathers* (London, 1693); Brett T., *A Collection of the Principle Liturgies, used by the Christian Church in the Celebration of the Holy Eucharist* (London, 1720); Dodwell H., *Dissertationes Cyprianici* (Oxford, 1684); Dodwell H., *Dissertationes in Irenaeum* (Oxford, 1689)

⁵ Van Mildert (ed.), *The Works of the Rev Daniel Waterland* (v. 5), 253-333

⁶ Rowell, *The Vision Glorious*, 9ff.; Fraught, *The Oxford Movement*, 55-9

⁷ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 109-113

appealing for the Tractarians because, as they became increasingly critical of the erastian relationship between the church and the state, the appeal to antiquity became even more important as an alternative source of authority for the contemporary church.⁸

1. The Value of Antiquity and the Importance of the Church Fathers

Apart from Isaac Williams' scriptural commentaries which made frequent reference to the patristic writings, the importance of the appeal to antiquity is reflected in two of his contributions to the *Lyra Apostolica*, namely "The Rule of Faith" and "The Angel of the Church". The first of these emphasises the importance of the *Commonitorium* of St. Vincent of Lerins which defined catholicity as what has been believed 'always, everywhere and by all'. This was also central to the High Church and Tractarian understanding of antiquity as the rule of faith since, while it was accepted that individual church fathers could err, a consensus of their writings was believed to be much more reliable as an expression of Christian orthodoxy.⁹ For Williams, God's truth was not to be found just in the "Sacred Volume" of scripture, but also in the traditions of the church, the

hallowed shrine,
Founded on Jesus Christ the corner stone.¹⁰

Whereas schism and heresy are described as being transitory, God's truth, like Christ himself, the 'true Sun', is seen as remaining constant and unchanging:

. . . Truth ever one,
Not here or there, but in the whole hath shone.
Whilst Heresies arise of varying clime
And varying form and colour, the true Sun,
One and the same through all advancing time,
The Whole His Mansion makes, vast, uniform, sublime.¹¹

Deviations from the orthodox faith, on the other hand, are portrayed as schismatic "novelties" which sought to compromise with the revealed faith by adapting it to suit

⁸ Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 29

⁹ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 104; Cornwall, "The Search for the Primitive Church", 314-5; McAdoo H.R., *The Spirit of Anglicanism: A Survey of Anglican Theological Method in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1965), 333-4 citing Andrewes, *Responsio*, 208; More and Cross (ed.), *Anglicanism*, 132 quoting White F., *A Treatise of the Sabbath Day, containing a Defence of the Orthodoxal Doctrine of the Church of England Against Sabbatarian Novelty* (London, 1635), 97

¹⁰ Williams I., "The Rule of Faith (XCVII)" in Newman (ed.) *Lyra Apostolica*, 118

¹¹ *Ibid.*

the contemporary age.¹² In contrast Williams believed that one ought to seek to avoid such “controversial leanings and debate” and remain obedient to all that was taught in Christian tradition by “[f]ollowing wher’er the Church hath mark’d the Ancient Way”.¹³ In presenting orthodoxy as remaining constant and theological error as being subject to continual change, Williams’ thinking was at one with that of Nonjurors such as Thomas Brett and Charles Leslie.¹⁴

In “The Angel of the Church” Williams reflected at length on the erastianism which he saw threatening the spiritual autonomy of the Church of England during the 1820-30s. As in “The Rule of Faith”, he contrasted unchanging tradition with heresy and theological error which are seen as being subject to relentless change:

The flood-gates on me open wide,
And headlong rushes in the turbulent tide
Of lusts and heresies . . .¹⁵

Williams claimed that the church had become spiritually weakened by this onslaught of liberalism since it had given up its “ancient strength” which lay in the traditional devotional practices of frequent fasting and prayer.¹⁶ In the final verse of the poem contemporary liberalism is described in terms of the antichrist and is presented as an “ABOMINATION” which had infiltrated the church.¹⁷ The only defence against such a foe, according to Williams, was to be found in Christian tradition, the “untainted fount of pure Antiquity”.¹⁸ This assumption that the ancient church was closer to the pure, unadulterated faith than the contemporary church was reflected in the writings of many of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen.¹⁹ Daniel Waterland, for example, compared the beliefs of the contemporary age with “the pure and ancient faith” of the

¹² Ibid., 119

¹³ Ibid., 120

¹⁴ Cornwall, “The Search for the Primitive Church”, 314 citing Brett T., *Tradition Necessary to Explain and Interpret the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1718), 82-3, Leslie C., *The True Notion of the Catholick Church*, in *The Theological Works of the Reverend Charles Leslie* (volume 1) (London, 1721), 581

¹⁵ Williams I., “The Angel of the Church (CXI)” in Newman (ed.), *Lyra Apostolica*, 139

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 141

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Cornwall, “The Search for the Primitive Church”, 303 quoting Dodwell H., *The Doctrine of the Church of England, Concerning the Independency of the Clergy on Laypower* (London, 1697), iv-v; McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism*, 335; Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic*, 48-9, citing Brett T., *Tradition Necessary to Explain and Interpret the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1718), 1-3, 41-2, 146; Johnson, *The Unbloody Sacrifice* (v. 1), 31-2; Lowth S., *Directions for the Profitable Reading of Holy Scripture* (London, 1712), 28; Duffy E., “Primitive Christianity Revived; Religious Renewal in Augustan England”, *Studies in Church History*, 14 (1977), 287-300

early church, while William Beveridge claimed that the Reformation had restored the Church of England to “the pattern of the Primitive and Apostolical Church”.²⁰

Isaac Williams’ emphasis on the importance of tradition is also reflected in *The Cathedral* where a number of his verses on the cloisters reflect his veneration for ancient and unchanging values. His verse entitled “The Ancient Village”, for example, suggests that he saw the theological changes which were taking place in the church reflected in society at large as the rural English village was becoming increasingly threatened by the growing industrial towns and cities. Williams called on the rook, the bird that he saw as being responsible for guarding the village, to protect the “hoary haunts of sweet Antiquity”.²¹

In another poem entitled “New Ways”, Williams reflected on the distinction between novelty and antiquity in a religious context claiming that new developments of the faith would lead to a “foul Stygian deep, where hideous things / Stable in darkness”.²² The second stanza of his poem on episcopacy claimed that Christian tradition could be seen as a defence for the orthodox faith against the threat of liberalism:

The soul that knows not thy constraining power,
Sacred Antiquity! Hath lost a spell
From Heaven, - a delicate chain impalpable
To hold clear spirits; he hath miss’d the tower
Where Faith finds refuge . . .²³

The use of the image of the protecting ‘tower’ suggests the constancy of Christian tradition which had preserved the integrity of the faith despite the changes of time.

Williams’ poetry suggests that Christian tradition was essentially static and unchanging, a view also held by John Keble and H.E. Manning. Keble claimed that principles such as “improvement, discovery, [or] evolution of new truths” had no place in the Christian approach to tradition.²⁴ This understanding stood in contrast to Newman’s theory of the development of Christian doctrine, according to which doctrine was believed to have developed legitimately from primitive apostolic

²⁰ Van Mildert (ed.), *The Works of the Rev. Daniel Waterland* (v. 5), 255; Duffy, “Primitive Christianity Revived”, 287 quoting Beveridge, *The Theological Works of William Beveridge* (v. 2), 444

²¹ Williams, *The Cathedral*, 18

²² *Ibid.*, 32

²³ *Ibid.*, 44

²⁴ Keble, *Primitive Tradition*, 48

tradition while remaining the same in substance.²⁵ Williams was highly critical of this concept of development and suggested in his *Autobiography* that Newman's emphasis on it reflected the influence which the Oriel Noetics had over him during the 1820s.²⁶ Manning also condemned the idea in his 1839 sermon *The Rule of Faith*, claiming that,

Progression and results are indeed the very life of science; but the rule of faith is retrospective altogether, and the first axiom of apostolic truth is, whatsoever is new is not of Christ. God has set up the landmarks of Revelation, and no man may move them.²⁷

Although the church sometimes had to clarify what was taught in scripture and tradition, it had no authority to add to the deposit of faith.²⁸ In contrast to Newman's idea of development, Williams, Keble and Manning, before his conversion, continued to believe that, by following tradition, the contemporary church held the same truths that were taught by the apostles.

Isaac Williams also emphasised the importance of the appeal to antiquity in his poem on the High Church divine Thomas Wilson from *The Cathedral*. Wilson had been bishop of Sodor and Man during the eighteenth century and was renowned for his attempt to uphold primitive practices, including ecclesiastical discipline:²⁹

Mona, may Ocean's waves that gird thee round
Keep watch about thy shores, as holy ground,
And lift their suppliant hands, nor plead in vain,
And thine Apostle's See e'en yet remain!
For, louder than those waves thy rocks among,
That saintly name once had a thrilling tongue,
Which pleaded for thy sea-encircled strand;
And still doth plead. Woe worth the reckless hand
That shall remove thy landmark, and defile
His living monument thou sacred Isle.
He needeth nought of us, true-hearted saint,
Nor storied stone, nor monumental plaint,
But much we need of him, while in his praise
Shall the memorial live of pure primeval days.³⁰

²⁵ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 144-5; Rowlands, *Church, State and Society*, 178; Ker, *John Henry Newman*, 304, citing Newman J.H., *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 38-40; Bauckham R., "Tradition in Relation to Scripture and Reason", in Bauckham and Drewery (ed.), *Scripture, Tradition and Reason*, 124-7

²⁶ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 46 – The Noetics were a group of liberal theologians who included Richard Whately and Edward Hawkins

²⁷ Manning H.E., *The Rule of Faith* (Oxford, 1839), 50

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 34-5

²⁹ Cf. Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, 107, 225

³⁰ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1889 edition), 168

This poem was in keeping with the Tractarian veneration for Thomas Wilson³¹ and it is clear that Williams believed that his witness in defending the faith of antiquity on the Isle of Man provided an important example for the nineteenth-century Church of England.

The importance of unchanging tradition was also highlighted in Williams' poetry by his use of the image of the cathedral building. In the final poem of *The Cathedral*, for example, Williams claimed that the aesthetic beauty reflected in the cathedral building pointed to the value of tradition:

Beauty of holiness, still let me hold
Thy mantle skirts, and talk with thee awhile,
And read thy brow, which fairer seems when old;
Time's fingers rude, which other things defile,
Make thee more lovely³²

It is interesting to note that Williams' portrayal of the cathedral building seemed to owe much to the Gothic Revival,³³ a movement which, since the middle of the eighteenth century, had attempted to return to Medieval patterns of church design.³⁴ The work was therefore influenced by a wider architectural movement which, like the Oxford Movement, sought to appeal to the past.

Williams' emphasis on the cathedral building as reflecting the importance of Christian antiquity was also reflected in a poem about a pilgrimage which he made in 1841 with his brother to St. David's cathedral in south west Wales. His love for St. David's is reflected in his description of it in a letter to Pusey as being "a place very much out of this world".³⁵ Williams' poem, which was included in *The Baptistery*, again links his veneration for Christian tradition with the grandeur and beauty of the cathedral building:

It was St. David's ancient pile,
Chancel, nave, tower, and window'd aisle,
And skirting all the Western side,
A palace fair in ruin'd pride,
With storied range in order set,
And portal, arch and parapet.³⁶

³¹ Cf. Avis, *Anglicanism*, 282

³² Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition) 304

³³ Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, 154-6

³⁴ Cf. Yates, *Liturgical Space*, 113-23

³⁵ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (30 August, 1841), P. H., M.S. (L.B.V., no. 6)

³⁶ Williams, *The Baptistery* (1842 edition), 191

Williams' references to the 'chancel, nave, tower' as well as to the 'palace fair' with its 'portal, arch and parapet' suggest the authority and power of tradition embodied in the ancient cathedral building. The fact that he went on to describe this site as

. . . hiding from the haunts of men
In hollow of the mountain glen,³⁷

suggests a link between tradition and the doctrine of reserve since, like the cathedral of St. David's which was hidden from view by the 'mountain glen', the teachings of tradition were not immediately obvious to all people but had to be uncovered by a gradual reading of the works of the church fathers.

The majestic portrayal of the cathedral building in Williams' poem stands in contrast to his description of the "ruin'd pride" of the bishop's palace which suggests the idea of a former glory that has passed away. The two buildings point not only to the church's roots in tradition, but also to the grave sacrilege which was taking place as her ancient apostolic authority (symbolised by the bishop's palace) was being widely ignored amid the political upheavals of the nineteenth century:

Religion's venerable hold,
With wrecks and ruin manifold,
Burst full on the astonish'd eye,
Hoar in sublime antiquity.³⁸

At the same time the landscape around St. David's evoked for Williams a strong yearning for a return to the church's ancient traditions which he felt were being increasingly ignored:

Ancient Menevia, o'er thee still,
I linger, sea, and rock, and hill,
Peopling with recollections high,
Of more divine antiquity.
Sons of a happier, holier day,
I cannot deem ye gone away,
The moaning wind your requiem sings,
To all around your memory clings,
No crowded town, no fertile scene,
To stand yourself and us between.³⁹

Again the rural imagery of "sea, and rock, and hill", among which St. David founded his monastic community in the sixth century, and which remained unchanged through the passing centuries, stands in contrast to the contemporary industrial "crowded

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

town”, which was constantly subject to change. The natural landscape calls to mind the traditions of “divine antiquity” on which the church was founded and which had once been so fervently upheld in the see of St. David’s. It is also significant that Williams’ refers to the diocese by its ancient Latin title “Menevia”.

Like the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen and the Tractarians, Isaac Williams’ emphasis on Christian tradition was also reflected in his veneration of the church fathers. Three poems which he contributed to the “Commune Doctorum” section of the *Lyra Apostolica*, for example, were dedicated to Clement, Origen and Basil,⁴⁰ while *The Cathedral* contains verses on no less than twenty three of the patristic writers.⁴¹ His translation of the Latin hymn *Vos succensa Deo splendida Lumina* from the Paris Breviary also reflects his deep admiration for the fathers of the early church who, in their day, defended the Christian faith against error and heresy. They are presented as being bearers of God’s “sure truth and virtue” and also as “channels” by which his grace was able to touch the world.⁴² The images of the “sword” and the “shield”⁴³ suggest that it was their vocation to defend and fight for the faith which they had received. In an age when Christian truth appeared to be increasingly threatened by erastianism, Williams believed that the church fathers provided a worthy example for the Tractarian cause:

We too may grasp your arrows bright,
E’en till this hour we combat in your mail
And with no doubtful end – we combat and prevail . . .⁴⁴

Williams praised the church fathers for their fidelity to the faith even in the midst of worldly opposition. Clement of Rome, for example, was to be commended for his faithfulness while the Church of Rome was suffering from “persecution, poverty and strife”.⁴⁵ Irenæus likewise was praised for his resolve to lead the church in the face of schism and apostasy.⁴⁶ Athanasius was presented as “[t]ruth’s loyal champion” who is “to all time rever’d”, since his allegiance to the truth was not weakened by the “sea of

³⁹ Ibid., 201

⁴⁰ Williams I., “Clement (XC)”, “Origen (XCI)”, and “Basil (XCIV)” in Newman (ed.), *Lyra Apostolica*, 110-5

⁴¹ Williams, *The Cathedral*, 274-97 – Williams mentions Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin, Irenæus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Dionysius of Alexandria, Hippolytus, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Athanasius, Ambrose, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Hilary, Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius, Gregory Nyssen, Chrysostom, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria and Jerome

⁴² Williams, “Commune Doctorum (LXXXVIII)” in Newman (ed.), *Lyra Apostolica*, 106

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 107

⁴⁵ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1848 edition), 274

troubles” which challenged him.⁴⁷ The fact that he had refused to compromise with God’s truth, despite having been

. . . beaten by wild breath
Of calumny, of exile, and of wrong,⁴⁸

made him a worthy example for Christians of all ages. He was a source of inspiration for the Tractarians in particular as they attempted to challenge the erastianism which they believed was threatening the church:

Thou from our tossing waves, and stormy sky,
Art in thy peaceful haven hid from sight;
But still thy name hath leave to guide us thro’ the night.⁴⁹

This suggests that Williams saw the church fathers not just as theologians whose writings helped to confirm the correct interpretation of scripture, but as living examples of Christian fidelity in the nineteenth century. Such an approach had also been employed by churchmen since the seventeenth century.⁵⁰ William Cave, for example, in his *Primitive Christianity: or, the Religion of the Ancient Christians In the first Ages of the Gospel* claimed to have studied the patristic writings not just for theological reasons but to ascertain “what was their [i.e. the church fathers’] practice, and by what rules and measures they did govern and conduct their lives”.⁵¹ During the seventeenth century the High Churchman Anthony Horneck created a group of societies in which members lived according to a rule of life based on patristic principles and the “strictness of the primitive church”.⁵²

Isaac Williams’ portrayal of the church fathers also appears to share something of the rhetorical approach to church history which was employed by Newman in his *Arians of the Fourth Century* and his *Letters on the Church of the Fathers* (which he dedicated to Williams).⁵³ Following the example of Joseph Milner’s *The History of the Christian Church*, through which he had first become familiar with the patristic writings, Newman attempted to present the history of the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 278

⁴⁷ Ibid., 286

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism*, 316

⁵¹ Duffy, “Religious renewal in Augustan England”, 288 quoting Cave W., *Primitive Christianity, or the Religion of the Ancient Christians in the first ages of the Gospel* (London, 1773), preface, no pagination

⁵² Ibid., 289-91

⁵³ Cf. Nockles, “Survivals or New Arrivals? The Oxford Movement and the Nineteenth-Century Historical Construction of Anglicanism”, 145

early church not objectively, but as mirroring the issues which the Tractarians faced in the 1830s. This was reflected in *The Arians* in his claim that, in the fourth century as in the nineteenth, “there was the prospect, and partly the presence in the Church, of an Heretical Power enthraling it . . . and interfering with the management of her internal affairs” and in the hope which he expressed at the end of the work that, “should the hand of Satan press us sore, our Athanasius and Basil will be given us in their destined season, to break the bonds of the oppressor, and let the captives go free”.⁵⁴ For both Williams and Newman the patristic writers were to be seen not just as individuals who lived in their own set of historical circumstances, but as figures whose life and witness possessed relevance for the church in the contemporary age.

