

Baxter to Cummins:
The Debate Over The Language of Baptismal Regeneration
In The Book of Common Prayer, 1662 – 1873

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July 2001 Preface

It is now more than two years since I put this thesis to rest, and much has happened in the Episcopal Church to rekindle my interest in this debate. Consider the developments surrounding the Anglican Mission in America (AMiA) under the oversight of its irregularly consecrated bishops Chuck Murphy and John Rogers: in August of 2000, there was a pronouncement by a group calling itself the Nassau Coalition¹ that there is a “Pastoral Crisis” in the Episcopal Church; in June 2001, we witnessed the consecrations of four new missionary “bishops” to serve under the auspices of the AMiA; and as I write this now the Accokeek conflict between Fr. Samuel Edwards and interim bishop Jane Dixon of the Diocese of Washington continues to worsen.

All of this reminds me very much of the tenor and movement leading up to the schism wrought by George David Cummins and his followers in 1873 over the various concerns which overwhelmed and preoccupied them. It occurs to me that the same kinds of rancor, mutual disrespect, asinine behaviour and Corinthian-style partisanship which characterized the last century’s great fight over baptismal regeneration (as well as other Roman innovations such as ritualism, reservation, decoration, etc.) have been reenacted in the current feast of disruption arising over the hot-button issues of human sexuality, ‘gender-issues,’ and the deeper disagreement over scripture, conciliarism and doctrinal authority in the Anglican branch of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. This inhouse conflict and likely divorce has occurred in a larger Christian context in which the Pope reaffirms the ‘defective nature’ of churches outside communion with Rome, while fast-growing ‘fundamental Bible churches’ hold that Roman Catholicism is itself the world’s most dangerous cult.²

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¹ A group of church leaders calling itself the Nassau Coalition met Aug. 21-23, 2000 in Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas, and issued a letter, which was signed by the Most Rev. Drexel Wellington Gomez, archbishop of the West Indies. The letter protests actions taken at the Episcopal Church's General Convention in July 2000 that "demonstrate a clear departure from historic Anglican practice." In particular, the letter expresses concern over two resolutions. One declares that all Episcopal bishops will ordain women as priests, and the other calls on Episcopal clergy to support people in sexual relationships outside of traditional marriage.

² Note the Vatican’s August 2000 declaration *Dominus Iesus* for the Roman assertion of its unicity and salvific universality in Christ. For the radical evangelical position, consult www.fundamentalbiblechurch.net for a typical view held by many contemporary ‘Bible-believing Christians.’

Introduction

The language of Baptismal regeneration in the Book of Common Prayer was the subject of heated controversy in mid-nineteenth-century Anglicanism between Evangelical and Catholic churchmen.³ Crucial differences over Baptismal theology were—again—one of the great doctrinal fissures between the Genevan and Romeward wings of the Church. The doctrine of Baptismal regeneration as inherited and elaborated upon by the Tractarians was one of the principal doctrinal issues over which the founders of the Reformed Episcopal Church departed from the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1873.

Yet, this turmoil in Victorian Anglicanism was not the product of any new theological or doctrinal thinking. Despite what has often been supposed, the controversy over the language of Baptismal regeneration in the Church's Liturgy did not begin with the publication of Pusey's tracts on Baptism or Newman's Tract 90. Rather, this issue had been simmering in the background since the Puritan and Laudian wings of the Church were established more than two-and-a-half centuries earlier. The debate was ongoing due to the constancy throughout those hundreds of years of the Prayer Book's language—

³A note on language: Diana Hochstedt Butler, author of *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, first captured my interest in the nineteenth-century struggles between Evangelical and High Church Anglicans. While I do not explicitly refer to her work in this thesis, I owe her a debt of gratitude for interesting me in this area. I have adopted Prof. Butler's terms and language, believing her work to be the new standard on the subject. In a footnote to her preface, Prof. Butler explains her use of language:—I recognize the importance of inclusive language, but, quite frankly, could think of no "inclusive" terms to replace *High Churchman* and *churchmanship* that retain their simplicity and meaning. *Evangelical* does not share this problem. Occasionally, I have inserted something like High Church *partisans* or *colleagues* to encourage the reader to remember that women were also part of the High Church movement. *Churchmanship* should be considered inclusive throughout the text because it includes women's views and opinions. Emily McIlvaine, the wife of Bishop Charles McIlvaine, for example, was vocally Evangelical in her churchmanship. *Church-style* or *churchpersonship* does not seem to capture the nineteenth-century sense of the term. In addition, the word *evangelical* is rendered with a capital *E* to denote the Evangelical party in the Anglican Church. See Diana Hochstedt Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), xiii.

certain particulars of which, in the eyes of the Puritans and their Evangelical heirs, had high potential for erroneous or “Romish” interpretation.