2.The Relationship between Tradition and Scripture

While Isaac Williams’ poetry placed a great deal of emphasis on the value of Christian antiquity, it does not directly discuss how he understood the relationship between tradition and scripture. In *Tract 86* he claimed that the Church of England’s liturgy drew upon ecclesiastical tradition as well as scripture since a number of the canticles appointed for Morning Prayer were drawn from the apocryphal books of the Bible. The Athanasian Creed also derived from tradition rather than from the Bible. This led Williams to state that both scripture and tradition were “two threads mutually interwoven with each other . . . combining for our use in instruction and devotion”.⁵⁵ In one of his sermons he also claimed that the *Book of Common Prayer* reflected the authority of both scripture and tradition since it had its roots in the ancient liturgies of the primitive church.⁵⁶

Tradition was also closely related to Williams’ understanding of the doctrine of reserve and to the spiritual interpretation of scripture. His claim in *Tract 80* that the doctrines of the faith ought to be revealed gradually to enquirers and that copies of the scriptures should not be widely distributed,⁵⁷ suggests that he believed that that the faith ought to be handed on not primarily by scripture but by oral tradition. He also believed that the spiritual approach to scripture was related to the principle of

⁵⁴ Newman, *The Arians*, 393-4

⁵⁵ Williams, “Indications of a Superintending Providence in the Preservation of the Prayer Book (no. 86)”, 40

⁵⁶ Williams I., “Sermon LXI: The Church Prayer-Book a Safe Guide”, Williams and Copeland (ed.), *Plain Sermons by Contributors to the ‘Tracts for the Times’* (v. 2), 197-8

⁵⁷ Williams, “On Reserve (no. 80)”, 61-3

reserve⁵⁸ since, in order to gain a true understanding of scripture, it was essential to interpret it in accordance with Christian tradition as reflected in the writings of the church fathers.⁵⁹ Failure to read the Bible in the light of tradition was to make its interpretation subject solely to private judgement.⁶⁰ The importance of tradition as a means of interpreting the Bible was reflected at the beginning of one of Williams' gospel commentaries, where he quoted a prayer of bishop Thomas Wilson asking that "in reading Thy Holy Word, I may never prefer my private sentiments before those of the Church, in the purely ancient times of Christianity".⁶¹ In his *Thoughts on the Study of the Holy Gospels*, Williams also emphasised the fact that tradition was inextricably linked to the interpretation of scripture because certain doctrines, like that of the Trinity, could not be deduced from a purely literal reading of scripture but only by interpreting it spiritually and in accordance with tradition.⁶²

In claiming that tradition helped lead to a correct interpretation of scripture Williams was at one with the majority of pre-Tractarian High Churchmen who, following what Richard Bauckham termed the 'ancillary view' of tradition, believed that its function was to confirm and clarify the teaching of scripture without adding to its meaning.⁶³ Since the church fathers had lived closer to the apostolic age, they were deemed to have been more likely to have understood the true meaning of scripture than contemporary readers, and it was therefore believed that their writings were indispensable for interpreting scripture.⁶⁴ This understanding was held by Herbert Thorndike who claimed that tradition helped those who "cannot easily or safely discern wherein the substance of faith depends" to understand the Bible.⁶⁵ In the eighteenth century Daniel Waterland also claimed that tradition "ought to attend as an handmaid to Scripture . . . to keep off intruders from making too bold with her and to discourage strangers from misrepresenting her" but not "to superadd new doctrines to

⁵⁸ Williams, "On Reserve (no. 87)", 21-2

⁵⁹ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 154; Williams, "On Reserve (no. 87)", 21-25

⁶⁰ Williams, "On Reserve (no. 87)", 199

⁶¹ Williams I., *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (volume 7): *Our Lord's Passion* (London, 1882), opening quotation (no pagination)

⁶² Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 1), 162

⁶³ Cf. Bauckham, "Tradition in Relation to Scripture and Reason", 122; McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism*, 340-1

⁶⁴ Cornwall, "The Search for the Primitive Church", 307

⁶⁵ Thorndike H., *An Epilogue to the Tragedy of the Church of England*, in *The Theological Works of Herbert Thorndike* (volume 2, part 1) (Oxford, 1845 L.A.C.T. edition), 120-1

scripture”.⁶⁶ In his biography of bishop Samuel Horsely, F.C. Mather claimed that Horsely’s emphasis on the authority of tradition foreshadowed the teaching of the Oxford Movement. It is important to point out, however, that Horsely’s rejection of contemporary Roman Catholic beliefs and practices, and his emphasis on tradition as a means of interpreting the scriptures,⁶⁷ would seem to suggest that he did not see tradition as possessing an authority which was supplementary to that of scripture.

Although Isaac Williams’ claim that not all Christian doctrines were explicitly stated in the Bible was also echoed in the writings of Newman and John Keble,⁶⁸ his understanding of the relationship between scripture and tradition seems to have been more in line with that of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen than with Newman, John Keble and Hurrell Froude, who held what Bauckham termed the ‘supplementary view’ of tradition.⁶⁹ This belief that tradition provided additional revelation to the contents of scripture and that beliefs and practices could be justified on the basis of tradition alone,⁷⁰ was reflected in the eighteenth century in the writings of the Nonjurors William Law and Thomas Brett. In his letters to the Latitudinarian bishop Hoadley of Bangor, Law claimed that, since the Bible nowhere taught that scripture alone was the authoritative source of Christian truth, to reject a doctrine just because it was not contained in the Bible would also involve rejecting the authority of scripture itself.⁷¹ Brett also claimed that, since the faith was normally passed on orally and not by reading the Bible, scripture and tradition were mutually dependent upon each other so that

We cannot . . . receive any Interpretation of Scripture which is contrary to truly primitive and universal Tradition, because it is by such Tradition that we are assured that the Books we have received as holy scripture are indeed the Word of God.⁷²

As a result of his understanding of the authority of tradition Brett argued that a number of practices which were not commanded in scripture, for example anointing with oil in baptism and confirmation, the mixed chalice and prayers for the departed

⁶⁶ Van Mildert (ed.), *The Works of the Rev. Daniel Waterland* (v. 5), 257, 282

⁶⁷ Mather, *High Church Prophet*, 207-8

⁶⁸ Keble, *Primitive Tradition*, 32; Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 110

⁶⁹ Cf. Bauckham, “Tradition in Relation to Scripture and Reason”, 120

⁷⁰ Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic*, 50-54

⁷¹ Law W., *A Second Letter to the Bishop of Bangor* (London, 1762), 67-8

⁷² Brett T., *Tradition Necessary to explain the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1718), 86-7, 101-2

were essential to the faith and ought to be restored to the liturgy of the Church of England.⁷³

The fact that a number of the Tractarians shared the Nonjuror view of tradition is reflected by the Evangelical J. Jordan's claim that they appealed to tradition as "a treasury of divine knowledge, of equal authority, value and eminence with Holy Scripture".⁷⁴ In his 1836 sermon entitled *Primitive Tradition Recognised in Holy Scripture* Keble claimed that both scripture and tradition were of equal authority for the Christian since both were influenced by the Holy Spirit and contained divine revelation.⁷⁵ An essay entitled "Apostolic Tradition" written by Newman the same year described tradition as an "infallible" interpreter of scripture, while, in *Tract 85* he also claimed that the Bible possessed no authority of its own independent of tradition since it did not actually teach that scripture contained "all things necessary for salvation".⁷⁶

That Newman and Keble's supplementary view of tradition was also held by Hurrell Froude is reflected in the preface which they wrote for the second part of his *Remains*. This made it clear that the understanding of tradition which Froude had advocated, and to which Newman and Keble also claimed to adhere, marked a deviation from the ancillary approach which had been taken by the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen.⁷⁷ The preface claimed that Froude's belief in the authority of antiquity and universal consent had led him to apply the teachings of tradition to a number of doctrines, and that it was on the basis of tradition alone that he came to believe in baptismal regeneration, the Eucharistic sacrifice and the apostolic succession.⁷⁸ Like the Nonjurors, Froude believed that the beliefs and practices of the primitive church were the antithesis to those brought about by the Reformation and, since tradition and scripture were equal sources of authority, he claimed that the contemporary church ought to be challenged on the basis of antiquity.⁷⁹ Froude believed that, at the Reformation, the Church of England had lost numerous beliefs

⁷³ Ibid., 105, 133ff.; see Cornwall, "The Search for the Primitive Church", 309-11

⁷⁴ Jordan J., *A Review of Tradition as taught by the Writers of the Tracts for the Times* (London, 1840), i

⁷⁵ Keble, *Primitive Tradition*, 26

⁷⁶ Newman J.H., *Essays Critical and Historical* (London, 1919), 103; Newman J.H., "Lectures on the Scripture Proof of the Doctrines of the Church (no. 85)", *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford* (volume 5) (London, 1840), 28

⁷⁷ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 125

⁷⁸ Keble and Newman (ed.), *The Remains of the late Reverend Richard Hurrell Froude* (part 2 ,v. 1), xvii

⁷⁹ Ibid., xvii

and practices taught only by tradition, which were not just beneficial but actually essential to the very nature of the church such as “Fasting, Celibacy, religious Vows, voluntary Retirement and Contemplation, the memory of the Saints” as well as various other “Rites and ceremonies recommended by Antiquity”.⁸⁰

This approach stood in contrast to Isaac Williams’ view of the role of tradition as helping to interpret scripture according to the mind of the primitive church. In *Tract 86* he claimed that scripture and tradition, while being inseparable, were “not in any way equivalent in authority”.⁸¹ While the principle of reserve could be justified on the basis of tradition, as Williams attempted to make clear in *Tract 87*, *Tract 80* attempted to justify the principle primarily on the basis of scripture by demonstrating that reserve was reflected in God’s dealings with humanity throughout the Bible.⁸² In his *Autobiography* Williams claimed that, although he first came across the principle of reserve in the writings of Origen, it was his own study of the gospels which helped to confirm his belief in it.⁸³

Whereas Froude claimed to have held doctrines like baptismal regeneration and the eucharistic sacrifice solely on the basis of tradition, Williams’ sermons on these subjects are strongly scriptural. For example, he cites passages like Galatians 4:5-6, 1 Peter 1:2-3 and Titus 3:5 to justify baptismal regeneration and Malachi 1:11, Genesis 8:20-21, Luke 22:15 as teaching the doctrine of the eucharistic sacrifice.⁸⁴ This suggests that Williams upheld the importance of tradition acting as an interpreter of scripture rather than seeing it as a supplementary source of authority in itself. This is also confirmed by a letter which Isaac Williams wrote to his brother Matthew in 1834 following the death of their brother Charles. In this letter Isaac responded to his brother’s question regarding the propriety of offering prayers for the departed, stating that “I cannot but think that were it any benefit to the Dead, or any Duty in us, that Scripture would not have been silent on such a subject, and independently of other reasons I have felt its silence a prohibition”.⁸⁵ Such an attitude to intercession for the departed suggests that, at this time, he did not believe that tradition could be used to supplement the teachings of the Bible. He claimed to agree with the High Church

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, xxviii-xxix

⁸¹ Williams, “Indications of a Superintending Providence in the Preservation of the Prayer Book (no. 86)”, 40

⁸² Williams, “On Reserve (no. 87)”, 7; Williams, “On Reserve (no. 80)”, 3

⁸³ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 89-91

⁸⁴ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 2), 269-82, 313-25

⁸⁵ Williams I. to Williams M.D. (1835), L.P.L., M.S. 4476, f. 157

bishop Thomas Wilson that prayers should be offered not for the departed soul but for bereaved relatives, and was critical of Johnson of Cranbrook's belief in praying for the dead.⁸⁶

It would appear from Williams' writings that, unlike the Nonjurors and the Tractarians who held to the supplementary view of tradition and claimed that practices taught only in tradition were nonetheless fundamental,⁸⁷ he maintained the more traditional High Church distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental beliefs and practices. This understanding was held by High Churchmen including William Laud, Thorndike and Ussher, who claimed that the only essential articles of faith were those which could be justified on the basis of scripture and were contained in the Apostle's creed. Other beliefs and practices which were only confirmed by tradition were non-fundamental.⁸⁸ Daniel Waterland also claimed that no doctrine should be held on the basis of tradition alone, "but what is contained in Scripture, and proved from Scripture, rightly interpreted".⁸⁹ At the beginning of the nineteenth century William Van Mildert, following Waterland's teaching, taught that scripture was

the only Rule of Faith: and whatever benefit may be derived from other writings . . . as apostolical traditions, additional matters illustrative of our faith and worship; to them is to be assigned no more than a secondary rank, as being subsidiary, not essential to our Creed.⁹⁰

This distinction between essential and non-essential beliefs and practices was reflected in Isaac Williams' *Tract 86* on the Prayer Book. Here Williams claimed that, while it was regrettable that elements like the introit, the Hosanna and the Gloria Deo and the east-ward position for the prayer of consecration had been omitted from the church's liturgy since the Reformation,⁹¹ divine providence had ensured that

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 119-122

⁸⁸ McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism*, 340-1; Laud W., *A Relation of the Conference between William Laud, late Archbishop of Canterbury, and Mr Fisher the Jesuit* (Oxford, 1849 L.A.C.T. edition), 51, 97; More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, 135 quoting Ussher J., *An Answer to a Challenge made by a Jesuit in Ireland wherein the Judgement of Antiquity in the points questioned is truly delivered, and the novelty of the new Romish doctrine plainly discovered*, in Elrington C.R. (editor), *Works* (volume 3) (1864), 41-7; Thorndike, *The Theological Works of Herbert Thorndike* (v. 2, part 1), 120-1

⁸⁹ Van Mildert (ed.), *The Works of the Rev. Daniel Waterland*, 316

⁹⁰ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 114 quoting Van Mildert W., *An Inquiry into the General Principles of Scripture Interpretation. Considered in Eight Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford in the Year MDCCCXV* (Oxford, 1815), 174

⁹¹ Williams, "Indications of a Superintending Providence in the Preservation of the Prayer Book (no. 86)", 19-20, 76

everything that was essential had been preserved in the services of the Prayer Book.⁹² This was highlighted by Williams' reference to the practice of anointing with oil at baptism and confirmation. Although he believed that this practice arose from an ancient, universal and apostolic tradition he did not claim that its omission from the Prayer Book rendered these rites invalid since "[t]he essentials are not touched" since "[t]he lessons of humiliation, of being 'buried and crucified with Christ' . . . we have still retained".⁹³ This was the antithesis of the Usager Nonjuror belief that the validity of the Church of England's sacraments depended upon re-introducing practices, such as the mixed chalice and prayer of oblation, which were found only in tradition.⁹⁴

Williams' belief that tradition, while being essential to interpret scripture correctly, could not be used to add to the deposit of faith was also consistent with the more conservative Tractarians and contemporary High Churchmen. H.E. Manning, for example, believed that scripture was "the one sole foundation and proof of faith" and rejected all traditions which were not taught in scripture.⁹⁵ William Palmer of Worcester also continued to maintain the ancillary High Church view of tradition, claiming that only beliefs and practices which were taught in scripture were to be considered fundamental.⁹⁶ The traditional High Church dislike for the supplementary view of tradition was also reflected in a letter from H.J. Rose to Newman in 1836 in which he claimed, that "All that is in Antiquity is not good; and much that was good for Antiquity would not be good for us". Rose, like Williams, believed that the role of tradition was not to point to the discovery of new truths but to highlight and confirm what the Church of England had held since the Reformation on the basis of scripture:

We know exactly what the Truth is. We are going on no voyage of discovery. We know exactly the extent of the shore . . . We know all this beforehand, and therefore can lay down our plans, and not, (as I think), feel any uncertainty where we are going, or feel it necessary, or advisable to spread our sails, and take our chance of finding a new Atlantis.⁹⁷

Although Isaac Williams did not openly criticise the supplementary view of tradition which Newman, Froude and Keble came to hold it is clear that he did not share their belief that scripture and tradition ought to be considered equal sources of

⁹² Ibid., 3

⁹³ Ibid., 27, 29

⁹⁴ Cf. Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, 272

⁹⁵ Manning, *The Rule of Faith*, 14, 17

⁹⁶ Palmer, *A Treatise on the Church of Christ* (v. 2), 53

authority. R.H. Greenfield has noted that the publication of *The Cathedral* in 1838 marked a deviation between Williams and the other Tractarians “about the role of the Primitive Church as a standard for later times”.⁹⁸ While emphasising the importance of the appeal to antiquity frequently in his poetry, Williams did not believe that tradition ought to be used to supplement anything which was lacking in the liturgy or belief of the reformed Church of England, but rather to provide a defence against what he saw as the liberalism of the age. His biblical commentaries reflect the High Church belief that tradition, as reflected in the patristic writings, could help to uncover the true meaning of scripture. While the principle of reserve drew heavily on the tradition of the *Disciplina Arcani* in the early church, *Tract 80* made it clear that Williams also believed in the practice because he saw it reflected throughout scripture. At the same time *Tract 86* reflected the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental beliefs and practices which was upheld by the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen. Williams’ understanding of the relationship between tradition and scripture can therefore be seen as a deviation from the understanding of the most prominent Tractarians. In continuing to hold to the ancillary view of tradition, Williams’ thinking was more in line with the pre-Tractarian and ‘Z’ High Churchmen than with Newman, Froude and John Keble.

⁹⁷ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 117 quoting Burgon J.W., *Lives of Twelve Good Men* (v. 1) (London, 1891), quoting H.J. Rose to J.H. Newman (9 May, 1836); J.H. Rose to J.H. Newman 13 May 1836

⁹⁸ Greenfield, “The Attitude of the Tractarians to the Roman Catholic Church”, 253-4

Chapter Nine: The Apostolic Succession and attitude to Protestant Nonconformity and Roman Catholicism

In rejecting the authority of the state over the church and appealing to the authority of Christian tradition, the Tractarians came to emphasise the importance of the church's apostolic roots.¹ The importance of the apostolic succession for Tractarian ecclesiology was directly linked to the emphasis on tradition since the belief that the church's bishops were the authentic successors of the apostles in the contemporary age was seen as confirming the fact that the present day Church of England was linked to the primitive church. The first of the *Tracts for the Times*, written by Newman, emphasised the importance of the apostolic succession through which bishops, and priests ordained by them, had, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, received "the power to bind and loose, to administer the sacraments, and to preach".² Although the Tractarians often gave the impression that their emphasis on the apostolic succession was a rediscovery of a neglected doctrine, recent scholarship has shown that its importance was also emphasised by a number of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen, including Charles Daubeny, William Stevens, William Jones of Nayland, John James Watson and Thomas Burgess.³

1. The Apostolic Succession

The importance of the apostolic succession was emphasised in Isaac Williams' *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* where he emphasised the High Church and Tractarian belief that, before his ascension into heaven, Jesus committed his own authority over the church to the apostles by making them his successors.⁴ The fact that the bishops of the Church of England had received their authority via the apostolic succession meant therefore that they had been entrusted with the ministry of

¹ Sykes S.W. and Gilley S.W., " 'No Bishop, No Church!' The Tractarian impact on Anglicanism", in Rowell G.(editor), *Tradition Renewed: The Oxford Movement Conference Papers* (London, 1986), 124-6

² Newman J.H., "Thoughts on the Ministerial Commission Respectfully Addressed to the Clergy (no. 1)", *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford* (volume 1) (London, 1834), 1-3

³ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 146-52; cf. Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic*, 98-102; Stevens W., *A Treatise on the Nature and Constitution of the Christian Church* (London, 1833 edition), 6-10 and ff.; Daubeny C., *A Guide to the Church in Several Discourses* (volume 1) (London, 1830 edition), 14-25

⁴ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative* (v. 8), 231; Andrewes L., "A Sermon Preached at Whitehall", *Ninety-Six Sermons* (volume 5) (Oxford, 1843 L.A.C.T. edition), 91-2;

Christ himself. Williams also emphasised the importance of the apostolic succession for the ordering of the church in his poem “The Rule of Faith” from the *Lyra Apostolica* which claimed that the church to which God’s truth had been committed was

Founded on Jesus Christ the corner stone,
With Prophets and Apostles and the Line
Of ordered Ministers . . .⁵

This belief that the truth of divine revelation had been committed to a church which could trace its roots back to the apostles themselves was also held in the eighteenth century by William Jones of Nayland, who taught that, as a result of the apostolic succession, “where we find these orders of ministers [i.e. bishops, priests and deacons] duly appointed . . . there we find the Church of Christ, with its form, and its authority”.⁶ According to Jones the church which, as a result of its apostolic descent, possessed the authority of Christ himself, had a solemn duty as the “pillar and ground of truth” to preserve the truths of the faith which had been committed to it.⁷ This suggests that, for both Jones and Williams, the apostolic succession was inextricably linked to the preservation of Christian doctrine.