The theological heart of the controversy over Baptismal regeneration was the process of salvation attested to in the Prayer Book liturgy. But, for the greatest part of the controversy’s long history, the controversy was viewed by reasonable Anglicans as deriving more from an important difference in the interpretation and everyday use of particular religious words. The word ‘regeneration,’ as originally written in the Prayer Book in the middle of the sixteenth century, had already begun to assume a significantly different popular meaning by the early seventeenth century. By the middle of the nineteenth century the word meant something rather different for most Protestants outside of the Church as well as their sympathizers within it. The language of the Prayer Book, while remaining verbally constant, could not be interpreted constantly by a growing number of readers. In other words, for many in the Church, the plain meaning of certain words in the offices of Baptism and Confirmation began to mean something far different from what Reformed thinkers thought they should mean.

What this thesis will do

In this paper I will explore the history of the roughly three centuries of debate over the language of Baptismal regeneration in the Prayer Book, which came to a crisis point in the middle of the nineteenth century, focusing on the most important attempts to revise the Prayer Book. The schism of the Reformed Episcopal Church was in some respects the result of tensions which had been brewing since the seventeenth century—when the Prayer Book’s language of Baptismal regeneration became a dividing line between the Puritan and Laudian parties. I will explain the Baptismal theologies for the ‘Puritan’ and ‘Laudian’ wings of Anglicanism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and I will trace the development of these views to the nineteenth century debate between Evangelicals and High Churchmen. Lastly, though there was often significant critique from Latitudinarian circles of the Prayer Book’s language of Baptismal regeneration, this thesis will focus on the controversy as it played out between the Puritan and Laudian lines of churchmanship through 250 years.

Prayer Book Language of Regeneration: The Heart of the Matter

In the simplest terms, the Prayer Book’s language and normative practice of infant Baptism, caused this long-term controversy over Baptismal regeneration. The specific problem was that certain of the prayers of the Baptismal Office and the Confirmation Liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer of 1662 and its descendants (until 1979) included the word ‘regenerate’ in regard to the sacrament of Baptism—for infants and adults. This was problematic because the meaning of this word as it was used in regard to Baptism was already highly debatable long before the 1662 Book was finalized. Simply put, the word ‘regenerate’—which since the Patristic era had been associated with Christian Baptism, to the extent that ‘regenerate’ and ‘baptize’ were roughly synonymous terms—had begun to take on a meaning associated with the experience of personal, spiritual conversion which Puritans and other Reformed Protestants were emphasizing as the

moment of the real new birth, as called for by Jesus in his conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:3-7.

For Reformed Christians, the new birth meant that internal process by which a person—most expectably an ‘adult’—was convicted of their own sinfulness and inability to save themselves, their hope that Jesus Christ alone could save them by his Atonement, and their heart-felt assent to the lordship of Jesus Christ. As such, the Puritans, and their sympathizers, could not abide by the language of the Prayer Book which seemed to indicate that by the work of sacramental Baptism alone an infant may be saved and converted to Christ. Such an idea was repugnant to them, recalling for the Puritans the pre-Reformation abuses of the sacraments by sacerdotalist clergy.

Puritan Baptismal Theology

E. Brooks Holifield explains in his work, *The Covenant Sealed*, that the Puritans inherited the characteristic Reformed ambivalence about external sacraments. Salvation, after all, rested ultimately on the unconditional election of a Deity who was the ‘Father and the God of all the elect, and only the elect.’⁴ Puritan ministers frequently criticized the Catholic view that the sacrament of Baptism conferred saving grace, removed the stain of original sin, or justified the baptized infant, just as they denied that Baptism was necessary for salvation. For conforming Puritans, for whom the Prayer Book remained “the Liturgy,” these points became hugely important, and answers necessary.