Isaac Williams also considered the importance of the apostolic succession in his poem on “The Chapter House” in *The Cathedral*. This part of the cathedral building lent itself particularly well to the subject of the apostolic succession since it was the place where new bishops were traditionally elected by the cathedral chapter. The chapter house was portrayed as consisting of eight walls, corresponding to the eight stanzas of the poem. The image of this octagonal room, supported by one pillar, alluded to the role of the bishop as a focus of unity within his diocese. Williams’ reference to the seats around the walls of the chapter house for the priests also emphasised the relationship between the bishop and his clergy⁸ which Ignatius of Antioch, in a passage from his *Epistle to the Ephesians* quoted by Williams, had compared to the strings of a harp:

Beveridge, “Christ’s Presence with His Ministers”, *The Theological Works of William Beveridge* (v. 1), 2-3; Jones, *An Essay on the Church*, 22, 32-3; Law, *A Second Letter to the Bishop of Bangor*, 16-7

⁵ Williams, XCVII in Newman (ed.), *Lyra Apostolica*, 118

⁶ Jones W., *An Essay on the Church*, 35

⁷ *Ibid.*, 37

⁸ Williams, *The Cathedral*, 307-8; Benham W., “Introductory Analysis of ‘The Cathedral’”, Williams I., *The Cathedral, or the Church Catholic and Apostolic in England* (London, 1889 *The Ancient & Modern Library of Theological Literature* edition), 7-8

The Presbytery, being worthy of God, is united to the Bishop, as the strings are to an harp, thus bound together in union of heart and voice, and in that love of which Jesus Christ is the Leader and Guardian.⁹

Williams began his poem by taking up Ignatius' image of the harp and referring to the three-fold ministry as the "Mysterious harp of heaven-born harmony" which was essential to ensure the maintenance of "order" and "obedience" in the church.¹⁰ He also emphasised the belief that episcopacy was founded personally by Christ through his commissioning of the apostles. The apostolic succession therefore formed a direct link between the church of the present day and that of antiquity:

. . . Christ Himself, and His appointed few,
Moulded the frame, and in the silvery bound
Set all the glowing wires. Then potent grew . . .
The treasury of sweet sounds: deep aisle and fane
Prolong, from age to age, the harmonious strain.¹¹

While the belief that episcopacy had been established by Christ himself set Williams apart from Richard Hooker who believed that it was a later development which could be justified on the basis of tradition,¹² his argument was in line with many of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen and Tractarians, including Lancelot Andrews, William Beveridge, William Law, Jones of Nayland, John Henry Newman and John Keble.¹³

In stanza five of his poem on the chapter house Williams made it clear that, according to John 20:22-3, the apostolic ministry was inextricably linked to the authority to forgive or to remit sins,¹⁴ a point which was also emphasised by Andrews, Law, Jones of Nayland and Newman.¹⁵ Williams also alluded to the link between the apostolic succession and absolution in stanza eight where his reference to the 'best robe' calls to mind the parable of the Prodigal Son of Luke 15:

"He that despiseth you doth me despise."

⁹ Williams, *The Cathedral*, 43 quoting Ignatius', *Epistle to the Ephesians*, c. iv.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 43

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 44

¹² Norris R.A., "Episcopacy", Sykes S. and Booty J. (editors), *The Study of Anglicanism* (London, 1988), 302-3

¹³ Andrewes L., "A Sermon Preached at Whitehall", *Ninety-Six Sermons (Volume 5)* (Oxford, 1843 L.A.C.T. edition), 91-3; Beveridge W., "Christ's Presence with his Ministers", *The Theological Works of William Beveridge* (v. 1) (Oxford, 1842), 2-6; Law, *A Second Letter to the Bishop of Bangor*, 16-7; Jones, *An Essay on the Church*, 32-3; Newman, "Thoughts on the Ministerial Commission (no. 1)", 2; Keble J., "Adherence to the Apostolical Succession the Safest Course (no. 4)", *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford* (volume 1) (London, 1834), 4

¹⁴ Williams, *The Cathedral.*, 47

¹⁵ Andrewes, "A Sermon Preached at Whitehall", *Ninety-Six Sermons*, 91-3; Law, *A Second Letter to the Bishop of Bangor*, 18; Jones, *An Essay on the Church*, 40-1; Newman, "Thoughts on the Ministerial Commission (no. 1)", 3; Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (v. 2), 308-9;

Lo! At that call Faith her best robe prepares,
And Heaven to Earth lets down the eternal stairs,
Through a long line of more than good or wise,
The high-born legates of the appeased skies
Come down their avenue of sacred years . . .¹⁶

Williams' references to the 'eternal stairs', the 'long line' and the 'avenue of sacred years', imply the idea of a succession passing down through the ages, and suggests that episcopal ordination in the apostolic succession linked the church of antiquity with the contemporary church and the earthly church with the heavenly church. This point was also made by Benjamin Harrison in *Tract 24* entitled "The Scripture views of the Apostolic Commission", where he claimed that, as a result of the apostolic succession "since the Apostolic times . . . the City of GOD is, as it were, come down from heaven to earth; the scene is changed, but the city remains the same. The Corner-stone is the same, its foundations are the same".¹⁷ The belief that the apostolic succession ensured the contemporary church's continuity with primitive church also had a precedent in the writings of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen. William Beveridge, for example, claimed that the descent of the bishops from the apostles meant that the means of salvation were just as available in the eighteenth-century Church of England as they had been in the early church,¹⁸ while Jones of Nayland emphasised the belief that the contemporary church receives its "authority from the Church which Christ first planted in the world . . . by succession from the church which went before; the line extending from Christ himself to the end of the world".¹⁹

Stanza three of Williams' poem makes it clear that he saw the role of bishops as being more than just a convenient way of ruling and ordering the earthly church. Rather, they were the means by which God's grace continued to touch temporal sphere in a tangible way through the sacramental life of the church. Whereas earthly monarchs *represented* the kingly rule of God by wearing the "shadow of God's Kingship", those ordained in the apostolic succession actually made Christ present in the church:

But in Thy Priesthood Thou Thyself art here,

¹⁶ Williams, *The Cathedral*, 48-9

¹⁷ Harrison B., "The Scripture views of the Apostolic Commission (no. 24)", *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford* (volume 1) (London, 1834), 8

¹⁸ Beveridge, "Salvation in the Church only, under such a ministry", *The Theological Works of William Beveridge* (v. 1), 67-8

¹⁹ Jones, *An Essay on the Church*, 32

And virtue goeth forth from Thee.²⁰

As a result of the apostolic succession bishops in the contemporary church continued to fulfil the ministry of the apostles by teaching the faith and celebrating the sacraments:

. . . With awe-stricken eyes
We sit with loved disciples round Thy feet;
Or, as the growing bread Thy love supplies,
From Apostolic hands we take and eat.²¹

This suggests that, in Williams' view, the validity of the sacraments depended upon the apostolic succession, and that it was therefore essential to the very nature of the church. The sixth stanza of the poem highlights this:

. . . Key-stones are ye, every one,
In God's sure house; fountains of benison,
Which Christ, the mighty Sea of love, supplies.²²

Williams went on to speak of bishops in even more exalted terms as “[v]isible angels lightening lower skies” who are appointed to represent Christ on earth.²³ His description of them as, “golden ties / From Christ's meek cradle to His throne on high”²⁴ again suggests that, through their sacramental ministry, bishops formed a link between the church on earth and the church in heaven.

In emphasising the importance of the apostolic succession for the celebration of the sacraments Williams was upholding a belief central to the thinking of all the Tractarians. In *Tract 1* Newman had claimed that valid ordination in the apostolic succession gave authority to validly celebrate the sacraments²⁵ while, in *Tract 7*, he claimed that the Tractarian approach differed from the traditional High Church view which had seen episcopacy in the apostolic succession merely as being beneficial to church order.²⁶ In Newman's view episcopacy was rather to be understood as “an appointed channel by which the peculiar Gospel blessings are conveyed to

²⁰ Williams, *The Cathedral*, 45

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 47

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Newman, “Thoughts on the Ministerial Commission (no. 1)”, 3

²⁶ Newman J.H., “The Episcopal Church Apostolical (no. 7)”, *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford* (volume 1) (London, 1834), 1

mankind”.²⁷ To reject its importance was to reject the importance of the sacraments altogether since their validity depended upon the minister having been ordained by a successor of the apostles.²⁸

. . . if ordination is a divine ordinance, it must be necessary; and if it is not a divine ordinance, how dare we use it? Therefore all who use it . . . must consider it necessary. As well might we pretend the Sacraments are not necessary to Salvation, while we make use of the offices of the Liturgy; for where GOD appoints means of grace, they are the means.²⁹

In *Tract 4* Keble also claimed that ordination in the apostolic succession was necessary for the valid celebration of the eucharist since Christ had intended that the sacrament should “be constantly conveyed through the hands of commissioned persons”.³⁰ He also claimed, in *Tract 52*, that a celebration of the eucharist by one who was not episcopally ordained “is not that blessed thing which our Saviour graciously meant it to be: it is not ‘verily and in deed taking and receiving’ the Body and Blood of our incarnate Lord”.³¹

Although Newman’s assessment of the pre-Tractarian High Church view of the apostolic succession was true in a limited sense, it is clear that many eighteenth-century High Churchmen, and in particular the Nonjurors, also saw episcopal ordination in the apostolic succession as being directly linked to the valid celebration of the sacraments. Hooker, Laud, Andrews and Cosin, while valuing episcopacy, did not believe that the apostolic succession was fundamental to the very being of the church and were prepared to accept that the orders of continental Protestant churches which had not maintained it could still be considered valid.³² In contrast to this position, William Beveridge claimed that episcopal ordination was essential to celebrate the sacraments validly and to preach worthily.³³ The ordinations of Nonconformists who had not maintained the apostolic succession could not be

²⁷ Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (v. 2), 305

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 316-7

²⁹ Newman, “Thoughts on the Ministerial Commission (no. 1)”, 3

³⁰ Keble, “Adherence to the Apostolic Succession (no. 4)”, 2;

³¹ Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 120 quoting Keble J., “Sermons for Saints’ and Holydays. No. I (no. 52)”, *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford* (v. 2) (London, 1835), 7

³² Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 156-7; Sykes and Gilley, “‘No Bishop, No Church!’”, 120-3; More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, 397 quoting Hooker R., *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Book 7), chapter 14, section 11, in; Andrewes, “A Sermon Preached at Whitehall”, *Ninety-Six Sermons* (v. 5), 92-3; Cosin J., *The Works of the Right Reverend Father in God John Cosin* (Volume 4), (Oxford, 1851 L.A.C.T. edition), 401-8

³³ Beveridge W., “Sermon XI: Ministers of the Gospel, Christ’s Ambassadors”, *The Theological Works of William Beveridge* (v. 1), 196-200

considered valid and their ministers were therefore unable to administer valid sacraments.³⁴ It was because of the direct link between the apostolic succession and the celebration of the sacraments that Beveridge claimed that the “means of salvation” could not be dispensed without the three-fold apostolic ministry.³⁵ William Law also emphasised the belief that only one ordained by a bishop who stood in the apostolic succession could be considered properly ordained and able to administer the sacraments since “[t]here is an absolute Necessity of a strict Succession of authorized ordainers from Apostolic Times, in order to constitute a Christian Priest”.³⁶ No one could be considered as having been validly ordained who was not ordained in the apostolic succession,³⁷ and a sacrament could not be regarded as having been validly celebrated “when it is administered by a false, uncommissioned Minister”.³⁸ Jones of Nayland and Samuel Horsely also held this view.³⁹ Isaac Williams’ emphasis on the link between the apostolic succession and the celebration of the sacraments was therefore something which he held in common with both the Tractarians and which also had a precedent in the pre-Tractarian High Church tradition.

The doctrine of the apostolic succession is also dealt with in Williams’ prose writings. In a sermon entitled “The Holy Catholic Church” he emphasised the belief that the three-fold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons was instituted by Christ himself and was to be seen as the fulfilment of the ministry of the high priest, priests and levites in the Old Testament, a point also upheld by William Beveridge.⁴⁰ Williams went on to claim that the apostolic succession guaranteed the church’s catholicity by linking the contemporary church directly with the apostolic church:

We may, therefore, humbly hope and trust that we do belong to that Holy Catholic Church . . . which has been from the beginning: that that Church which our Saviour purchased with His blood, and regulated through His Apostles, consisting of all people, and tongues, and nations, and languages, has come down even unto us . . . even in every little parish in this “end of the world”.⁴¹

³⁴ Beveridge W., “Sermon I: Christ’s Presence with His Ministers”, *The Theological Works of William Beveridge* (v. 1), 23-4

³⁵ Beveridge W., “Sermon II: The Institution of Ministers”, *The Theological Works of William Beveridge* (v. 1), 42

³⁶ Law, *A Second Letter to the Bishop of Bangor*, 11-2, 24

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 27

³⁹ Jones, *An Essay on the Church*, 21-2; Mather, *High Church Prophet*, 201-4

⁴⁰ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 1), 223-4; Beveridge, “Sermon II: The Institution of Ministers”, *The Theological Works of William Beveridge* (v. 1), 28-9

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 225

Through the apostolic ministry each individual Christian was able to feel confident that he, or she, was part of the same church which Christ had founded on the Apostles:

The sun is but one and the same for many hundred years; and yet it shines for each one of us as much as if it was shining for no one else in the world. So is the Catholic Church; it is one and the same, and yet it comes home to each as if it was only for himself alone. Have we received Holy Baptism? Have we received Confirmation? Have we received the Supper of the Lord as the first Christians did? And from whom have we received these things? From the Catholic Church. If the Church was not in this country, we should have obtained none of these.⁴²

Williams' belief that the apostolic succession was essential to ensuring the catholicity of the Church of England was also reflected in a sermon by John Keble entitled "The Office and Authority of the Christian Ministry" and in Jones of Nayland's *An Essay on the Church*.⁴³

In the sermon which he preached at the consecration of the church of All Saints, Llangorwen, Williams also emphasised the belief that the presence of Christ himself was to be discerned working through the ordained minister as he administered the sacraments of the church.⁴⁴ Another of Williams' sermons entitled "The Blessing of the Minister", claimed that the liturgical blessing pronounced by the minister at the end of services, by virtue of his ordination in the apostolic succession, was in fact the blessing of Christ himself⁴⁵ which was able to bring about "real and substantial gifts".⁴⁶ This highlights the fact that, like Newman, Williams saw the three-fold apostolic ministry not just as a hierarchy of order but as a channel of sacramental grace.⁴⁷ This point was also made by William Law who claimed that, through their ordination, priests and bishops had been given the authority to bless in God's name "and be ministerial towards the Salvation of others".⁴⁸ William Beveridge also held

⁴² Ibid., 225-6

⁴³ Keble J., *Sermons for the Saint's Days and other Festivals* (London, 1877 edition), 186; Jones, *An Essay on the Church*, 35

⁴⁴ Williams, *A Sermon Preached at the Consecration of the Church of Llangorwen*, 10-1

⁴⁵ Williams I. "The Blessing of the Minister", Williams and Copeland (ed.) *Plain Sermons by Contributors to the Tracts for the Times* (v. 10), 83-5

⁴⁶ Ibid., 82

⁴⁷ Cf. Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (v. 2), 305

⁴⁸ Law, *A Second Letter to the Bishop of Bangor*, 16-17

that the blessing of the Trinity was dispensed through the priest's pronouncing of the benediction.⁴⁹

This suggests that Isaac Williams' understanding of the apostolic succession was consistent with that of his fellow Tractarians and of many of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen and Nonjurors. Unlike some early High Church divines, he believed that it was essential to the very nature of the church and not just beneficial to ecclesiastical order. The foundation of the episcopacy was to be found in Jesus' commissioning of his apostles so that the contemporary church could trace its authority back to Christ himself via a line of successive ordinations. Since it was through this succession that those ordained received authority to act in Christ's name and celebrate the sacraments it was to be understood not just as relating to ecclesiastical order, but was a channel by which Christ's grace continued to flow into the church through the sacraments.

2.The Attitude to Protestant and Catholic Nonconformity

Their emphasis on the apostolic succession influenced how the High Churchmen and Tractarians viewed the Reformation, Protestant Nonconformity and Roman Catholicism. The pre-Tractarian High Churchmen tended to be sympathetic to continental Protestant churches which had not preserved episcopacy and the apostolic succession, but condemned dissenting denominations in England which rejected the Church of England's apostolic authority.⁵⁰ Although most High Churchmen did not deny the fact that the Roman Church had maintained the apostolic succession they claimed that its teachings contained corruptions of the primitive faith of which the Church of England had purged itself at the Reformation.⁵¹

While the Tractarians shared the traditional High Church view of British Nonconformity, their rejection of Protestantism *per se* was reflected in their refusal to subscribe to the erection of the Martyrs' Memorial at Oxford in 1839⁵² and in their opposition to the proposal to form a joint Anglican-Lutheran bishopric in Jerusalem in

⁴⁹ Beveridge, "Sermon XII: The Sacerdotal Benediction", *The Theological Works of William Beveridge* (v. 1), 230-1

⁵⁰ Gilley S., "The Ecclesiology of the Oxford Movement", Vaiss, *From Oxford to the People*, 63; Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 155-7; Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic*, 107-8

⁵¹ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 164-170

⁵² Fraught, *The Oxford Movement*, 90-2;

1841-2.⁵³ A negative view of the Reformation was reflected in Froude's *Remains* and also came to be held by Newman, John Keble and Pusey.⁵⁴ Such an understanding of the Reformation, as a result of which many of the Tractarians came to see the Roman Church in a more positive light, was a deviation from the pre-Tractarian High Church approach.⁵⁵

Isaac Williams' writings do not deal in any great length with the Reformation, however there are suggestions in a number of his works that he held it in a higher regard than many of the other Tractarians. The fact that, in *The Cathedral*, he included poems not just on the church fathers but also on Anglican divines like William Laud, Jeremy Taylor, Lancelot Andrewes and George Herbert,⁵⁶ would seem to suggest that he did not share Froude's belief that the Church of England's roots in the Reformation and in antiquity were mutually exclusive.⁵⁷ Although in the preface to Hurrell Froude's *Remains* Newman and John Keble claimed that Williams shared Froude's negative view of the Reformation,⁵⁸ this assertion ought to be treated with some caution. The fact that Williams had intended the tract as a rebuke to the anti-Protestant statements contained in the *Remains*⁵⁹ suggests that the work was, in fact, written in opposition to the view that the Reformation and the appeal to antiquity stood in direct contrast to each other. Whereas Froude believed that the church had given up a number of beliefs and practices which were fundamental to the faith,⁶⁰ Williams believed that nothing essential had been lost at the Reformation. Although the omission of some practices and ceremonies was regrettable,⁶¹ the Church of England was no less catholic for having abandoned them:

Strong judicial withdrawals doubtless there may have been . . . [b]ut those essentials, to which the promise had been annexed, have not been forfeited,

⁵³ Welch P.J., "Anglican Churchmen and the Establishment of the Jerusalem Bishopric", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, volume 8, No. 2 (1957), 193-4; Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 157-161

⁵⁴ Avis, *Anglicanism*, 189-194; Newman J.H., *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Hammondsworth, 1974 edition), 72; Liddon H.P., *Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey* (volume 2) (London, 1894), 71; Greenfield R.H., "Such a Friend to the Pope", Butler (ed.), *Pusey Rediscovered*, 173 quoting Pusey E.B. to Manning H.E. (12 August, 1845), P.H., M.S.