Two of the most celebrated Puritan ministers within the Church in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were William Perkins and Richard Sibbes. They elaborated a view of Baptism using covenantal terms—explaining Baptism to be the seal of the covenant of grace initiated by Christ and an introduction into the visible Church. Holifield explains:

Perkins foreshadowed his reliance on covenantal imagery when he observed in his formal definition of a sacrament that it ‘sealed’ Christ and his graces ... In Romans, Paul called ‘the sign of circumcision’ a ‘seal of the righteousness of faith’ that Abraham possessed. Genesis described circumcision as ‘a token of the covenant’ between God and Abraham. Conflating the two verses, Puritan theologians defined circumcision as a seal to the covenant. Since circumcision, in turn, was a prototype of Baptism, the Puritans defined Baptism, and by implication the Lord’s Supper, as covenant seals.⁵

Nor did Baptism merely seal or confirm membership for Puritan Anglicans—they believed it created membership in the Church. Perkins said that by instrumentally conferring the grace to nourish and increase faith, Baptism made faith itself a more

⁴E. Brooks Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570-1720* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), 46.

⁵Ibid, 41.

effective “instrument to apprehend or receive the grace of God.”⁶ In this sense, the person who rightly used the Baptismal seal would surely receive the gift that it signified. So long as Baptism was joined to faith, thus being a “perfect and intire [sic] Baptism,” it abolished both the punishment and the guilt of sin, though sinfulness remained in the baptized.⁷ Baptism could be justified in the case of infants because they were seen to be offered entrance into the covenantal relationship initiated by God. As Sibbes said, “we see a ground of baptizing infants, because they are in the covenant ... to whom the covenant belongs, the seal of it belongs ... to infants, the covenant belongs ... therefore the seal of it, Baptism, belongeth to them.”⁸

In North America, the Puritans found themselves under different circumstances than those Puritans operating within the Church of England. Interestingly, even in the Puritan New England, the theology of Baptism would evolve away from strict believer’s Baptism only, to the compromise doctrine of the Half-Way Covenant, which was elaborated in 1662. According to Holifield, by 1700, the Half-Way Covenant would be widely accepted, and would begin to have a significant effect on sacramental theology and piety. He says that while a Puritan leader as Increase Mather would deny that Baptism was necessary for salvation—as had Perkins—or that it effected regeneration, he would describe it as an important step toward salvation. Mather suggested that the “sacrament sealed a conditional covenant, but also that it ratified a covenantal promise to send the Spirit, thereby establishing a probability that the conditions would be fulfilled.”⁹

Catholic Doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration

As a counterpoint to the Puritan Baptismal theology, it is valuable to illustrate briefly the traditional Catholic view over against which the Reformed theology was drawn. In a few sentences, the Catholic view of Baptism held that it: remits original and actual sin and the punishment due of them, spiritually regenerates the baptized into life in Christ in anticipation of the resurrection, it suppresses the anarchy of our tendencies to

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid, 42.

⁹Ibid, 186-190.

sin, and it is necessary for salvation.¹⁰ This view as found in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* would likely have found favor not only with Roman Catholics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but also with the Laudians within the Church of England.

¹⁰*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, (Vol. II: 1967), 63.

Anthony Sparrow, a Loyalist of Charles I before the Civil War, and a Laudian bishop of Exeter and then Durham after the Restoration, wrote a commentary on the Book of Common Prayer which neatly presents the Catholic view within the Church of England, not only at the time it was written, but later in the early nineteenth century by High Churchmen of the Oxford Movement.¹¹ Sparrow writes the following on the need and nature of Baptism:

Firstly, ... we are all born in sin ... all guilty in Adam's fall, (so the catholic Church spread over the world always understood it,) and therefore by our first birth have no right to heaven, into which "no unclean thing shall enter."
Secondly, That therefore there is need of a second birth, to give us right to that, as it is "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God."
Thirdly, That this second or new birth is by water and the Holy Ghost; "Except a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." By water and the Holy Ghost is here meant holy Baptism. For first, this is the most literal interpretation of the words, (for what is Baptism but water and the Holy Ghost?) and therefore the best ...¹²

Sparrow would assert that not only was Holy Baptism defined by water and the Holy Ghost, it was the "only ordinary means of our regeneration or second birth, which gives us a right and title to heaven."¹³ Here we see the main differences with the Puritan view have to do the Catholic doctrine of the necessity of water Baptism, its unique character as entrance into the life of the Church, its ability to remit sins, and its identification with the new birth called for by Christ in the third chapter of John.