⁵⁵ Nockles, "Survivals or New Arrivals?", 154

⁵⁶ Williams, *The Cathedral*, 57-61, 192-7

⁵⁷ Keble and Newman (ed.), *The Remains of the Late Reverend Richard Hurrell Froude* (part 2, v.1), xviii-xxi, xxvii-xxviii

⁵⁸ Keble and Newman (ed.), *The Remains of the Late Reverend Richard Hurrell Froude*, xxiii

⁵⁹ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 92-93

⁶⁰ Williams, *The Doctrine of the Church in the Writings of Isaac Williams*, 8

⁶¹ Williams, "Indications of a Superintending Providence in the Preservation of the Prayer Book (no. 86)", 19, 27-30

while we retain those Mysteries which are “necessary to Salvation;” and Divinely-commissioned stewards to convey them.⁶²

While, as Alf Härdelin and Peter Nockles have pointed out, Williams’ tract did view liturgical developments in the post-Reformation church in a negative light and was criticised by the ‘Z’ High Churchman Edward Churton,⁶³ it was in no way comparable to Froude’s attitude to the Reformation as reflected in his *Remains*. In one of his *Plain Sermons* Williams echoed the belief of William Palmer and the ‘Z’s that the roots of the Church of England’s Prayer Book could be traced back to apostolic times:⁶⁴

. . . the Almighty has provided us with a guide, for which we cannot be too thankful, in the Prayer-Book. To say that it is not the Bible, and therefore not to value it or attend to it, is a very unthankful way of rejecting one of the best blessings which has been bestowed upon us . . . The Prayer-Book is not indeed as old as the Bible, but a great part of it is nearly as old as the Christian religion itself. It has not been made to-day or yesterday, but has been, for the most part, taken from old Liturgies; and some of these old Liturgies were known by the names of Apostles: one was called that of St. Peter, one that of St. James, another that of St. Mark, and another of St. John, in early ages.⁶⁵

Williams also pointed out that the central place which the reciting of the Psalms played in the Church of England’s liturgy was not a product of the Reformation but something which had been preserved from the practice of the early church.⁶⁶

Williams’ belief that the Reformation was not a radical break with antiquity since all that was essential had been preserved by divine providence was echoed in his poem on Lancelot Andrewes which was included in later editions of *The Cathedral*, replacing the verse on Richard Hooker which was found in the first editions of the work. The poem opens with a reference to the marble effigy of Andrewes at St. Saviour’s, Southwark, and goes on to reflect on his belief that the liturgy of the Church of England was based on that of the early church:

Still praying in thy sleep,
With lifted hands and face supine!
Meet attitude of calm reverence deep,
Keeping thy marble watch in hallow’d shrine.

Thus, in thy Church’s need,

⁶² Ibid., 6

⁶³ Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 256-9; Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 221-2, citing Churton E. to Pusey E.B. (13, December, 1841), P.H., M.S. (L.B.V.), transcript

⁶⁴ Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 252

⁶⁵ Williams I., “The Church Prayer-Book a Safe Guide”, Williams and Copeland (ed.), *Plain Sermons by Contributors to the Tracts for the Times* (v. 2), 198

⁶⁶ Williams, “*The Psalter, or Psalms of David; in English Verse*”, 7

Enshrin'd in ancient Liturgies,
Thy spirit shall keep watch and with us plead,
While from our secret cells thy prayers arise.

Still downward to decay
Our Church is hast'ning more and more;
But what else need we but with thee to pray
That God may yet her treasures lost restore? ⁶⁷

The last line of the poem alludes to the prayer from Andrewes' *Devotions* for the Church of England "That what is wanting in her may be supplied",⁶⁸ and suggests that, although having been reformed, it was still essentially catholic.

Although Williams' view of the Reformation seems to have been less negative than that of the other Tractarian leaders, like Newman, John Keble and Pusey, he opposed the erection of the Martyrs' Memorial and the establishment of the Jerusalem Bishopric. His correspondence to Thomas Keble made it clear that he did not intend to subscribe to the erecting of the Martyrs' Memorial,⁶⁹ while in another letter to his friend he dismissed the proposed Anglican/Lutheran bishopric as a "state measure" intended to please the Evangelicals.⁷⁰ Williams was impressed with William Palmer of Magdalene's *A Letter to a Protestant Catholic* and J.R. Hope's *The Bishopric of the United Church of England and Ireland at Jerusalem*,⁷¹ two works which were published in opposition to the Jerusalem Bishopric.⁷² While Williams' opposition to the Jerusalem Bishopric set him apart from the 'Z's who supported the scheme as a means of introducing the apostolic succession into the Lutheran church,⁷³ he does not seem to have been as concerned with the issue, nor with that of the Martyrs' Memorial, as were his Tractarian colleagues. Neither subject is discussed in any of his published writings and they are mentioned only in passing in two of his letters. It may be that his opposition to these issues was fuelled more by loyalty to his friends than by strength of personal conviction.

⁶⁷ Williams, *The Cathedral* (London, 1889 edition), 169

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Williams I. to Keble T. (no date), L.P.L., Box 779, "Photocopies of 'Isaac Williams Letters' donated by the late Mr. Edgan Hubert (died 1985)"; Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 46 quoting Liddon H.P., *Life of E.B. Pusey* (volume 2), 65

⁷⁰ Williams I. to Keble T. (no date), L.P.L., Box 779, "Letters from Isaac Williams to Rev. Thomas Keble and his family, c. 1829-1865"

⁷¹ Williams I. to Keble T. (no date), L.P.L., Box 779, "Letters from Isaac Williams to Rev. Thomas Keble and his family, c. 1829-1865"

⁷² Palmer W., *A Letter to a Protestant Catholic* (Oxford, 1842), 19, 36-47; Hope J.R., *The Bishopric of the United Church of England and Ireland at Jerusalem* (London, 1842), 40-2

⁷³ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 163-4

It is also interesting to note that, in a post-script to a letter written to Pusey in 1851, Isaac Williams wrote that “If you can make any use of the opinion of a Protestant like myself you may show this letter to anyone”.⁷⁴ While this statement appears to contain a note of irony, it does suggest that, at a point when the Oxford Movement had begun to see the Church of England as being primarily catholic rather than reformed,⁷⁵ Williams continued to emphasise the fact that, as a member of the reformed Church of England, he was also a ‘Protestant’, an emphasis which set him apart from Pusey and John Keble. Williams’ emphasis on the fact that the Church of England was also a ‘Protestant’ church was at one with the attitude of ‘Z’ High Churchmen like R.W. Jelf who claimed that the Church of England was “best defined . . . by the term ‘Protestant-Catholic-Church’ . . . The Protestant Character of her teaching may be called an accident, the Catholic her essence”.⁷⁶

Williams’ positive view of the Reformation was also highlighted in a poem entitled “The Church in England” from *Thoughts in Past Years*, where he claimed that, by following the example of antiquity, the reformed church had avoided the theological errors of extreme Protestantism and Roman Catholicism:

Our Church, though straighten’d sore ’tween craggy walls,
Kept her true course unchanging and the same,
Known by that ancient clearness, pure and free,
With which she sprung from neath the Throne of God.⁷⁷

Another of his poems entitled “Foreign Breviaries” from *The Cathedral* expressed admiration for the reformed liturgy of the Church of England, although it had abandoned the “richer dress” of the continental Roman Church. Williams believed that the simpler liturgy of the English church was particularly apt since it prevented the truths of the faith from becoming lost amid too great a concern with liturgy and ceremonial:

. . . I love thee, nor would stir
Thy simple note, severe in character,
By use made lovelier, for the lofty tone
Of hymn, response, and touching antiphone,
Lest we lose homelier truth.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (19 December, 1851), P.H., M.S. (L.B.V., no. 27)

⁷⁵ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 178-80

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 180-1 quoting Jelf R.W., *Via Media*, 28

⁷⁷ Williams, *Thoughts in Past Years* (1838 edition), 263

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 21

Although Williams does not appear to have expressed the more positive pre-Tractarian High Church view of continental churches which had not maintained the three-fold ministry, which continued to be held by Geoffrey Faussett and W.F. Hook,⁷⁹ it is clear that he did not share the negative view of the Reformation held by Froude, Newman, John Keble and Pusey.⁸⁰

While Isaac Williams saw the Reformation in a more positive light than some of the other Tractarians he was critical of Nonconformist denominations outside the communion of the Church of England. Such a negative view of Nonconformity was at one with the view of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen as well as the Tractarians. In his sermon entitled *On the Perils of False Brethren in Church and State*, for example, Henry Sacheverell claimed that dissenters were “apostates” and “false brethren” who threatened the status of the established church and were therefore also enemies of the state.⁸¹ Jones of Nayland also claimed that it was impossible to be both a dissenter and a loyal citizen,⁸² and pointed to “the many evil consequences of non-conformity” claiming that dissenters were guilty of schism in separating themselves from the Church of England.⁸³ In departing from the communion of the Church of England, Jones, like Charles Daubeny, claimed that Nonconformists were placing their souls in jeopardy.⁸⁴ This negative view was also upheld by the Tractarians. In 1834, for example, Newman refused to marry the daughter of a parishioner who was a Baptist. Since the girl had not received baptism Newman regarded her as an “outcast” from the Church and refused to conduct the marriage until she had been baptised.⁸⁵ He also claimed that Nonconformist ministers were invalidly ordained since they had not been ordained in the apostolic succession, a view which was also expressed by John Keble in *The Christian Year*.⁸⁶ For the Tractarians, Protestant Nonconformity, in rejecting

⁷⁹ Cf. Faussett, *The Claims of the Established Church*, 195-6; Hook, *Two Plain Sermons on the Church*, 30

⁸⁰ Cf. Gornall (ed.), *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* (v. 5), 302; Newman and Keble (ed.), *The Remains of the late Reverend Richard Hurrell Froude* (part 1, v. 1), 336, 433; Liddon, *The Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey* (v. 2), 203, 225

⁸¹ Sacheverell, *On the Perils of False Brethren*, 8, 10, 12

⁸² Jones W., *Thoughts on the Resolutions of the Protestant Dissenters*, Stevens W. (editor), *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of the Rev. William Jones* (volume 6) (London, 1810), 277

⁸³ Jones W., *A Short View of the Present State of the Argument between the Church of England and the Dissenters*, Stevens W. (editor) *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of the Rev. William Jones* (volume 5) (London, 1810), 68

⁸⁴ Jones W., *A Letter to the Church of England*, Stevens W. (editor) *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of the Rev. William Jones* (volume 6) (London, 1810), 238; Daubeny, *A Guide to the Church* (v. 1), 143 ff.

⁸⁵ Fraught, *The Oxford Movement*, 68

⁸⁶ Newman, “The Episcopal Church Apostolical (no. 7)”, passim; Keble, *The Christian Year*, 149

the authority of the established church and basing their understanding of Christian doctrine on their own interpretation of scripture, was ultimately a form of private judgement.⁸⁷

One of Isaac Williams' poems from the *The Cathedral* entitled "The Church in Wales" reflected this negative view of protestant dissent. In the verse Williams lamented the fact that Nonconformity had gained such a strong foot-hold in the diocese of Saint David's that,

... from Towy's flood
To Conway springs an ever-teeming brood
Of novelty . . .⁸⁸

The use of the word 'novelty' suggests that Williams saw Protestant Nonconformity as being inextricably linked to theological liberalism since dissent was, in his view, a relatively new movement which rejected the ancient authority of the church on the basis of private judgement. This view, which was also held by John Keble,⁸⁹ had a precedent in the pre-Tractarian High Church tradition. William Jones of Nayland, for example, claimed that heresy always arose when individuals were resolved to follow their own judgment rather than accepting the revelation of divine authority through the church.⁹⁰ William Beveridge also argued that, in separating themselves from the apostolic church, dissenters were cutting themselves off from the grace of Christ since, without the apostolic succession and episcopacy, "although they preach their hearts out, I do not see what spiritual advantage can accrue to their hearers by it".⁹¹ For Isaac Williams, the Protestant emphasis on private judgment was further from the truth than the unquestioning obedience displayed by the Roman Catholic faithful to the errors of papal teaching.⁹² He also described Nonconformist worship as being a "conventicle" and was particularly critical of the hymns composed and popularised by dissenters which, in his view, contained "egoistical expressions" which were the antithesis of the liturgies of the church. In his view such Protestant compositions

⁸⁷ Cf. Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist*, 39-41; Beek, *John Keble's Literary and Religious Contribution to the Oxford Movement*, 100

⁸⁸ Williams, *The Cathedral*, 23

⁸⁹ Beek, *John Keble's Literary and Religious Contribution to the Oxford Movement*, 100

⁹⁰ Jones W., *A Short View of the Present State of the Argument between the Church of England and the Dissenters*, 304

⁹¹ Beveridge, "Sermon I: Christ's Presence with His Ministers", *The Theological Works of William Beveridge* (v. 1), 24

⁹² Williams, *The Cathedral*, 23

reflected a tone of self-confidence which was opposed to attitude of awe, mystery and humility that was typical of the spirit of reserve.⁹³

Isaac Williams' writings make it clear that he did not share the attitude of Newman, Froude, Pusey and John Keble towards the Roman Catholic Church. In his doctoral thesis on the attitude of the Tractarians to Roman Catholicism, R.H. Greenfield pointed out that Isaac Williams was one of the few disciples of John Keble who did not become more pro-Roman than his master.⁹⁴ According to a letter from Henry James Coleridge to his father, W.G. Ward felt deeply uncomfortable with Williams' anti-Roman attitude. So great was Williams' dislike for Roman Catholicism that, when Ward informed him of his decision to convert, Williams' response was to "burst into a flood of tears".⁹⁵ From Williams' correspondence it would also appear that he was influential in preventing Robert Broadley from converting to Rome in the 1840s.⁹⁶ When Williams wrote to Thomas Keble in 1845-6 to ask him to contribute more sermons to the *Plain Sermons* he specified that sermons were needed which emphasised the importance of "finding content in our own Church and against joining the Church of Rome".⁹⁷ In his autobiography, Robert Gregory, another 'Bisley' Tractarian, claimed that Williams never ceased to see the Roman Church as the "the Scarlet Woman of the Apocalypse" though he never wrote this in any of his books.⁹⁸ Such anti-Romanism was also typical of the other members of the 'Bisley School'. Thomas Keble, for example, saw the church of Rome as "an Antichrist",⁹⁹ while George Prevost claimed that, by remaining a member of the Church of England he was "to be understood as religiously disavowing the claims of the See of Rome to supremacy, and the unauthorized additions to the primitive faith and worship which . . . have been imposed by that See as conditions for communion".¹⁰⁰ Similar anti-Roman rhetoric, which presented the church of Rome in terms of the antichrist, had a precedent in the writings of pre-Tractarian High

⁹³ Williams, "*The Psalter, or Psalms of David; in English Verse*", 3

⁹⁴ Greenfield, "The Attitude of the Tractarians to the Roman Catholic Church", 62

⁹⁵ Coleridge H.J. to Coleridge J.T. (10 November, 1843), British Library Coleridge Family Papers – at the time of writing these papers have yet to be bound and catalogued. I am indebted to Dr. Arnold Hunt for drawing my attention to this letter.

⁹⁶ Ingleby E. to Williams I. (no date), L.P.L., 4474, ff. 135-6; Broadley R. to Williams I. (4 June, 1849), L.P.L., M.S., 4473, ff. 79-80

⁹⁷ Williams I. to Keble T. (c. 1845-6), L.P.L., Box 779, "Letters from Isaac Williams to Rev. Thomas Keble and his family"

⁹⁸ Holden W. (editor), *Robert Gregory, 1819-1911: An Autobiography* (London, 1912), 37

⁹⁹ Greenfield, "The Attitude of the Tractarians to the Roman Catholic Church", 254

¹⁰⁰ Prevost G. to Pusey E.B. (no date), P.H. M.S. CUP 5/32

Churchmen like Jones of Nayland, Charles Daubenny and William Van Mildert¹⁰¹ and continued to be held by a number of the ‘Z’s, including Christopher Wordsworth.¹⁰²

Williams rejected the claim to papal supremacy asserting that Jesus’ gift of the “Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 16:19) had been made to all of the apostles and not just to Peter, and echoed the traditional High Church belief that the Church of England was the true catholic church of the nation.¹⁰³ Many of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen claimed that the Church of England had always been independent of the Roman See and that it had received the apostolic succession not from Rome but from the ancient British Church.¹⁰⁴ Also in line with the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen,¹⁰⁵ Williams claimed that modern Roman Catholicism, as defined by the council of Trent, included a number of corruptions of the primitive faith and was to be distinguished from the catholicism of the ancient and undivided church. In his view the corruptions of Tridentine Roman Catholicism were indirectly responsible for the Protestant errors which arose during the Reformation:

When the infatuate Council named of Trent
Clogg’d up the Catholic course of the true Faith,
Troubling the stream of pure antiquity,
And the wide channel in its bosom took
Crude novelties, scarce known as that of old;
Then many a schism overleaped the banks,
Genevese, Lutheran, Scotch diversities.¹⁰⁶

The contrast between the ancient catholic church and modern Roman Catholicism was reflected in Williams’ poem “City of Martyrs” from *The Baptistery*. These verses reflect something of an ambivalence in his attitude towards the church of Rome. On the one hand the traditional High Church attitude is reflected in his reference to the contemporary Roman Church in terms of the antichrist and as a kingdom heavily infested with “dark idolatry” whose

¹⁰¹ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 167 citing Churton R., *Antichrist or the Man of Sin. A Sermon Preached before the University of Oxford at St. Mary’s on Sunday, May 23, 1802* (Oxford, 1804) *Anti-Jacobin Review*, 55 (September, 1818), 69

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 178 citing Wordsworth C., *Is the Church of Rome the Babylon of Revelation? An Essay Derived in Part from the Author’s Lectures on the Apocalypse* (London, 1850), 104

¹⁰³ Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* (v. 1), 225-6; Beveridge, “Sermon IV: Salvation in the Church only, under such a Ministry”, *The Theological Works of William Beveridge* (v. 1), 67-8, 83; Jones, *An Essay on the Church*, 85-7

¹⁰⁴ More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, 57 quoting Laud W., *A Relation of the Conference between William Laud and Mr Fisher the Jesuit* (1901 edition), sections xx, xxv, pp. 145ff; 58-9 quoting White F., *A Reply to Jesuit Fisher’s Answer*, 157 ff.; Nockles, *The Oxford Movement*, 165-7

¹⁰⁵ Gilley, “The Ecclesiology of the Oxford Movement”, 63; More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, 53-4 quoting Cosin J., *Works* (v. 4), 332-6;

¹⁰⁶ Williams, *Thoughts in Past Years*, 263

hands are stain'd with blood
Of Christian brotherhood.¹⁰⁷

In the eighth stanza of the poem, however, Williams shifted his gaze from the corrupt, contemporary Roman see to the ancient Roman Church, the patriarchate of Western Christendom claiming that,

I would forget thee what thou art
To learn of thee as thou hast been.¹⁰⁸

This suggests that, although the faith of the modern Roman Church had become corrupted, Williams believed that that see had played an important role in the primitive church. This led him to express the desire for a re-union between the separated sees of Canterbury and Rome on the basis of a mutual reconciliation:

To thee we yearn, O Rome, O Rome,
As exiles to their home,
Wilt thou not here be reconciled?¹⁰⁹

This view was also expressed in the 'Prefatory Thoughts' of *The Baptistery* where Williams pointed out that, because of the failures of the Church of England, many people were becoming impatient with it and wished to seek union with Rome by a personal conversion. For Williams, however, such conversions were not the correct way of seeking Christian unity:

This union in His Church is God's own gift,
Not to be seiz'd by man's rude sinful hands,
But the bright crown of mutual holiness.
Therefore such leanings find in me no place,
So broad I feel the gulf 'twixt her and us,
Form'd by her dark and sad idolatries,
That I would rather die a thousand deaths
Than pass it; sure I cannot others lead
To thoughts which foreign are to all I love,
And find in me no sympathetic chord.¹¹⁰

Whereas more extreme Tractarians like Newman and W.G. Ward sought re-union with Rome by leaving the communion of the Church of England and accepting the authority of the papacy, Williams believed that any reconciliation between the two churches had to be preceded by the latter purging itself of its Tridentine

¹⁰⁷ Williams, *The Baptistery* (Oxford, 1844 edition), 222-3

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 224

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 224

¹¹⁰ Williams, *The Baptistery* (1858 edition), xix-xx

corruptions.¹¹¹ A letter to Thomas Keble from Williams dated around 1841 also reflects this point, claiming that “we see nothing among them [i.e. the Roman Catholics] but what is hollow and bad – let them show us some examples of reformation and piety and we shall hail it as a symptom of reunion”.¹¹² This view was also expressed by High Churchmen in the eighteenth century, including George Croft and Samuel Wix.¹¹³

Williams’ criticism of the Tridentine Roman Catholic Church was reflected in a number of the other poems of *The Baptistery*. In the first few pages of the work he attacked contemporary Roman Catholicism claiming that traditional devotional items like the “rosary, the amice, cowl and veil” were synonymous with superstition and “allied with evil”.¹¹⁴ The twelfth poem of the work entitled “The Church asking the Prayers of her Children” was highly critical of those who were becoming attracted by Roman Catholicism and contemplated conversion. In Williams’ view those who became Roman Catholics were not just misguided but were guilty of betraying the true catholic church in England:

. . . to seek her [i.e. the Roman Church] is to seek a double curse;
‘Tis first disloyalty which blinds the sight,
‘Tis then with blinded hands to choose the worse:
Her very boast of light her judgement doth rehearse . . .¹¹⁵

An unpublished sermon on Daniel 12:10 also reflects Williams’ antipathy for the Roman Church:

. . . the things spoken against the Church of Rome are in a great measure true and so evident that the Almighty God seems thereby to caution and warn us. Her footsteps have been in every country marked with blood, the deceits and frauds practised by her members, and ministers and that too on a great scale, seem as bad as any that has been in the world. Her very worship is mixed up with something like falsehood and idolatry. It does certainly seem that there is some great sign of evil upon her.¹¹⁶

Williams’ criticism of Roman Catholicism can be explained by the fact that, since he was, from 1832, Newman’s curate at St. Mary’s, he was no stranger to those who felt attracted to Romanism. The issue was not just academic but something which

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Williams I. to Keble T. (no date, but probably post-1841), L.P.L. Keble Dep. 9/29

¹¹³ Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, 170; Nockles, “Survivals or New Arrivals?”, 148; Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 110

¹¹⁴ Ibid., xiv

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 126

¹¹⁶ Unpublished sermon on Daniel 12:10, L.P.L., M.S. 4479, f. 199

affected Williams directly. His *Autobiography* suggests that he was deeply uncomfortable with Newman's growing attraction to Rome,¹¹⁷ and a letter which he wrote to Pusey in 1841 expressed concern about a rumour he had heard that Pusey had attended the profession of some Roman Catholic sisters in Dublin.¹¹⁸ When Newman confided to Williams (probably in 1841) that he suspected that the Roman Catholic Church might in fact be the true church,¹¹⁹ Williams' reaction was to feel that he ought to withdraw from their friendship lest he be influenced by Newman's view-point.¹²⁰ After the publication of *The Baptistery* in 1842 the anti-Roman references in the work caused an argument between the two men which placed further strain on their friendship.¹²¹

In a letter written to John Keble in the wake of Newman's conversion, Isaac Williams made it clear that he did not doubt the catholicity of the Church of England, claiming that he could not understand the concern which some of the Tractarians seemed to have developed about whether or not the Church of England possessed the "marks of the Church".¹²² He went on to explain that, despite the problems faced by the Church of England, he personally found it impossible to sympathise with those who wished to join the Roman communion:

I quite agree with all you say about the sad state of our own Church, but while God is pleased to let the dark marks which He has set on the Church of Rome to continue for our warning, if anyone doubts whether he ought to leave our Church for it, I cannot enter into his feelings; and, if he chooses to shut his eyes to the black marks, I cannot see what books or arguments can be used to him.¹²³

For Williams, who in *Tract 86* had stressed the duty of remaining in communion with the Church of England while it was not guilty of heresy or schism,¹²⁴ secession was unthinkable. Among the 'dark marks' which he mentioned in his letter to Keble it is likely that he would have included Roman Catholic devotion to the Virgin Mary,

¹¹⁷ Prevost (ed.), *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams*, 58-60, 104-111

¹¹⁸ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (30 August, 1841), Pusey House Library M.S. (L.B.V., no. 6)

¹¹⁹ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 53-4

¹²⁰ Williams, *The Doctrine of the Church*, 14-5

¹²¹ Williams I. to Keble T. (4 October, 1842), L.P.L. Box 779, "Letters from Isaac Williams to Rev. Thomas Keble and his Family"

¹²² Williams I. to Keble J., (20 September, 1843), L.P.L. M.S. 4474, f. 148

¹²³ Williams I. to Keble J. (20 September, 1843), Lambeth Palace Library, M.S. 4474, f. 149

¹²⁴ Williams, "Indications of a Superintending Providence in the Preservation of the Prayer Book (no. 86)", 90-1

(which he saw as idolatry),¹²⁵ the doctrine of transubstantiation and veneration of the consecrated elements, giving communion under one kind and indulgences.¹²⁶

While Williams' negative view of the Roman Church had much in common with the pre-Tractarian High Church approach, a more pro-Roman view was held by the main Tractarian leaders. In *The Christian Year* John Keble presented the Roman Church as a sister church of the Church of England which was to be pitied for having lost the fullness of the faith through her corruptions:

Speak gently of our sister's fall:
Who knows but gentle love
May win her at our patient call
The surer way to prove?¹²⁷

A more radical pro-Roman attitude was reflected in the writings of Hurrell Froude who claimed that, if Rome were to revoke its condemnations of Anglicanism, then the differences between the two churches could be seen not as fundamental divisions but merely as differing "[t]heological opinions".¹²⁸ Writing to Newman in March 1835 he expressed the hope that

. . . one might send a Latin petition to the Pope confessing one's interpretation of the 39 articles . . . and opinions on divers subjects, and praying that one might be allowed to communicate in their Churches.¹²⁹

While Pusey believed firmly that he ought to remain within the Church of England and that the see of Rome could not make infallible decisions without the consent of the Eastern Church, in the wake of Newman's secession he came to believe that the Council of Trent could "become the basis of union" by being recognised as an ecumenical council by the universal church.¹³⁰ These views stood in direct contrast to Williams' belief that the Council of Trent had corrupted the orthodoxy of the primitive faith.

Isaac Williams' strong criticism of the Roman Catholic Church is difficult to reconcile with the fact that, like Pusey, he was responsible for adapting a number of continental Roman devotional books for Anglican use. As well as his translations of the hymns of the Paris Breviary, *The Baptistery* was based on the allegorical drawings

¹²⁵ Williams, *The Doctrine of the Church*, 15-6 citing Williams, *The Cathedral*, 234

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16

¹²⁷ Keble, *The Christian Year*, 186

¹²⁸ Gornall and Ker (ed.), *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* (v. 4), 83

¹²⁹ Gornall and Ker (ed.), *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* (v. 5), 68

¹³⁰ Greenfield, "Such a Friend to the Pope", 172-4, quoting Pusey E.B. to Manning H.E. (12 August, 1845), P.H. M.S.

from Sucquet's *Via Vitae Aeternae*, which Williams also adapted and translated in his *Meditations and Prayers from the Way of Eternal Life*. *The Altar* was also reflective of continental Roman Catholic devotion to the precious blood of Christ, as is reflected in Williams' poem "The Cross Dropping Blood".¹³¹ Williams' correspondence also makes it clear that some of his associates were uncomfortable with the Romish nature of these works. Writing in 1845 William Copeland commented on the drawings which Caroline Williams had provided for *Meditations and Prayers for the Way to Eternal Life*, claiming that the use of such devotional imagery was not suitable for use in the Church of England:

I can only say that with all due admiration of Mrs I.W.'s execution, the whole aspect of the thing is so wholly unlike our own that I still question the experiment. People must be tutored, and I believe R.C.'s are expressly trained to understand all these symbolical parts of their ceremonial, which range of course entirely with the deep mystical interpretation of Holy Scripture. But with us, who had well nigh lost both, they will merely come in violent contrast with the whole outward and visible aspect of things amongst us.¹³²

Copeland believed that any attempt to reconcile Sucquet's book to the Church of England would be futile since "it belongs not merely to the Catholic, but the most Roman period and development of the Catholic system".¹³³ The fact that the other members of the 'Bisley School' advised Williams to suppress the images from further editions of *The Altar*¹³⁴ suggests that this work was also believed to have had connotations with Roman Catholicism. Thomas Keble was also uncomfortable with the images printed in *The Baptistery*,¹³⁵ and even Williams himself, when the book was first published, was concerned that it would bring him "a world of trouble".¹³⁶

It is significant that Williams' purpose in publishing such works was not to propagate Roman Catholic devotional material but to take what was good in it and to adapt it for use in the Church of England by excising from it any Tridentine corruptions of the primitive faith. This was consistent with Pusey's original intention in producing translations of Roman Catholic devotional works as an attempt to prevent people from converting to Rome rather than as a means of advocating

¹³¹ Cf. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, 168

¹³² Copeland W. to Williams I. (5 June, 1845), L.P.L., M.S. 4473, f. 151

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Jones, *Isaac Williams*, 76-7

¹³⁵ Williams I. to Keble T. (no date), L.P.L., Keble Dep. 9/42

¹³⁶ Williams I. to Keble T. (4 October, 1842), L.P.L., Box 779, "Letters from Isaac Williams to Rev. Thomas Keble and his family, c. 1829-1865"

reunion.¹³⁷ In the preface to his English translation of the hymns of the Paris Breviary, Williams claimed that a small number of the hymns “on the Eucharist, on the Blessed Virgin Mary, and on the Remains of the Dead” had been adapted to make them accord with the doctrine of the Church of England.¹³⁸ In a letter to Pusey dated 1845, Williams also made it clear that, in writing English translations of the hymns of the Latin Breviary, he had tried to keep their meaning in line with the teaching of the Church of England’s catechism.¹³⁹

Isaac Williams’ belief that, despite the Tridentine corruptions of the Roman Catholic faith, much of value was still to be found in her devotional life, was also reflected in a note entitled “Prospectus of an Anglo-Catholic Calendar for the Memorial of Early and Medieval Worthies”, written in his handwriting and included among his papers at the Lambeth Palace Library. This appears to have been a proposal to create a volume of poems commemorating not just the early church fathers but also a number of the saints who had lived during the Middle Ages, “in such a spirit as may be best adapted to our Church’s course of action”. Williams noted that, while a number of theological errors had developed during the medieval period, this did not detract from the sanctity of the saints who lived at that time:

. . . it is considered fitting in unison with this charitable and catholic memorial of our church’s desires, to compose and set forth to the world a volume of lyric poems, forming a minor Anglo-Catholic Calendar, and commemorating those Early and Medieval worthies in such spirit as may be best adapted to our Church’s course of action. This on the one hand is intended to embalm the memories of love and holiness in every era of the Church’s being, which Christian Charity must acknowledge to have been often combined with the most painful doctrinal errors, while on the other hand those errors will be plainly denounced and condemned so that what was in the first instance a labour of love may not be converted into an engine of spiritual allusion and corruption. Lest any misconception should arise with respect to the bearing of the projected work, it is necessary to state expressly, that the conductors of this work withstanding their utmost endeavours to [present] therein [a] collection with a spirit of Catholic reverence, devotional fervour, and Christian love . . . shall not fail boldly to denounce that Antichristian spirit which . . . now usurps sway over all the national churches in the Roman communion.¹⁴⁰

This suggests that, although Williams shared the traditional High Church condemnation of the Roman Church for having corrupted the primitive and apostolic

¹³⁷ Greenfield, “Such a Friend to the Pope”, 172

¹³⁸ Williams, *Hymns translated from the Parisian Breviary*, iv

¹³⁹ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (9 July, 1845), P.H., M.S. (L.B.V., no. 21)

¹⁴⁰ Miscellaneous note entitled “Prospectus of an Anglo-Catholic Calendar for the Memorial of Early and Medieval Worthies, otherwise to be entitled “The Church’s Memories”, L.P.L., M.S. 4476, f. 193

faith, he was prepared to recognise what was positive in traditional Roman Catholic devotion when it was purged from what he saw as its Tridentine errors. In a sermon he also taught that “there may be in the Roman Catholic Church all that is most holy and good upon earth and yet . . . out of her bosom may arise notwithstanding the great enemy of Christ”.¹⁴¹ This point was also reflected in *Tracts 80* and *87* where he had claimed that, despite its corruptions, the Roman Church had “served, by God’s protection, as a safeguard for the Catholic truth” and that “in the Church of Rome, that which is Roman and Tridentine, in distinction from that which is Catholic, is characterized by a want of . . . reserve”.¹⁴²

Isaac Williams’ approach to Protestantism and Roman Catholicism seems to have had more in common with that of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen and the ‘Z’s than the leading Tractarians. Although he was opposed to the erecting of the Martyrs’ Memorial and the establishment of the Jerusalem Bishopric he seems to have held the Reformation in a less negative light than Newman, Froude, John Keble and Pusey. Whereas most of the Tractarians became increasingly sympathetic towards the Roman Catholic Church as time went on, Isaac Williams’ negative view of that church never wavered. In this sense he is an example of a Tractarian leader who remained close the thinking of the ‘Z’s and to the original intention of the Oxford Movement, which was not to lead people to Rome but to emphasise what was seen as the catholicity of the Church of England.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Unpublished sermon on Daniel 12:10, L.P.L., M.S. 4479, f. 200

¹⁴² Williams, “On Reserve (no. 80)”, 79-81; Williams “On Reserve (no. 87)”, 101

¹⁴³ Brioth, *The Anglican Revival*, 127 ff.; Palmer W., *A Narrative of Events connected with the Publication of the Tracts for the Times* (London, 1883 edition), 143-53

Chapter Ten: Isaac Williams, Wales and Welsh Tractarianism

The fact that Isaac Williams was the only Welshman among the main Tractarian leaders raises the question of how important he was to the course of the Oxford Movement in Wales and vice versa. Although historians like D. Ben Rees have claimed that the Tractarian movement was fundamentally English and had a negligible effect on the Welsh people,¹ others have demonstrated that it did have a significant, even if not widespread, following among a number of Welsh clergy and laity. In a series of articles published in the *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales* and based on his 1952 Eisteddfod essay “Traethwad: Dylanwad Mudiad Rhydychen yng Nghymru”, Eifion Evans has shown that the Oxford Movement exerted a marked influence on a number of parishes, mainly in north Cardiganshire and in the diocese of Bangor.² David Freeman also claimed that Tractarianism was not merely an English movement in Wales since a number of patriotic Welsh clergy came under its influence during its formative years, often while they were students at Jesus College, Oxford. They were subsequently able to teach Tractarian principles to their people in their native language³ and also published works which attempted to propagate Tractarian teaching in Welsh.⁴ Welsh Tractarianism was not just a clerical phenomenon but, through the influence of their pastors, many lay people became strong supporters of the movement.⁵ For example, two parishioners from Llanllechid had been so well grounded in Tractarian principles by their incumbent Evan Lewis that they were able to deliver lectures defending the doctrine of the apostolic succession in response to the Calvinistic Methodist John Phillips’ lecture “Babyddiaeth, Eglwysyddiaeth ac Ymneilltuaeth” which had been delivered at Bangor.⁶ A number of lay people also wrote articles in *Baner Y Groes*, a

¹ Freeman D.P., “The Influence of the Oxford Movement on Welsh Anglicanism and Welsh Nonconformity in the 1840s and 1850s” (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wales, Swansea, 1999), 396-7 quoting Rees D.B., *Pregethwr y Bobl. Bywyd a Gwaith Owen Thomas* (Denbigh, 1979), 250

² Evans D.E., “Mudiad Rhydychen yng Ngogledd Sir Aberteifi”, *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales*, vol. 4, no. 9 (1954), 45-6; Evans D.E., “Dylanwad Mudiad Rhydychen yng Nghymru II”, *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales*, vol. 6, no. 11 (1956), 92-104

³ Freeman, “The Influence of the Oxford Movement”, 8

⁴ *Ibid.*, 260

⁵ *Ibid.*, 16; Evans D.E., “Dylanwad Mudiad Rhydychen yng Nghymru III: Y Gymdeithas Leygol”, *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales*, volume 10, no. 15, 66-81

⁶ Roberts R., *A Wandering Scholar: The Life and Opinions of Robert. Roberts* (Cardiff, 1991 edition), 278-280

Welsh language Tractarian journal which was published in the 1850s under the editorship of the Tractarian clergyman John Williams (Ab Ithel).⁷

1. Isaac Williams, Cwmcynfelin and the consecration of All Saint's Church, Llangorwen

Although Isaac Williams was brought up in London he spent many vacations at his family's estate at Cwmcynfelin, and there is some evidence from his poetry to suggest that he felt a great affinity for the land of his birth.⁸ This was reflected in the conclusion of his poetic description of St. David's cathedral in *The Baptistery*, where Williams' use of the title 'Menevia' refers to the ancient diocese of St. David's where he was born:

Yea, lov'd Menevia, if to thee
O'er mount and vale my spirits flee;
Yea, if to thee my fancy yearns,
If early love within me burns
At thy dear name, my native land –
If thrills a pulse in heart or hand
For home, or shrine, or Church below,
This is the dearest wish I know.⁹

The Cathedral also expressed admiration for the rural landscape and Welsh language of west Wales and the diocese of St. David's:

Ancient Menevia, I must love thee still
For thou didst take me up into thy breast,
Pitying my lost and helpless infancy,
And didst engraft me on the living Tree.
Still breathe fresh thoughts from thy Plinlimmon's crest,
Hedg'd by thy language, (in thy mountain-nest,
Indented oft with blue o'er arching sea).¹⁰

The section of *Thoughts in Past Years* entitled "The Mountain Home" also contains a number of poetic descriptions of the landscape of Ceredigion. A poem entitled "Thoughts of Home", for example, provides a stark portrayal of the view of the sea from Clarach Bay, close to Cwmcynfelin:

⁷ Freeman D.P., "Baner Y Groes, A Welsh Language Tractarian Periodical of the 1850s", *National Library of Wales Journal*, volume 32, no. 3 (Summer, 2002), 305-16; Freeman, "The Influence of the Oxford Movement on Welsh Anglicanism and Welsh Nonconformity", 285

⁸ See Taylor, "Isaac Williams of Cardiganshire", 115-126; Dennis, "Isaac Williams", 86-89; Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, 150-1

⁹ Williams, *The Baptistery* (1844 edition), 234-44

¹⁰ Williams, *The Cathedral* (1839 edition), 23-5

I stood within a vale with hills girt round,
Save where its opening portals did disclose
A sapphire shield of deep o'er-arching blue,
Bright Ocean, with his glistening wilderness,
Wedded to the blue Heav'ns.¹¹

Another poem from this section entitled "An Evening Scene" reflects on this same view as the end of the day approaches:

A gleam breaks on the mountains here and there;
The sea is one dark mass of molten lead,
But o'er it in the clouds a bar of red;
In whose wild distance opes a silver sphere
Of skies and waters, where in vision clear
A vessel seems on fairy land to tread;
The valley 'neath our feet in evening spread
Dark green and dewey freshness seems to wear,
Thick set with golden fields, and hanging woods
Stretch'd to the hills.¹²

Williams' poetry also expresses a veneration for the rural mountain scenery of Cardiganshire:

Dear are her mountains wild, and stern, and free;
And dear the sound of their descending streams;
And dear on them the summer's glittering beams;
And dear the woods on which the shadows flee;
And dear her valleys opening to the sea;
And dear those seas where parting Evening gleams;
In absence dear your image haunts my dreams,
And after absence dearer still to see.¹³

Such affection for rural Cardiganshire was also highlighted in Williams' portrayal of the waterfall at Devil's Bridge in his "Actions Written in Heaven" from *The Baptistery*:

In that place where time is not . . .
All is light, and stillness all,
Like an ice-bound waterfall,
Where the waves all bright and hoar,
Seem to pass and be no more,
But there fix'd in durance dwell,
Solid and unmovable,
Ice-chain'd in its headlong tract
Have I seen a cataract,
Caught, as by a magic spell,

¹¹ Williams, *Thoughts in Past Years* (1838 edition), 126

¹² *Ibid.*, 181

¹³ *Ibid.*, 194

Like a downward falling well,
All throughout a wintry noon,
Hanging in the silent moon;
All throughout a sun-bright even,
Like the sapphire gate of Heaven.¹⁴

That Isaac Williams was also interested in Welsh culture is suggested by correspondence from his niece Catherine Williams in reply to a letter in which he had asked her to send him some information about the Welsh legends. She enclosed for her uncle two legends, one about a place called Llyn Telyn and the other about St. Melangell who is associated with the parish of Pennant Melangell in Montgomeryshire. She also informed him that many more legends were in existence.¹⁵ Although there is no evidence that Isaac Williams was fluent in Welsh it is possible that he may have had a basic proficiency in the language because when his eldest son John Edward first visited Llangorwen the parishioners were surprised to meet a member of the Williams family who was unfamiliar with Welsh.¹⁶ It is also interesting to note that, when Isaac Williams took Thomas Keble's son on holiday to Cwmcynfelin in September 1837 they both attended the Welsh service at Llanbadarn Fawr. When the young man wrote back to his father he dated the letter in Welsh¹⁷ so it may have been that Williams gave him some guidance in the use of the language.