The Savoy Conference

G.J. Cuming said that the century of debate between Puritan and Laudian may be seen in microcosm in the events of 1661 and 1662. He writes of the long struggle between these two wings in the Church,

whether you look at Matthew Parker enforcing the surplice, ... Hooker's controversy with Travers, when 'the forenoon sermon' at the Temple 'spake Canterbury, and the afternoon Geneva,' ... at Laud and Prynne wrangling over altars and reverences, ... or at the meetings ... at the Savoy ... it is always the same points that are debated, the same arguments used, even the same literature reprinted.¹⁴

¹¹The 1839 edition of Sparrow used for this thesis includes a praise-filled preface by John Henry Newman.

¹²Anthony Sparrow, *A Rationale Upon The Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England*, Reprint of 1684 Blanche Pawlet edition (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1839), 229.

¹³Ibid, 230.

¹⁴G.J. Cuming, "The Grand Debate," *The Church Quarterly Review* (Vol. 163: 1962), 29.

For our review of the centuries of Anglican debate over the Prayer Book's language of Baptismal regeneration, we have no better place to look first than to the proceedings of the Savoy Conference.

In 1661, the recently restored Charles II called for a conference of clergy from both sides of the Puritan and Laudian divide to examine the Elizabethan Book of Common Prayer and make recommendations for its revision. Twelve Commissioners on either side were named. Among these were some of the greatest minds of the Church of England at that time. Notable on the bishops' side were John Cosin and Anthony Sparrow, those redoubtable forebears of nineteenth-century High Churchmen. Notable on the Presbyterian side was Richard Baxter, one of the most influential Puritans of his day and a significant inspiration to his moderate-Calvinist heirs, outside the Established Church as well as within.

The Savoy Conference was an antagonistic affair from the start. The Laudians were aware of their advantage— not only on the bench but in Parliament— and of the significant political weakness of the Puritans. While it is likely that Charles II was desirous of a moderate outcome and the comprehension of the Presbyterians within the Church, the Laudian Bishops were not as moderately inclined. Indeed, “the intransigency of the Laudians, who favored the Laudian conformity,” in concert with “the Cavalier Parliament and the convocation of 1661, began at once to undermine the policy of the king and the hopes of the Presbyterians.”¹⁵ Opposed to compromise or commonality with the Presbyterians in the Prayer Book, the bishops hardened in their stance toward them.¹⁶

The bishops did not offer to examine the Prayer Book together with the ministers. Instead they resolutely defended the Prayer Book as it stood, challenging the ministers to prove any deficiency in it.¹⁷ The Presbyterians were asked to provide a set of objections to the existing Prayer Book, to which they replied with detailed *Exceptions*—as they were called—to the entire Prayer Book, as well as a “Reformed Liturgy” by Richard Baxter—who would become the Presbyterians' spokesman, genius, and scape-goat. The Presbyterian *Exceptions* give us our greatest insight into the earliest objections to the language of Baptismal regeneration in the Prayer Book, objections which would not go away even after they were first dismissed by the Laudian bishops.

The Exceptions

It is important to note in the *Exceptions* that the Presbyterians were concerned with the potential for schism over differences with the Prayer Book. In the very first

¹⁵George R. Abernathy, Jr.—The English Presbyterians and the Stuart Restoration, 1648-1663, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* (Vol 55, No. 2: May, 1965), 80.

¹⁶Cuming, 33.