Isaac Williams made an important contribution to the Oxford Movement's influence in Wales through his involvement in the building and consecration of the church of All Saint's, Llangorwen, in 1841. This was the first church built in Wales in order to propagate Tractarian principles and, according to David Freeman, its consecration marked the arrival of the Oxford Movement to Wales.¹⁸ Although the Ecclesiological movement, which sought to ensure that church buildings were built to accommodate worship which reflected Tractarian principles,¹⁹ had a significant influence on church building in England during the 1840s, All Saint's, Llangorwen was the only Welsh church built under its influence before 1850.²⁰ Eifion Evans

¹⁴ Williams, *The Baptistery* (1858 edition), 77

¹⁵ Williams C. to Williams I. (no date), L.P.L., M.S. 4476, ff. 60-6

¹⁶ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 111

¹⁷ Keble T. and Williams I. to Keble T. (16, September, 1837, Cwmcynfelin), L.P.L. Keble Dep. 9/14

¹⁸ Evans, "Mudiad Rhydychen yng Ngogledd Sir Aberteifi", 45; Freeman, "The Influence of the Oxford Movement", 3

¹⁹ Yates, *Liturgical Space*, 115-6

²⁰ Yates N., "Church Building and Restoration", Williams G, Jacob W. and Yates N. *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment, 1603-1920* (Cardiff, 2007), 280-1

claimed that Isaac Williams was therefore instrumental in allowing the Oxford Movement to develop a presence in Wales through the parish of Llangorwen.²¹

The idea of building a church at Llangorwen, close to the Williams' family home, had been suggested by Matthew Davies Williams, Isaac Williams' brother and the squire of Cwmcynfelin, in 1837, and an appeal was launched in order to raise money for the new church.²² Apart from the distance of two miles which separated Llangorwen from the parish church of Llanbadarn Fawr, the fact that a Nonconformist chapel had been built in Llangorwen may have made the opening of a church in the area appear all the more urgent to the Williams family.²³ Matthew Williams provided the land upon which the new church was to be built and he and his sister-in-law, Jane Griffiths, both donated £1,000 each to the project. Isaac Williams also contributed to the building of the church and a local tradition claims that he provided the candlesticks which were placed upon the altar. Together with his brother, his sister-in-law and Jane Griffiths, Isaac Williams held patronage of the parish.²⁴

The church of All Saints was designed to reflect the Oxford Movement's emphasis on the importance of dignified worship and the celebration of the sacraments. It was modelled upon the church which J.H. Newman had built at Littlemore and where Williams had served as curate in the 1830s, and was built to facilitate Tractarian worship, with its raised sanctuary which helped to emphasise the importance of the altar and the celebration of the eucharist.²⁵ The completed church building was consecrated by bishop Connop Thirlwall of St. David's on 16 December 1841 in Welsh. Although Thirlwall was not himself a High Churchman, the fact that he consecrated the church using a translation of Lancelot Andrewes' consecration service,²⁶ and his request that Isaac Williams should preach on the morning of the church's consecration,²⁷ suggests that he was not antagonistic towards the Tractarian principles of the Williams family. Williams' sermon at the consecration focused on a number of themes which were fundamental to Tractarian belief.²⁸ From the outset he

²¹ Evans E.D., "Traethwad:Dylanwad Mudiad Rhydychen yng Nghymru" (unpublished essay written for the Eisteddfodd Genedlaethol Frenhinol Cymru, Aberystwyth, 1952; National Library of Wales M.S.S. 21439 D.), 30

²² Evans, "Mudiad Rhydychen yng Ngogledd Sir Aberteifi", 47

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 96-7

²⁵ Yates, "Ecclesiology and Ritualism in Wales", 59-60

²⁶ Evans, "Mudiad Rhydychen yng Ngogledd Sir Aberteifi", 47

²⁷ Williams I. to Pusey E.B. (30 August, 1841), P.H., M.S. (L.B.V., no. 6)

²⁸ Cf. Freeman, "The Influence of the Oxford Movement", 261

made it clear that the church was to be understood as a heavenly institution which made spiritual things a reality on earth. “[H]er ordinances,” he claimed, “are not of earthly appointment . . . but of God; the ministers and stewards of her Mysteries and her Sacraments, and all the gifts of the Church are of Heaven, not of earth”.²⁹

In his sermon Isaac Williams made use of the sacramentalism and typology which were also central to his poetry and biblical commentaries. He claimed, for example, that baptism and the eucharist were both prefigured in the Old Testament.³⁰ The church building itself was prefigured by the tabernacle in which the Israelites worshipped in the Old Testament, while the earthly church as an institution pointed beyond itself to the church triumphant in heaven.³¹ His belief that “things in the Christian Church are but the types and emblematic shadows of God’s Church in Heaven”³² also led him to claim that the doctrines of baptismal regeneration and the real presence were more than just earthly mysteries since they pointed to spiritual ‘realities’ which would be even more completely fulfilled in Heaven:

Baptismal Regeneration . . . is the type and shadow of that regeneration which is at the entrance of the eternal Kingdom on the day of Judgement . . . And His Sacramental Altar and Table below is the emblem of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb . . . And His Presence in the holy Eucharist . . . seems to shadow forth beforehand that His inconceivable Presence in Heaven . . .³³

The doctrine of reserve was reflected in Williams’ belief that, in order to perceive God’s presence in the sacraments of the church, it was necessary for the Christian to possess the “reverence and holiness of mind” which was foreshadowed in Moses and Solomon’s encounter with God (Exodus 40:34-5; 2 Chronicles 7:1-3).³⁴ Since the manifestation of the divine presence always ought to be accompanied by feelings of awe, Williams claimed that that church buildings, which were so closely related to God’s presence, should always be treated with reverence.³⁵ Williams’ sermon was important since it highlighted a number of themes which were central to his other works and to Tractarian thinking in general.

The Williams family’s connection with the Oxford Movement was also maintained by two of Isaac Williams’ cousins Lewis Gilbertson and Lewis Evans.

²⁹ Williams, *A Sermon Preached at the Consecration of the Church of Llangorwen*, 8-9

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14

³¹ *Ibid.*, 14-6

³² *Ibid.*, 13

³³ *Ibid.*, 14-5

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 11-2

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 13

Gilbertson came under the influence of the Oxford Movement while he was a student at Jesus College, Oxford, and was also familiar with John Keble, J.H. Newman and Hurrell Froude.³⁶ After his ordination in 1837 he served as curate of Sherringham, Gloucestershire, near George Prevost's parish of Stinchcombe. He became the first incumbent of the church of All Saint's, Llangorwen, and during his time there he introduced a number of Tractarian practices including the daily service in Welsh, a weekly celebration of the eucharist, and the singing of the Gregorian chant.³⁷ Gilbertson was appointed Vice-Principal of Jesus College, Oxford, in 1855 where he began a weekly Welsh service in the college chapel. He was also supportive of attempts to translate devotional literature into Welsh, including Thomas á Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*.³⁸

Isaac Williams' other cousin Lewis Evans was an undergraduate at Oriel college at the same time as Newman, Keble and Froude, and became incumbent of Llanfihangel y Creuddyn in 1835. In 1859 he was appointed to the living of Ysbyty Ystwyth and Ystrad Meurig where he was appointed as head of a school for the training of clergy.³⁹ Evans' sermons have been described as being distinctly High Church in tone and his influence over the students at Ystrad Meurig brought many to sympathise with the Oxford Movement and to teach its principles in their future parishes.⁴⁰

Isaac Williams' correspondence suggests that it was believed that he made an important contribution to the progress of the Oxford Movement in Wales. Following a serious illness in 1846 George Prevost had suggested that Williams should move to Stinchcombe where he could assist as a curate when he was well enough.⁴¹ Although Williams seems to have expressed the hope of being able to build a new church in England when his health returned, his brother Matthew Williams argued that it was even more important that he should have an influence over the church in Wales. He reminded Isaac that he had once expressed the hope of doing something to help the Welsh Church, and wrote that,

nothing can be so great a comfort to us as your being so near us . . . I cannot overlook the effect and benefit your residence here might have on the Welsh

³⁶ Evans, "Traethwad: Dylanwad Mudiad Rhydychen yng Nghymru", N.L.W. M.S. 21439 D, 34

³⁷ Evans, "Mudiad Rhydychen yng Ngogledd Sir Aberteifi", 48-51

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 51

³⁹ Evans, "Traethwad: Dylanwad Mudiad Rhydychen yng Nghymru", N.L.W. M.S. 21439 D, 39

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 247, 328

⁴¹ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 105-6

Church. From your residence in England the Welsh Church could but be little benefited, very little, but its almost only chance of life may depend on your living within its reach, for really there is a great necessity for someone to whom the well disposed may look up to for advice and example. There is no one to look up to, and yet, if living in Wales, your influence in England would not be the less.⁴²

Matthew Williams reiterated this point in the post-script to the letter, and claimed that his sister-in-law also shared his view:

Jane Griffiths says your living here and not building a new church would do much more good than your building a new church elsewhere could. She says it is your presence that is wanted for the Church in Wales and nothing will make up for your absence – and I entirely agree with her. Here you would be near us: you would have English society and an English service might be managed. I mention these things as you would have the same advantages as in England, while on the other hand your presence here might do incalculable good.⁴³

While this letter could be seen primarily as an attempt by Williams' brother to attract him back to his home at a time when his health was becoming increasingly frail, it is important to note that his cousin Lewis Evans, writing before Isaac Williams' illness, had also claimed that his presence would greatly aid the Tractarian cause in Wales.⁴⁴ Evans wrote to Williams about his plan to create a college to train Welsh clergy, run on Tractarian principles in his parish of Llanfihangel y Creuddyn.⁴⁵ His letter expressed concern for the standard of clerical education in Wales. While Evans believed that university education at Oxford or Cambridge, apart from being prohibitively expensive, did not really prepare men to serve in poor Welsh parishes, he was also concerned that, because of the cost of schooling, many students at Lampeter had not been sent to grammar school and lacked a proper education.⁴⁶ He also pointed out that the bishop of St. David's was prepared to ordain men who had not, in his opinion, received proper training. He referred, for example, to the master of the workhouse at Aberaeron who was over 60 years old and ordained after only two years of study. Evans believed that such occurrences, as well as the tendency to ordain those who had been Nonconformist ministers, inhibited the spread of Tractarian principles in the diocese.⁴⁷ In Evans' view, the future state of the Welsh church

⁴² Williams M.D. to Williams I. (2 April, 1846), L.P.L., M.S. 4476, f. 163

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Evans L. to Williams I. (8 October, 1845), L.P.L., M.S. 4474, ff. 82-3

⁴⁵ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 100-4

⁴⁶ Evans L. to Williams I. (8 October, 1845), L.P.L., M.S. 4474, ff. 80-2

⁴⁷ Ibid., f. 81

depended on improving the training of its clergy,⁴⁸ and he suggested that Isaac Williams would be a suitable person to run such a college:

I do not see how to extricate this country from its present helpless state, but by some plan of offering education gratuitously and so supplying the lamentable deficiency. I am thinking that your coming to reside in this country would operate materially to open men's eyes and put things on a better system, and I don't think you can find a more eligible spot or locality to commence operations than this place . . . I have all the machinery ready excepting a house for yourself. The old Church and the schoolroom are waiting for you. Such a plan as the one above mentioned may be tried without any risk or damage to any one; for if found not to answer, or if otherwise interrupted, there would be no injury done.⁴⁹

Lewis Evans' plan was interrupted by Williams' illness at the end of 1845, but after his recovery the proposal was revived by Basil Jones, a fellow of Queen's College, Oxford, who was later to become bishop of St. David's.⁵⁰ Jones wished to found a college in the diocese of St. David's where men "would come down to read for orders, in the same manner as they do at certain Theological Colleges. All of these would live in a collegiate fashion, with the necessary accompaniments of the daily service, a common table, and so forth".⁵¹ Jones suggested that the college could be founded at Brecon, and he believed that Williams would be the best person to oversee it.⁵² That Williams took this proposal seriously is confirmed by the fact that he asked his fellow-Tractarian William Copeland to assist him with the project.⁵³ To Williams' disappointment, however, the plan met with defeat since the bishop of St. David's was not prepared to support it.⁵⁴

Although the attempts to draw Isaac Williams back to Wales came to nothing, the fact that Matthew Williams, Jane Griffiths, Lewis Evans and Basil Jones wished to see him return reflects the high regard in which they held him and their belief that his presence could make an important contribution to the Welsh Tractarian cause. The fact that Williams chose not to return does not necessarily suggest that he had lost interest in his native land, since it is possible that, after his serious illness in 1846, he wished to remain close to his close friend Thomas Keble and his brother-in-law George Prevost. It may also be that, since his wife was English, Williams felt that she

⁴⁸ Evans L. to Williams I. (16 October, 1845), L.P.L., M.S. 4474, f. 87

⁴⁹ Evans L. to Williams I. (8 October, 1845), L.P.L., M.S. 4474, ff. 82-3

⁵⁰ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 107-8

⁵¹ Jones W.B.T. to Williams I. (30 May, 1846), L.P.L., M.S. 4474, ff. 140-1

⁵² *Ibid.*, 142-3

⁵³ Jones, *Isaac Williams and his Circle*, 108

would have found it difficult to adjust to life in rural Cardiganshire. Owain Jones suggests that many of Williams' published works were to be found in clerical libraries throughout Wales, so it is possible that he did influence a number of the Welsh clergy.⁵⁵ It would seem that his works were read in Wales since a Nonconformist minister from Llanelli named John Rees Canaan criticised Tractarian ritualism and attempted to paraphrase the imagery used by Williams in *The Altar*, claiming that, for the Tractarians, the altar represented the cross and the surplice the shroud in which Christ was buried.⁵⁶ It is also interesting to note that an article printed in the Welsh Tractarian journal *Baner Y Groes* in 1855 claimed that the linen cloth which was used to cover the consecrated elements after the celebration of the Eucharist represented the shroud in which Christ was buried.⁵⁷ This was strikingly reminiscent of *The Altar*, where Williams suggested that the covering of the elements after communion represented Christ's burial.⁵⁸ The fact that Isaac Williams' *Hymns on the Catechism*, was translated into Welsh in 1909,⁵⁹ suggests that the work was already well read in Wales and that there was some demand for a translation of it.

2. The Welsh Tractarians

Apart from the Williams family in north Cardiganshire there were also a number of Welsh clergy who supported the aims of the Oxford Movement and taught Tractarian principles in their parishes. Such individuals included Morris Williams (Nicander) (1809-74), Evan Lewis (1818-1901), Phillip Constable Ellis (1822-1900), John Williams (Ab Ithel) (1811-1862) and Richard Williams Morgan (Môr Meirion) (1812-89). With the exception of John Williams who, according to his nineteenth century biographer James Kenward, spent a year working as curate of All Saint's, Llangorwen, and became acquainted with Matthew and Isaac Williams,⁶⁰ there is no evidence that Isaac Williams was on intimate terms with any of these individuals. However, it is interesting that their theological views seem to have had much in

⁵⁴ Ibid., quoting a letter from Isaac Williams to Thomas Keble (not referenced)

⁵⁵ Ibid., 112

⁵⁶ Freeman, "The Influence of the Oxford Movement on Welsh Anglicanism and Welsh Nonconformity", 345 quoting Canaan J.R., *Y Drych Pabyddol* (Llanelli, 1852), 20

⁵⁷ Ibid., 348 citing *Baner Y Groes* (1855), 77

⁵⁸ Williams, *The Altar*, image 29 (no pagination), 113-6

⁵⁹ Morgan W. (translator), *Emynau ar y Catechism* (Bangor, 1909)

⁶⁰ Kenward J., *Ab Ithel: An Account of the Life and Writings of John Williams Ab Ithel* (Tenby, 1871), 61-2

common with the conservative Tractarianism of Isaac Williams which, in turn, shared much common ground with the pre-Tractarian High Church tradition.⁶¹

One clear point of contact between Isaac Williams and the Welsh-speaking Tractarians was their understanding of the sacraments. Both Morris Williams and R.W. Morgan shared Isaac Williams' belief that baptism and the eucharist alone were the true sacraments ordained by Christ which were necessary for salvation.⁶² The Welsh-speaking Tractarians also emphasised the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. In contrast to the Calvinistic Methodists who, they claimed, associated membership of the church with membership of the 'Seiat Breifat', a private society of lay people which claimed authority to judge the validity of a person's Christian conversion on the basis of his, or her, spiritual experiences,⁶³ Morris Williams emphasised the fact that one became a member of the church through baptism.⁶⁴ The importance of baptismal regeneration was emphasised in his *Ecclesia Defensa*:

. . . gyflwiad neu drosglwyddiad cyfammodal o ffafir Duw a maddeuant pechod i'r bedyddiedig, trwy'r hyn y mae'n cael ei ddwyn o'i hen gyflwyr naturiol o gondemniad i gyflwr newydd o ras ac iachawdwriaeth; a thrwy hyn y gwneir ef, o ganlyniad, yn aelod i Grist, yn blentyn i Dduw, ac yn etifedd teyrnas nefoedd.⁶⁵

[Baptism is a dedication and a covenantal transference to God's favour and the forgiveness of sins. Through this he [i.e. the Christian] is brought from his old natural state of condemnation to a new state of grace and salvation; and as a result of this he is made a member of Christ, a child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven]

In his *Y Flwyddyn Eglwysig*, a volume of poems for each Sunday of the liturgical year, which formed something of a Welsh counter-part to *The Christian Year*, Morris Williams emphasised the belief that baptism was more than just an outward ceremony. Like Isaac Williams he claimed that it was the means by which the individual was united spiritually to Christ, made a member of the church, and given the strength to withstand the temptations of 'the world, the flesh and the devil':

Fe'm hunwyd i â Christ drwy ffydd
Yn Medydd mewn cyfammod;
Modrwy'r Briodas hon drwy f'oes

⁶¹ Freeman, "The Influence of the Oxford Movement", 2, 60

⁶² Evans, "Traethwad: Dylanwad Mudiad Rhydychen", 81; Freeman D.P., "The Revd. Richard Williams Morgan of Tregynon and his Writings", *Montgomeryshire Collections*, v. 88 (2000), 90 quoting Jones O.W., "Tractarianism at Tregynnog", *Province*, 14, no. 3 (Autumn, 1963), 90

⁶³ Cf. Brown R.L., *John Griffith: The Unmitred Bishop?* (Welshpool, 2007), 23-4

⁶⁴ Williams M., *Y Flwyddyn Eglwysig* (Bangor, 1883), 126

⁶⁵ Williams M., *Ecclesia Defensa* (Holywell, 1851), 25

Yn arwydd Croes fy Mhriod.

Bellach, yr Iesu gaiff fy mryd,
Y cnawd a'r byd a wadaf;
'Rwy'n eiddo Crist o fewn ei gail,
Mae nod fy Mugail arnaf.⁶⁶

[I was united with Christ through faith
Baptised into the covenant,
This Wedding Ring, as long as I live,
Is a sign of the Cross of my Bridegroom.

Henceforth my aim is to honour Jesus.
I renounce the flesh and the world.
I belong to Christ as a member of His flock,
And I bear the Shepherd's mark.]⁶⁷

The Welsh-speaking Tractarians also objected to the claim made by some Nonconformists that, since repentance and faith were necessary in order for baptism to be effective, it was wrong to baptise infants. R.W. Morgan argued that, because baptism bestowed upon the individual an unmerited grace, it was equally effective regardless of whether it was administered to an infant or to an adult.⁶⁸ He claimed that, in emphasising the importance of faith and repentance to the extent that they excluded the possibility of infant baptism, Nonconformists were, paradoxically, teaching a doctrine of salvation by works and human merit since they “believe the glory of salvation to be divided between the Saviour and themselves; they build repentance and faith as works of their own, under and not upon the atonement of Christ”.⁶⁹ Such use of caricature and hyperbole suggests that the Welsh Tractarians made little attempt to understand the real teachings of Nonconformity which they sought to criticise.

Another point of contact between Isaac Williams and the Welsh-speaking Tractarians was their emphasis on the real presence in the eucharist. In an unpublished sermon John 5:56 John Williams claimed that the presence of Christ in the sacrament was to be understood in concrete terms and not just metaphorically, since “the mystical body of our Lord which we read of is a reality and not a mere phrase”. By eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament the individual was

⁶⁶ Williams, *Y Flwyddyn Eglwysig*, 118-9

⁶⁷ Translation by Canon D.W. Thomas

⁶⁸ Morgan R.W., *Notes on Various Distinctive Verities of the Christian Church* (London, 1849), 304

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 305

united more intimately with Christ.⁷⁰ His belief in the Real Presence was also confirmed by the fact that he wrote a Welsh translation of the Latin eucharistic hymn *Pange Lingua Gloriosi* by Thomas Aquinas.⁷¹ Morris Williams also emphasised the importance of the Real Presence in *Y Flwyddyn Eglwysig*:

Lle bynnag byddo dau neu dri
Yn cyd-ymborthi'n duwiol
Ar Fannau'r nef mewn anial dir
Mae yno'n Wir-bresennol.⁷²

[Wherever two or three might
Partake together devoutly,
On heavenly Manna in the desert land
He is there truly present.]⁷³

While emphasising the real presence of Christ in the eucharist the Welsh-speaking Tractarians also shared Isaac Williams' rejection of the doctrine of transubstantiation. Morris Williams stated that the real presence as taught by the Church of England was entirely different to transubstantiation as taught by the church of Rome:

Nid yr un peth yw y Gwir Bresennoldeb a'r Traws-sylweddiad. Mae y Traws-sylweddiad yn Babyddiaeth, ac yn gyfeiliornad peryglus; ond y mae Gwir Bresennoldeb yn wirionedd Ysgrythurol.⁷⁴

[The Real Presence is not the same thing as Transubstantiation. Transubstantiation is Papism and a dangerous error, but the Real Presence is a Scriptural truth]

Like Isaac Williams, Nicander believed that the real presence was ultimately a mystery which could not be adequately explained as the Roman Church had attempted to do. This mystery ought to be accepted in humble faith without trying to enquire into it:

Pa fodd y dichon Hwn ein Brawd
Roi in' ei Gnawd yn lluniaeth?
Yw cwestiwn balch y dyn di-gred,
Iaith galed anghrediniaeth.

Crist, gwna fi'n ostyngedig iawn

⁷⁰ Williams J., unpublished sermon on John 5:56, National Library of Wales M.S. 17184, p. 76

⁷¹ Williams J., "Cân fy nhafod, am ddirgeledd", Griffiths J. (editor), *Emynau'r Llan* (Bangor, 1997), 338-9

⁷² Williams, *Y Flwyddyn Eglwysig*, 69

⁷³ Translation by Canon D.W. Thomas

⁷⁴ Evans, "Traethwad: Dylanwad Mudiad Rhydychen", 83 quoting *Cronicl Cymru* (December 10, 1869), 4

I gredu'n llawn dy eiriau;
Heb wrando dim ar reswm dyn,
Pan safo'n erbyn d'enau.⁷⁵

[How can this person, our Brother,
Give us his Flesh as food?
Is the proud question of the unbeliever,
The callous language of unbelief.

Christ make me very humble so that I
Can believe your words fully,
Without listening at all to man's reasoning,
When he opposes the words of your lips.]⁷⁶

Isaac Williams' view of the real presence was also upheld by R.W. Morgan who emphasised the fact that the consecrated elements, while being truly the body and blood of Christ, also remained bread and wine in their natural substances:

So exactly does the Church of England deliver the mystery; neither exceeding the first truth, that what is given to and received by our bodies is in very substance "bread and wine": nor falling short of the second truth, that the Bread so blessed . . . and the Wine so blessed are the Body and Blood of our Lord.⁷⁷

Like Isaac Williams, Morgan claimed that the doctrine of transubstantiation, which taught a corporeal presence of Christ in the consecrated elements, was opposed to the belief of the Church of England that the real presence was to be understood in sacramental and spiritual terms.⁷⁸ In his view the Roman understanding of the real presence could not be reconciled with the orthodox definition of a sacrament since it made the outward and visible sign indistinguishable from the inward and spiritual grace.⁷⁹ The logical conclusion of the doctrine of transubstantiation, Morgan claimed, was to see the clergy not as being "ambassadors *from* Christ" but as "creators of Christ".⁸⁰

Morgan's claim that transubstantiation was an attempt to define a mystery which lay beyond the scope of human comprehension was also highly reminiscent of Isaac Williams' tracts on reserve, and suggests that he may have been influenced by them. Morgan pointed out that it was impossible for anyone to explain exactly how

⁷⁵ Williams, *Y Flwyddyn Eglwysig*, 59

⁷⁶ Translation by Canon D.W. Thomas

⁷⁷ Morgan R.W., *A Vindication of the Church of England* (London, 1851), 64

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 65

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 64

the real presence was brought about, since it was “‘a *mystery* in Christ;’ and being such, is in the province of faith, not of knowledge; of the soul, not of the mind”. In his view the Roman Church had erred by “presuming to solve such a high and spiritual mystery by the gross physical tenet of ‘Transubstantiation’”.⁸¹ He went on to claim, as Isaac Williams had done in *Tract 80*,⁸² that God would punish those who attempted to pry into mysteries which ought to be accepted by faith:

. . . beyond this great fact of infinite mercy, God has not revealed Himself, and it is certain that He withdraws His grace from such as, in lieu of simply believing His word, presumptuously attempt to exalt individual reason by eating of a tree of knowledge which in this world He forbids as productive of sin and death.⁸³

Another important emphasis which the Welsh-speaking Tractarians shared with Isaac Williams was the apostolic succession. A catechism printed in *Baner y Groes*, a Welsh-language Tractarian journal published in the 1840-50s under the editorship of John Williams (Ab Ithel), claimed that the orthodoxy of the church’s faith was ensured by the fact that the authority of the three-fold ministry could be traced back to Christ himself via the apostolic succession.⁸⁴ Another article in the journal emphasised the belief that only those who had been properly ordained in the apostolic succession could validly celebrate the sacraments.⁸⁵ In his *Ecclesia Defensa*, a collection of essays on Tractarian subjects written in Welsh, Morris Williams claimed that the authority of the contemporary church rested on the fact that its ministers had been ordained by the successors of the apostles.⁸⁶ This point was also reflected in one of his poems from *Y Flwyddyn Eglwysig*:

Fel yr anfonodd y Tad Grist
 Anfonodd Crist ei Weision,
 I iawn-drosglwyddo Gair y Groes
 O oes i oes olynol.

Enneiniwyd Crist a’r Ysbryd Glân
 Yn Ben i’w Burlan Eglwys;
 Rhydd Yntau Ef i aelodau hon
 Drwy law ei Weision cymmwys.

⁸¹ Ibid. 62; his use of the term ‘physical’, however, suggests that he did not fully understand the meaning of transubstantiation which referred not to a physical, but to an actual presence

⁸² Ibid.; cf. Williams, “On Reserve (no. 80)”, 45

⁸³ Freeman, “The Revd. Richard Williams Morgan of Tregynon”, 90 quoting Morgan, *A Vindication of the Church of England* (London, 1849 edition), 210

⁸⁴ Freeman, “*Baner Y Groes*,” 306 citing *Baner y Groes*, vol. 3, no. 4 (March, 1857), 56-8

⁸⁵ Ibid., 307, citing *Baner y Groes*, v. 2, no. 3 (February, 1856), 26

⁸⁶ Williams, *Ecclesia Defensa*, 44

Disgynnai'r olew ar y Pen
Yn rhith colommen gannaid;
Oddi arno disgyn, ddwyfol rodd,
Ar wisgoedd ei Offeiriaid.

Traddoda'r Tad-yn-Nuw y ddawn
O'i law i fyddlawn ddyinion;
Dont hwythau'n Dadau, yn eu tro,
Cenhedlaeth o Weinidogion.

O dad i fab yn ffydd y Groes
O oes i oes olynol,
Trosglwyddir ffurf a rhinwedd llawn
Y Ddwyfol Ddawn Ysprydol.⁸⁷

[As the Father sent Christ,
Christ sent his servants,
To convey rightly the Word of the Cross,
From one age to another.

Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit,
To be the Head of his Holy Church;
He in turn imparts Him to the members thereof,
Through the hands of his authorised servants.

The oil descended on the Head,
In the form of a white dove,
And from it descends a divine gift,
On the clothes of his priests.

The Father-in-God transmits the gift,
By his hand to faithful men;
They consequently become Fathers themselves,
A generation of Ministers.

The form and the full virtue
Of the Divine, Spiritual gift
Is transferred from father to son in the faith of the Cross,
From one age to another.]⁸⁸

The doctrine of the apostolic succession was also emphasised in P.C. Ellis' *Letters to a Dissenting Minister*. Contrary to the Roman Catholic claim that the Church of England was a human institution created at the Reformation, Ellis argued that the preservation of the apostolic succession and three-fold ministry confirmed the

⁸⁷ Williams, *Y Flwyddyn Eglwysig*, 29-30

⁸⁸ Translation by Canon D.W. Thomas

fact that it remained the true church founded by Christ.⁸⁹ The authority dispensed to the individual through ordination was a “gift of God the Holy Ghost, conveyed through the Bishop as a medium”, so that he carried out his duties and administered the sacraments not on his own authority, but as a channel through which God’s grace could be dispensed.⁹⁰ Ellis claimed that Nonconformists, by rejecting the importance of apostolic authority transmitted by episcopal ordination, tended to focus instead on the virtues and talents of their ministers. This had the effect of making divine grace inferior to human works since,

[i]f the validity of ministerial acts does not depend on the authority of Christ conveyed to His ministers by orderly transmission, then it must depend on the merit of the individual minister – but to assert this would be to exalt human virtue, so as to make God’s gifts to others conditional on the merit of a fallible man, and not on the free goodness of an infallible God.⁹¹

R.W. Morgan also claimed that ordination by a bishop in the apostolic succession confirmed that the contemporary church had received its authority directly from Christ and was necessary to celebrate the sacraments validly.⁹²

The Welsh-speaking Tractarians shared the traditional High Church view of Nonconformity and Roman Catholicism which was also upheld by Isaac Williams. Like the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen, the Welsh Tractarians emphasised the fact that membership of the ‘true’ church depended upon baptism and reception of Holy Communion and was necessary for salvation. An anonymous article entitled “Y Weinidogaeth” published in *Baner y Groes* highlighted the belief that the church was not just a human institution, but a divine society created by God in order to bring about human salvation:

Y mae Duw, yn ei dosturi at ddyn, wedi trefnu ffordd i’w achub. Y mae wedi sefydlu ei Eglwys yn y byd, a’r Eglwys hon yw Arch ymha un yn unig y mae Duw wedi addaw achub dyn, a’i adferyd i’w ffafr am byth. Nid cymdeithas o ddynion . . . ond cymdeithas yw wedi ei galw allan, neu ei neillduo oddi wrth y byd, gan Dduw ei hun.⁹³

[God, in his pity towards man, has arranged the means for him to be saved. He has set up his Church in the world, and this Church is the Ark in which alone God has promised to save man, and to restore him to his favour for ever. It is

⁸⁹ Ellis P.C., *Letters to a Dissenting Minister* (Rhyl, 1879), 10

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 43

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 23

⁹² Freeman, “The Revd. Richard Williams Morgan of Tregynon”, 90 quoting Jones O.W., “Tractarianism at Tregynog”, *Province*, v. 14, no. 3 (Autumn, 1963), 90; Morgan, *Notes on Various Distinctive Verities*, 169

⁹³ “Y Weinidogaeth”, *Baner y Groes*, vol. 3, no. 3 (February, 1857), 33

not a human society . . . but a society which is called out of, or separated from, the world by God himself]

R.W. Morgan, while not claiming that dissenters were automatically damned, taught that, by separating themselves from the church, they had rejected the ‘ordinary’ means of salvation established by God. They therefore had “nothing but the uncovenanted mercies of the Almighty to which to look for salvation”.⁹⁴ The safest way to ensure one’s salvation, in his view, was to walk “constantly and patiently . . . in the faith, discipline, and ordinances of [God’s] Catholic and Apostolic Church”.⁹⁵ Morris Williams claimed that, in separating themselves from the Church of England, dissenters had separated themselves from Christ and were guilty of damaging the unity of the church.⁹⁶

Unlike some of the more radical members of the Oxford Movement in England, the Welsh-speaking Tractarians were vehemently anti-Papal and tended to view the Reformation in a positive light.⁹⁷ Central to this approach was their belief that the apostolic succession of the Church of England could be traced back to Christ via the early British Church which, they believed, had been founded by Saints Paul and Joseph of Arimathea centuries before Saint Augustine had arrived at Canterbury.⁹⁸ The belief that the national church had received its apostolic authority not via the see of Rome and the successor of Saint Peter, but via Saint Paul, was seen as confirming the Church of England’s independence from the papacy.⁹⁹

P.C. Ellis and R.W. Morgan also rejected the Roman Catholic belief that Christ had given St. Peter direct authority over the other apostles. Like Isaac Williams they claimed that Peter had been given no more of a share in the gift of the Holy Spirit than the other apostles and that they all possessed equal authority over the church.¹⁰⁰ This meant that there was no basis to the papal claims and that the Church of England at the Reformation had “had as much right to withstand the Pope, when he was to be blamed, as St. Paul had to withstand St. Peter when he erred”.¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ Morgan, *Notes on Various Distinctive Verities*, 166

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 306

⁹⁶ Williams, *Y Flwyddyn Eglwysig*, 121-2

⁹⁷ Freeman, “The Influence of the Oxford Movement”, 2

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 264

⁹⁹ See Morgan R.W., *St. Paul in Britain, or, the Origin of British as Opposed to Papal Christianity* (London, 1922 edition), 187-8

¹⁰⁰ Ellis, *Letters to a Dissenting Minister*, 30; Morgan, *A Vindication of the Church of England*, 11; cf. Williams, *Plain Sermons on the Catechism (v. 1)*, 225-6

¹⁰¹ Ellis, *Letters to a Dissenting Minister*, 30

The Welsh-speaking Tractarians were also at one with Isaac Williams in tending to view the Reformation in a more positive light than was typical of many of the Tractarian leaders at Oxford. John Williams' claim that, as a result of the Reformation "our ceremonial worship was reduced and simplified on the right principle of edification" is reminiscent of Isaac Williams' poem "Foreign Breviaries" from *The Cathedral*, as well as *Tract 86*.¹⁰² Morris Williams' positive view of the Reformation is to be seen in one of his poems which presented the reformers Cranmer and Ridley as being in the same class as St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, and the church father St. Cyprian:

Stephan sy lamp na's diffydd,
 A Cyprian yn seirian sydd.
 Gwelaf Cranmer mal seren
 Ail i haul, a Ridley hen:
 Mir yw eu gwedd, Oh mor gain!
 A'u brodyr, hen Saint Brydain.¹⁰³

[Stephen is a lamp which will never be extinguished,
 And Cyprian glitters.
 I see Cranmer as a star,
 Second to the Sun, and venerable Ridley;
 Beautiful is their appearance – O how fair! -
 And that of their brothers, the old British saints.]¹⁰⁴

This is reminiscent of *The Cathedral* which reflects Isaac Williams' veneration for both the early church fathers and also post-Reformation divines like Lancelot Andrewes and Richard Hooker. For Morris Williams the Reformation had not altered the catholic status of the Church of England, but had merely purified it of various corruptions which had developed during the Middle Ages and restored it to its primitive status.¹⁰⁵ For the Welsh-speaking Tractarians such corruptions could be seen to include the papal claim of ultimate supremacy, the invocation of saints, the worship of images and relics, the doctrine of transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the Mass,

¹⁰² Freeman, "The Influence of the Oxford Movement", 410 quoting National Library of Wales M.S. 17184 C, 41; cf. Williams, *The Cathedral*, 21; Williams, "Indications of a Superintending Providence in the Preservation of the Prayer Book (no. 86)", 19-23

¹⁰³ Freeman, "The Influence of the Oxford Movement", 410 quoting Williams M., "Yr Adgyfodiad", *Y Traethodydd* (1851), 159

¹⁰⁴ Translation in Freeman, "The Influence of the Oxford Movement", 424, note 59

¹⁰⁵ Evans, "Traethwad: Dylanwad Mudiad Rhydychen", N.L.W. M.S. 21439 D., 76 quoting *Yr Haul* (December, 1841), 377

the giving of communion to the laity under one kind only and the doctrine of purgatory.¹⁰⁶

A detailed critique of Roman Catholic claims is to be found in R.W. Morgan's *A Vindication of the Church of England* which was written in response to Viscount Fielding's conversion to Rome in 1850. Morgan claimed that the Roman belief in papal supremacy was a "usurpation over the Church of Christ forbidden by Christ Himself".¹⁰⁷ In line with traditional High Church thinking, he claimed that, since the bishops of the Church of England were the true successors of the apostles, the Roman Church was a "corrupt and . . . schismatic community" in Britain.¹⁰⁸ Morgan also claimed that the Roman Catholic understanding of the development of doctrine was irreconcilable with the authority of Christian tradition and the appeal to antiquity.¹⁰⁹ This suggests that, like Isaac Williams, he understood tradition as being a static source of authority which did not develop or evolve over the course of time.