¹⁷Irvonwy Morgan, *The Nonconformity of Richard Baxter*, (London: The Epworth Press, 1946), 59.

paragraph of the text of the *Exceptions*, we read:

... we doubt not but the Right Reverend Bishops, and all the rest of His Majesties [sic] Commissioners ... will in imitation of His Majesties most prudent and Christian moderation and clemency, judge it their duty (that we find the Apostles own practice) ... to be tender to the Churches peace ... [and] seriously and readily to consider, and advise such Expedients as may most conduce to the healing of our breaches, and uniting those that differ.¹⁸

Among their criteria for Prayer Book revision, the Presbyterians sought to make changes only insofar as they could clarify language of dubious or debatable theological value. Baxter himself comments in his autobiography that he always “took the faults of the Common Prayer to be chiefly disorder and defectiveness ... a true worship, though imperfect.”¹⁹ At Savoy the ministers wrote:

... all the Prayers, and other Materials in the Liturgy, may consist of nothing doubtful or questioned among Pious, Learned and Orthodox Persons, inasmuch as the professed end of composing them is, for the declaring of Unity and consent of all who joyn in the Publick Worship, it being too evident, that the limiting Church-Communion to things of doubtful disputation, hath been in all Ages the

¹⁸*The Grand Debate Between the Most Reverend Bishops, and the Presbyterian divines, Appointed by His Sacred Majesty, as Commissioners for the Review and Alteration of the Book of Common Prayer, &c., Being an Exact Account of their whole Proceedings. The most perfect copy*, (London: 1661), 1.

¹⁹*The Autobiography of Richard Baxter—Being the Reliquiae Baxterianae Abridged from the Folio (1696)*, With Introduction, Appendices & Notes by J.M. Lloyd Thomas (London: J.M. Dent & Sons LTD, 1925), 164.

ground of Schism and separation, according to the saying of a Learned Man. ... To load our Publick Forms with the private Fancies upon which we differ, is the most Sovereign way to perpetuate Schism to the Worlds end ...²⁰

Primarily, the Presbyterians warned that schism could be the likely result from a hierarchically imposed maintenance of what they saw as debatable terms in the language of the Prayer Book. As we shall see from the *Exceptions*, the language of Baptismal regeneration in the Prayer Book seemed to present just the kind of questionable doctrine that the Presbyterians believed would lead to schism and separation.

²⁰Ibid, 2.

Before we move on to the text of the Presbyterian *Exceptions*, it will be valuable to briefly outline Baxter's own theory of Baptism. As Irvonwy Morgan writes, "to understand Baxter's doctrine of the Sacraments we must understand the importance he attaches to the conception of a covenant between God and man."²¹ Not surprisingly, Baxter, the Puritan, follows along with the covenant understanding of Baptism. The nature and merits of this covenant of Baptism are described by Morgan as follows:

It is an agreement made between two persons: God in His condescending mercy, in that the Creator should so treat with His own creature, over who He possesses the power of life and death, and man in his sinful, yet believing nature. It is not a covenant between two equal or even similar beings, but is expressive of that grace which manifested itself in Him who 'Laid His glory by, and wrapped Him in our clay.' The knowledge of this agreement freely offered by God results in two dispositions in the believing soul. The first is that evangelical piety which acknowledges its salvation through the Blood of Christ, and the second is the knowledge that sinful, impotent man has been raised to a position of responsibility, in that he too has a condition to perform by the aid of God's grace.²²

Following the same Puritan understanding outlined by Holifield, Baxter saw Baptism as the outward and visible seal of the inner covenant of grace, which confers legal rights to the benefits of the covenant, is bound by Christ, recognized by God, and "incorporates the soul into the universal Church which is the Body of Christ."²³

²¹Morgan, 167.

²²Ibid, 167.

²³Ibid.

Again, this was distinguished from the Laudian view of Baptismal regeneration in Baxter's contention that Baptism did not confer or infuse grace into the soul *ex opere operato*, "because it is what he calls a moral instrument, and not a physical one."²⁴ For Baxter, and Puritans in general, the difference was in the nature of the gift conferred by Baptism: it was seen by them to be the title to God's grace, not a state of grace as such. Baptism confers a change of status but not of state. This status was described as a *jus relationis* between the baptized person and the Holy Trinity in which God becomes her adopted Father; Christ becomes her redeemer and justifier; and the Holy Spirit becomes her regenerator and sanctifier.²⁵ Baxter criticized the Tridentine notion that Baptism conferred a state of grace and the regeneration of nature on the baptized. Instead, Baxter would argue that Baptism imparts a germ or seed of grace which would grow into future acts of grace and holiness, when "watered by the Word and good education."²⁶