With regard to the issue of the relationship between the church and the state, the Welsh-speaking Tractarians seem to have been consistent with the more radical Tractarian and Nonjuror view which held that the established link between church and state ought to be dissolved. While this went beyond Isaac Williams' more cautious belief that the problems brought about by the church's connection with the state ought to be borne patiently, they were at one with him in their belief that the union with the state was fundamentally negative.¹¹⁰

Like their English counterparts, the Welsh Tractarians became involved with political disputes. A number of them were highly critical of the government's proposal to amalgamate the dioceses of Bangor and St. Asaph in order to fund the establishment of a new diocese of Manchester in England, a plan which was seen as a stark example of English imperialism.¹¹¹ R.W. Morgan was also critical of the government's granting of political emancipation to Roman Catholics and of its support for the Roman Catholic seminary at Maynooth which he saw as undermining the status of the Church of England in Ireland. As he believed that the status of the Church of England was being increasingly threatened by Roman Catholicism and

¹⁰⁶ Morgan, *A Vindication of the Church of England*, 93-4

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 26

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 1; cf. Greenfield, "The Attitude of the Tractarians to the Roman Catholic Church", 256

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 96

¹¹⁰ Cf. Williams, "Indications of a Superintending Providence in the Preservation of the Prayer Book (no. 86)", 72-80

Nonconformity, Morgan argued that its position would be strengthened if the state allowed it more freedom to govern its internal affairs.¹¹² In his *Notes on Various Distinctive Verities of the Christian Church* he claimed that the church and the state were both interdependent parties in their union and that neither ought to exceed their authority by interfering in the affairs of the other. He believed that disestablishment could benefit the church by giving it greater autonomy from the usurpation of the secular state:

. . . the reciprocal allegiance, in things temporal, of the Church to the crown – in things spiritual of the crown to the Church – should be so deeply demarcated in the minds of all Christians, as to put it out of the power of any temporary minister to confound one with the other, and, by such confusion, mar and dislocate the harmony of their common yet distinct action. It is not impossible that the Church may be forced, by her duty to God and the souls of men, formally to renounce her union with the state . . . As an establishment she may or may not suffer; it is very much to be doubted whether she would experience any even temporal loss. As a Church, she cannot suffer; in unity of action and spirit, she would probably gain incalculably.¹¹³

While P.C. Ellis had more in common with the traditional High Church approach, claiming that union with the state had the advantage that it could “bring the world into the Church, and so consecrate it to God”,¹¹⁴ he also claimed that the church possessed an authority independent of the state.¹¹⁵ Morris Williams claimed that, since the connection between church and state was not taught in scripture, it was not essential to the faith, and that disestablishment would be a great blessing to the church.¹¹⁶

Another point of contact between English and Welsh Tractarianism was the emphasis on antiquity. In an essay on Bardism which was appended to his *Ecclesiastical Antiquities of the Cymru*, John Williams claimed that pre-Christian Celtic religion had prefigured elements of Christian theology and became absorbed into Christianity when it reached Britain.¹¹⁷ A similar view was also taken by R.W. Morgan’s *St. Paul in Britain* where he claimed that pre-Christian religion paralleled Christianity in the sense that it had emphasised the immortality of the soul and the

¹¹¹ Lloyd J.E. and Jones B., “Williams, John (1811-1862)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (v. 59), 248; Brown R.L., *Parochial Lives* (Llanrwst, 2002), 138

¹¹² Freeman, “The Revd. Richard Williams Morgan of Tregynon”, 90 quoting Morgan, *Notes on Various Distinctive Verities*, 238

¹¹³ Morgan, *Notes on Various Distinctive Verities*, 320-1

¹¹⁴ Ellis, *Letters to a Dissenting Minister*, 9

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20

¹¹⁶ Evans, “Traethwad: Dylanwad Mudiad Rhydychen”, N.L.W. M.S., 21439 D., 90-2

¹¹⁷ Kenward, *Ab Ithel*, 10-1

offering of sacrifices.¹¹⁸ He believed that the religion of the Celts had originated in Jerusalem and foreshadowed Christianity. In his view, the fact that the Druidic and Christian religions were so close to each other explained why Christianity was so readily accepted in Britain.¹¹⁹ Since Celtic druidism, according to Morgan, had emphasised the importance of the immortality of the soul and of peace (he believed that the Druids were opposed to all forms of violence), it was a better preparation for Christianity than Judaism.¹²⁰

John Williams and R.W. Morgan's view of Celtic religion was based on an uncritical acceptance of the bardic traditions of Iolo Morgannwg and William Owen Pughe as historical accounts,¹²¹ and there is no objective evidence to support their claims. However, it is interesting to note that their claim that Celtic druidism could be seen as foreshadowing Christian doctrine was a point of contact with Isaac Williams' belief that the ancient Greek and Latin religions were a preparation for the gospel. This belief found expression in his poetic work *The Christian Scholar*, where Williams claimed that the Greek and Latin classical writings could be seen as containing reflections of Christian truth.¹²² In his view it was possible to discern the divine presence in the history of Greeks and Latins, which he saw as pointing towards the coming of Christ:

. . . in the righteous visitations, in slow but sure judgments, in the rise and fall of nations, we must ever see [God] present, till our senses be so exercised by us to discern Him, that amid the noise of men and nations passing on to their destruction, our ears hear nothing but the new song of the redeemed of the earth, the eternal chime; and our eyes see nothing but Christ crucified, and in manifold manifestations the power of His Cross.¹²³

Williams claimed that heathen morality was fulfilled in Christian morality,¹²⁴ and that the classical poetry could be "made to glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ".¹²⁵ In his view the classical legend of Troy's decade of war could be seen as pointing to the moral battle between good and evil in which humanity is engaged, according to the book of Psalms.¹²⁶ He also claimed that Socrates, who had died as a

¹¹⁸ Morgan, *St. Paul in Britain*, 185

¹¹⁹ Brown, *Parochial Lives*, 140

¹²⁰ Morgan, *St. Paul in Britain*, 72-4

¹²¹ Lloyd and Jones, "Williams, John (1811-1862)", 249

¹²² Williams, *The Christian Scholar*, xiii-xxviii

¹²³ *Ibid.*, xxxii

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, xxxv-vi

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, xxxviii

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, xli

martyr for the truth, prefigured Jesus in his sufferings for the salvation of the world.¹²⁷ Homer's legend of Odysseus' long voyage home to Ithaca from Troy was also seen as pointing to the Christian's journey through earthly life to heaven.¹²⁸

In his commentary on the book of Genesis, Isaac Williams also echoed the Welsh Tractarians' belief that the pre-Christian religions' emphasis on the offering of sacrifice was in accord with God's will and formed a preparation for the coming of Christ:

. . . it must have been owing to some traditional knowledge of the Divine will in the beginning, that the nations of the world preserved so universally the custom of sacrifice . . . This must have been owing to one of two causes; either the instinctive religious feeling that such was pleasing to God; or it must have been, even in idolatrous worship, an imitation of what God had appointed.¹²⁹

In his *Thoughts on the Study of the Holy Gospels*, he also claimed that, while the fullness of God's revelation had been withheld from the pre-Christian pagans, what glimmers of truth they had received derived "from Jesus Christ manifesting Himself to them; for He is the true and only Light 'which lighteth every man that cometh into the world'".¹³⁰ Although the emphasis of John Williams and R.W. Morgan was on Celtic druidism rather than on the ancient Greek and Latin religions, they were at one with Isaac Williams in holding that Christian truth was reflected and prefigured to an extent in elements of non-Christian religion before the coming of Christ.

From what has been said it is clear that Isaac Williams did make a contribution to the Tractarian cause in Wales. Although it is probable that he only had, at best, a basic proficiency in the Welsh language and spent most of his life in England a number of his poems suggest that he continued to feel a great affection for his native land. Together with his brother, Williams was involved in building the first Tractarian church in Wales at Llangorwen and his sermon preached on the occasion of its consecration helped to emphasise the importance of doctrines which were central to the Oxford Movement. Although it has been claimed that Evan Lewis was "the first Anglican in the nineteenth century to preach in Wales the doctrines of apostolic succession and baptismal regeneration",¹³¹ it is clear that such doctrines were emphasised by Isaac Williams at the consecration of All Saint's, Llangorwen, the year

¹²⁷ Ibid., 81-2

¹²⁸ Ibid., 126

¹²⁹ Williams, *The Beginning of the Book of Genesis*, 407

¹³⁰ Williams, *Devotional Commentary on the Gospel Narrative (v. 1)*, 94

before Lewis was ordained. Letters from Williams' family also show that it was believed that his presence in Wales could have greatly assisted the progress of Welsh Tractarianism.

Having said this, it would be wrong to overstate the importance of Isaac Williams' contribution to the Oxford Movement in Wales. Despite the encouragement of his brother and cousin, he decided not to return to Wales and his direct involvement with Wales seems to have been restricted to the parish of Llangorwen. It is likely that Williams' main contribution to the Welsh Tractarian cause lay in the extent of his influence and reputation rather than in direct involvement. The majority of his published sermons and biblical commentaries were written for ordinary parish clergy and there is no reason to suppose that they would have been any less influential in Wales than elsewhere. It is also possible that, given Williams' reputation as a Tractarian author, his friendship with John Keble and Newman and the fact that he contributed to the *Tracts for the Times*, the Welsh Tractarians would have looked up to him and been influenced by his writings.

Apart from Isaac Williams' contribution to the Oxford Movement in Wales, Tractarian teaching was able to gain ground in a number of parishes through the influence of Welsh-speaking clergy who had come under the influence of movement at Oxford. The approach of these Welsh-speaking Tractarians to a number of issues such as baptismal regeneration, the real presence, and the apostolic succession, had much in common with that of Isaac Williams. Although it is possible that they may have been acquainted with him, we can but speculate as to the extent of the influence which Isaac Williams had over them. It may be that Isaac Williams and the Welsh-speaking Tractarians realised that, in order for the principles of the Oxford Movement to succeed among the people of rural parishes in England and Wales, it was necessary for them to be presented in a moderate form so that they were not seen as being alien to the ethos of the Church of England. The more pro-Roman approach of some of the English Tractarians may have created a following in urban parishes like St. Saviour's Leeds, but it would probably have repelled parishioners in the rural parishes of Wales and Gloucestershire. The Welsh-speaking Tractarians demonstrate that Isaac Williams, and the 'Bisley School' to which he belonged, were not the only churchmen who upheld a conservative form of Tractarianism which was more consistent with the

¹³¹ Thomas D.L. and Price D.T.W., "Lewis, Evan (1818-1901)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (v. 33), 607

pre-Tractarian High Church tradition. The existence of this conservative element within the Oxford Movement would seem to suggest that, while the more radical Tractarians did develop away from their High Church heritage, a form of the more traditional High Churchmanship continued to exist within the movement. They may not have been as conservative as the 'Z's who remained outside the Tractarian fold and actually opposed the movement, but they also stood very much apart from its later Rome-ward developments. It would be fair to claim that they were both High Churchmen and Tractarians.

Conclusion

From this study of Isaac Williams' contribution to the Oxford Movement and his theological views on various subjects it is clear that he contributed to the Tractarian cause by his personal example, his dedication to a number of its principles and also by his voluminous writings which sought to express and propagate its teaching. As a tutor of Trinity College between 1832 and 1842 he was on intimate terms with the main Tractarian leaders and, after leaving Oxford in 1842, he continued to play an important part in the movement through his published writings. Williams' authorship of *Tracts 80* and *87* on the doctrine of reserve was perhaps his most contentious contribution to the Oxford Movement. These tracts were not an end in themselves since the principle of reserve also found expression in Williams' poetry and biblical commentaries. Both of these seem to have been well read and admired and must have helped to propagate Tractarian principles and to encourage the spiritual approach to scripture which was an important element of the Oxford Movement. Williams' published works also made an important contribution to the movement since, in contrast to the many theological treatises which were written by Newman, John Keble and Pusey and were predominantly academic in tone, they tended to be devotional works aimed at ordinary parish clergy and laity. By publishing such works Williams may well have been instrumental in helping the principles of the movement to find a practical expression in parishes outside Oxford.

Isaac Williams' innate conservatism was also an important aspect of his contribution to the Oxford Movement. Like Thomas Keble, George Prevost and the other members of the 'Bisley School' to which he belonged, Williams tended to keep aloof from the more radical and pro-Roman attitude which had begun to emerge among the Tractarians and was suspicious of Newman's intellectualism and leadership of the movement. As he was both a close friend of Thomas Keble and also Newman's curate at St. Mary's, Williams formed an important link between the Oxford and the Bisley Tractarians. His conservatism was expressed by his dislike for the radical anti-Reformation statements which appeared in the published version of Hurrell Froude's *Remains* and resulted in his writing of *Tract 86* on the Prayer Book. He was also responsible for beginning and editing the series of *Plain Sermons by Contributors to the Tracts for the Times* in an attempt to counter the more radical strain which was beginning to appear in the movement. The more conservative

approach of Isaac Williams must have provided an alternative to the growing pro-Roman element in the movement and would have helped to provide an important sense of balance.

Although he was brought up in England and spent most of his life there, Isaac Williams never lost his love for Wales. He often returned to his family estate at his birth-place of Cwmcynfelin for holidays and the Welsh landscape inspired the imagery of many of his poems. He was also directly involved in the building and consecration of All Saint's, Llangorwen, a church built to further the Tractarian cause in Wales. Beyond this, and despite the fact that his family felt that his presence in Wales would have greatly aided the cause of the Oxford Movement there, his influence in Wales appears to have been limited. However, it does seem significant that a number of the Welsh-speaking Tractarians during the latter half of the nineteenth century also reflected a more conservative form of Tractarianism which was typical of Isaac Williams' approach. This may have been because they were influenced by Williams' example and writings. It is also possible that the Welsh-speaking Tractarians and the 'Bisley School' both felt that the more radical pro-Roman expression of Tractarianism would have failed to gain any real support in their rural parishes.

While examining Isaac Williams' theological views on various subjects this thesis has shown that his thinking had much in common with that of the pre-Tractarian High Church tradition, the 'Z' High Churchmen and also with the Tractarians. While the principle of reserve had been an important element of the ethos of pre-Tractarian High Churchmanship, the fact that Williams treated it as a doctrine in its own right which deserved to be discussed in two lengthy treatises, suggests that his emphasis on the principle was more in line with that of Newman and John Keble. As was shown in chapter two, Williams' tracts on reserve received much criticism from the 'Z's. Williams' emphasis on the importance of poetry also owed much to the influence of both John Keble and the High Church poet George Herbert. His approach to the Bible, which emphasised the 'spiritual' as opposed to the 'literal' interpretation of scripture, also had a precedent in the patristic writings and the pre-Tractarian High Church tradition, while also being in line with the approach of John Keble and Pusey.

With regard to his understanding of the nature of the eucharistic presence, Isaac Williams seems to have been more in line with the Tractarians than with the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen or the 'Z's. Unlike the High Churchmen who

understood the 'Real Presence' in terms of receptionism or virtualism, Williams seems to have shared Pusey's view of a 'real' and 'objective' presence in the elements themselves, while rejecting the Roman definition of transubstantiation. His view of the Eucharistic sacrifice seems to have been less extreme than that of Pusey, however.

Isaac Williams' emphasis on fasting, celibacy, asceticism, and ceremonial, all of which were emphasised by the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen, also seems to have been in line with that of the other Tractarians. Although he did not share Hurrell Froude's radical view that the Church of England should be separated from the state, like the Tractarians he believed that the relationship between church and state was something negative. This was the antithesis of the 'Z' belief that the church was benefited by establishment. Williams also shared the Tractarian emphasis on the importance of the apostolic succession, not just as being beneficial to the ordering of the church as the High Churchmen tended to believe, but as being fundamental to the very nature of the church since the valid administration of the sacraments depended on it. Like Newman, John Keble and Pusey, Williams did not subscribe to the erecting of the 'Martyrs' Memorial' at Oxford and was opposed to the establishment of the Jerusalem bishopric.

At the same time there were also important points of difference between Williams and the leading Tractarians. While Pusey and Keble both became strong advocates of habitual auricular confession and spiritual direction, Isaac Williams seems to have been uncomfortable with the former and directly opposed to the latter. This suggests that his approach to this issue was more in line with that of the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen and the 'Z's who opposed the auricular confession as a regular, habitual practice. Williams was also more in line with the High Churchmen with regard to his view of tradition. While Newman, Keble and Hurrell Froude, like the Usager Nonjurors, believed that tradition had an authority which could supplement the teaching of scripture, Williams seems to have held to the more traditional High Church view that tradition ought to be used to explain and confirm, but not to add to, the teachings of the Bible. Isaac Williams' negative view of Roman Catholicism was also something which he held in common with the pre-Tractarian High Churchmen and the 'Z's and which set him apart from the Tractarians.

On the whole Isaac Williams' thinking does seem to have been most in line with that of the Tractarians, even if he had strong reservations about some of the trends within the movement. It therefore seems fair to describe him as a "Tractarian".

At the same time it would seem that the differences between Williams and the other leading Tractarians should not be understated. Isaac Williams was a significant figure in the Oxford Movement because he maintained his individuality of judgment and was not afraid to depart from the opinion of Newman, John Keble or Pusey when he disagreed with them. Although Williams' letters suggest that a number of people greatly admired his published works and found them helpful in their spiritual life,¹ it does not appear that he had a direct group of disciples in the sense that Newman did. Given his general sense of reserve and his reticence to view the movement in political terms, it is unlikely that he would have wanted to have become a leader of a sub-group within the movement. This may be one reason why Williams chose not to return to Wales in 1846, since he would not have wished to have been thrust into the position of being a leader of the Welsh Tractarians. Although the 'Bisley School' did form something of a sub-group within the movement and Williams was the only member to publish avidly, it would be wrong to claim that he was a leader of this group. He may have been something of a mouthpiece for it through his published writings, but his letters give the impression that he would always defer to the opinions of Thomas Keble and George Prevost.²

It is significant that, because of his conservatism, Williams' writings helped to emphasise the link between the Oxford Movement and the pre-Tractarian High Church tradition which was most clear in the early stages of the movement. Since Williams' outlook did not undergo the same radical development as some of his colleagues, it seems fair to claim, as Owen Chadwick suggested, that he was the main Tractarian who continued to embody the original aims and purposes of the Oxford Movement.³ Had the more conservative, reserved approach of Isaac Williams permeated the Oxford Movement, then the subsequent rift between the Tractarians and the 'Z's would almost certainly not have become so great.

¹ Those who seem to have greatly admired Williams include Robert Broadley, James Davies, C.S. Greenway, Charles Lyell, Rounell Palmer, Fenning Park and R.A. Suckling. See L.P.L., M.S. 4473, ff. 64-80; M.S. 4474, ff. 1-7, 8-11, 105-8; M.S. 4475, ff. 5-6, 114-26, 127-8; M.S. 4476, ff. 22-42

² See, for example, L.P.L. Keble Dep. 9/11, 18, 19, 24, 42, 45; L.P.L., Box 779, "Letters from Isaac Williams to Rev. Thomas Keble and his family"

³ Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement*, 35

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