But, Baxter shows in his autobiography that his primary concern at the Savoy Conference was not that the Prayer Book overtly espoused Roman Catholic doctrines so much as it could well lead to Romeward interpretations and pre-Reformation abuses. As well, Baxter's difference with the bishops was often less doctrinal than personal and political—he found the bishops to share more of the papal attitude than doctrine.²⁷ Baxter found that the Bishops disingenuously insisted upon the antiquity of the Liturgy in defense of their demand for uniformity—which, Baxter argues, was not the witness of antiquity. He writes,

They told us of the antiquity of the liturgies. And I earnestly intreated [sic] them to let true antiquity be imitated by them; and desired any of them to prove that ever any prince did impose one form of prayer or liturgy, for uniformity, on all the churches in his dominions ... Yea, or upon any one province or country under them ... Or that ever any council, synod or patriarchs, or metropolitans, did impose one liturgy on all the bishops and churches under them. I proved to them not only from the instances of Basil and the Church of Neocaesarea ... that every bishop then chose what forms he pleased for his own church. They could deny none of all this; but antiquity is nothing to them when it makes against them ...

²⁴Ibid, 168.

²⁵Ibid, 170.

²⁶Ibid, 168.

²⁷Morgan, 60.

The Textual Objections

In the first instance, we encounter the Presbyterians' objection to the language of regeneration in the exception to the second prayer before Baptism. The exception refers specifically to the text: "... may receive remission of sins by spiritual regeneration." Their exception states: "This Expression [sic] seeming inconvenient, wee [sic] desire it may be changed into this: *May be regenerated and receive the Remission of sins.*"²⁸ This exception shows that the Presbyterians are not uncomfortable with the word 'regenerated' so much as with the possibility it may be misconstrued.

Baxter and his party offered a more pronounced exception to the spiritual connotation of 'regenerate' as found in the thanksgiving prayer after Baptism: "... it hath pleased thee to regenerate this Infant by thy holy Spirit."²⁹ Here, their exception reads: "We cannot in Faith say, that every Child that is baptized is regenerated by Gods [sic] Holy Spirit; at least, it is a disputable point, and therefore we desire that it may be otherwise expressed."³⁰

The Catholic response of the bishops to this second objection, is expressed in the following quotation:

Seeing that God's Sacraments have their effects, where the Receiver doth not *ponere obicem*, put any bar against them (which Children cannot do), we may say in faith of every Child that is baptized, that it is regenerated by God's Holy Spirit, and the denial of it tends to Anabaptism, and the contempt of this holy Sacrament, as nothing worthy, nor material, whether it be administered to children or no.³¹

The Presbyterians made the following rather testy rebuttal to the bishops'

²⁸Richard Baxter, *An Accompt of all the Proceedings Of the Commissioners of both Persuasions, Appointed by his Sacred Majesty, According To Letters Patent, for the Review of The Book of Common-Prayer, &c.*, (London: 1661), 21.

²⁹Paul V. Marshall, *Prayer Book Parallels* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1989), 260-261.

³⁰Baxter, 21.

³¹Ibid, 115.

pejorative-sounding criticism:

All God's Sacraments attain their proper end: But whether the Infants of Infidels be the due subjects, and whether their end be to seal up Grace and Salvation to them that have no promise of it, or whether it be onely to seal the Covenant to Believers and their seed, are Questions yet undecided [sic], wherein we must entreat you not to expect that we should implicitly believe you; and it is as easie for us to tell you, that you are promoting Anabaptism, and much more easie to prove it: We take those but for words of course.³²

Apart from the language of the Baptismal Office itself, the Presbyterians also objected to the use of the word 'regenerate' in the Confirmation Rite. Here, a noteworthy exception was made to the last rubric before the catechism. This rubric had been:

And that no man shall think that any detriment shall come to Children by deferring of their Confirmation, he shall know for truth, that it is certain by Gods Word that Children being baptized, have all things necessary for their salvation, and be undoubtedly saved.³³

The ministers' exception to this rubric further indicates that their objections over language had as much to do with explicit meanings as it did with potential meaning. Their exception here reads:

Although we charitably suppose the meaning of these words was onely [sic] to exclude the necessity of any other Sacraments to Baptized Infants; yet these words are dangerous as to the misleading of the Vulgar, and therefore we desire they may be expunged.³⁴

One historian writes that this Confirmation rubric was actually the most objectionable text in the whole Prayer Book for Richard Baxter and his side. E.C. Ratcliff comments,

In particular, [Richard Baxter] objected, with other Dissenters, to the Baptismal rubric affirming it as 'certain by God's Word' that baptized infants dying before

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid, 25.

³⁴Ibid.

the commission of actual sin ‘are undoubtedly saved,’ and he was later reported as ... saying on behalf of the Dissenters ‘...of the Forty sinful Terms for a Communion with us ... if Thirty-nine were taken away, and only that Rubrick ... were continued, yet they could not conform.’³⁵

And if their point had not been sufficiently made, in the prayer before the imposition of hands at Confirmation, the Presbyterians again objected to the language of Baptismal regeneration, in no uncertain terms. Where the prayer books text reads, “...who hast vouchsafed to regenerate these thy servants by Water and the Holy Ghost, and hast given them the forgiveness of their sins,” their exception is as follows:

³⁵E. C. Ratcliff, “The Savoy Conference and the Revision of the Book of Common Prayer.” *From Uniformity to Unity*, Geoffrey F. Nuttall and Owen Chadwick, eds. (London: S.P.C.K., 1962), 145.

This supposeth that all the Children who are brought to be Confirmed, have the Spirit of Christ, and the forgiveness of their sins; Whereas a great number of Children at that age, having committed many sins since their Baptism, do shew no evidence of serious Repentance, or of any special saving grace ... therefore this Confirmation (if admitted to such) would be a perillous and gross abuse.³⁶

The Presbyterian brethren objected to the language of Baptismal regeneration on the grounds that it could be misleading to the uneducated by implying an inner moral change or change of state. They said it was a clearly disputable point that all persons baptized with water are necessarily morally regenerate. In the language of regeneration they saw that the Baptismal and Confirmation Rites implied that persons were undoubtedly and necessarily saved by their water Baptism. And they could not abide by these assertions.

But, by any account, the Savoy Conference was a dismal failure in bridging the gap between the Laudian bench and the Puritan pulpit. Virtually none of the pertinent revisions which the Presbyterians sought in this area came to be included in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. Importantly, the old language of Baptismal regeneration to which they excepted was left as before. The 1662 Act of Uniformity led to the ejection of over 2,000 dissenting clergy who could not abide by the language of the Prayer Book—among them Richard Baxter.³⁷

Many historians have charged the failure of the conference to Richard Baxter's pugnacious style, and to his unswerving stance over the key points of debate for his side. Of course, it is likely that Baxter was of necessity unswerving, as members of his own side had either defected to the bishops (such as Reynolds) or never really participated (Drs. Horton, Tuckney, Lightfoot, and Woodbridge.)³⁸ But as one 20th century historian has written,

³⁶Ibid, 27.

³⁷F.L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: 1997), 1458.

³⁸Abernathy, 80.

it is doubtful, even if Baxter had trimmed his conscience, a thing he was incapable of doing, that there would have been any lasting reconciliation between the Episcopal party and the Puritans. For the real power in the land was not the King nor the bishops, nor the great lords, but the Cavalier Parliament, who were determined to punish those who had conquered and humiliated them in the Civil Wars.³⁹

The Anglican liturgical scholar G.J. Cuming wrote on the tercentenary of the Conference, that while the failure at Savoy perhaps allowed the Anglican Church to maintain its elements of Catholic heritage which the Puritans had sought to remove, and it essentially ended the century of political strife between the Church parties, the purged Anglican Church was alternatively deprived of a link with the Continental Reformation, the Church of Scotland, and the pastoral zeal and practical methods of the Presbyterian clergy who were far more advanced in this regard than their conforming counterparts within the Establishment.⁴⁰

The Glorious Revolution and Prayer Book Revision

While the efforts to comprehend Presbyterians failed at the Savoy Conference, efforts to do so continued, however unsuccessfully. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the arrival of England's new continental protestant monarchs, William & Mary, stunted the Laudians and offered another opportunity to revise the Prayer Book on comprehensive lines. The proposed revision of the common prayer included the following changes with regard to Baptism:

1. In the second prayer before Baptism, the words 'may be regenerated and receive remission of sin' is substituted for the words 'may receive remission of sins by spiritual regeneration.'
2. The rubric which states that infants baptized "are undoubtedly saved" is "either to be omitted, or to be proved by particular place of Scripture to be

³⁹Morgan (1946), 59.

⁴⁰Cuming, 39.

sett in ye margent.”⁴¹

⁴¹Marion J Hatchett, *The Making of the First American Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1982), 15.

Not surprisingly, these proposed changes were exactly the same as those requested by the Presbyterians in the Savoy Conference. However, the 1689 revised liturgy was not to be authorized by the convocation of that year. Instead, the text of the revised liturgy was instructed to be preserved in secret in the library at Lambeth by the Dean of the Arches, under the immediate custody of the Archbishop of Canterbury, with only one copy ever known to have been made—and that one lost. The revised liturgy was kept an official secret until 1854 when the House of Commons ordered that it be printed publicly. However, as Marion Hatchett has explained, throughout the eighteenth century, summary accounts of the 1689 proposed alterations were widely distributed in a Church of England which frequently sought, but never managed, to revise its Prayer Book.⁴²

Eighteenth Century Developments

The burgeoning Evangelical movement of the eighteenth century remained largely critical of the same points to which Baxter and the Presbyterians and Puritans before them had.⁴³ The Evangelicals' wide emphasis on conversion and new birth into the Spirit of God further hardened the linguistic association of the words 'regeneration' with 'conversion' throughout the eighteenth century. Yet, through most of the eighteenth century, Evangelicals made no formal proposals for Prayer Book revision. Indeed, one of their characteristics as a party was deep admiration for the Book of Common Prayer, finding it to be the container of truth which well complemented the font of all doctrinal

⁴²Ibid, 16.

⁴³Ibid, 36.

authority, the Holy Bible.⁴⁴

⁴⁴Charles Lowry observes that the Calvinist Evangelicals within the Church notably thought of themselves as—strong Prayer Book churchmen.” See Alexander C. Zabriskie, *Anglican Evangelicalism* (Philadelphia: The Church Historical Society, 1943), 52. Even the High Church Bishop of New York Horatio Potter would remark that the 18th-century Evangelicals like Simeon, Venn, and Wilberforce were good—Prayer Book men. See *Papers on the Proposition of the "Nine Bishops"*, (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1871), 20.

They did not call for revision for a few reasons. Firstly, the Evangelical movement which began in the 1730's, did not achieve any hierarchical clout for decades. Also, many calls for Prayer Book revision were coming from Latitudinarian Churchmen.⁴⁵ And in those years, before the Oxford Movement widened the chasm between Evangelical and High Churchman, the orthodox descendants of Baxter and of Laud within the Church would frequently be allied with one another against the theological liberalism of the Latitudinarians, who—along with the cadet lines of descent from the original class of Dissenters—not infrequently tended toward Deism and Unitarianism.

But there are two other factors which might explain why the Evangelical heirs of the Puritans made no formal attempts at Prayer Book revision for a century. One has to do with the interesting evolution of the revivalist wing of the Anglican Church, and the variety of influences which made up the Evangelical movement. The other has to do with the strong theology of Baptism articulated in the early decades of the eighteenth century

⁴⁵Throughout the eighteenth century Latitudinarian revisions were published and widely distributed, though none were, of course, official. Of particular significance were texts put forth by John Jones and Theophilus Lindsey which were both greatly influenced by Baxter and the Savoy *Exceptions*. For an in-depth account of these and other proposed revisions, see pp. 131-146 of Geoffrey J. Cuming's *A History of Anglican Liturgy*. 2nd Edition. (London: Macmillan, 1982).

by that “high church protestant theologian,” Daniel Waterland.⁴⁶ Waterland proposed a theory of Baptism which established a long-lived detente between the Evangelicals and what Peter Nockles describes as the ‘Orthodox’ party of the eighteenth century.⁴⁷

Evolution of Anglican Evangelicalism

⁴⁶Paul Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 150.

⁴⁷Peter Benedict Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship, 1760-1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

In assessing the spiritual ancestors of Anglican Evangelicalism, William Law holds a seminal position. Not only was Law influential among the High Church nonjurors, and not only did he revel in controverting unorthodox Latitudinarian positions. Law has been described as “the fountain-head of the puritanism which became a prominent feature of Evangelicalism” in the Anglican Church.⁴⁸ William Law’s 1729 book, *A Serious Call*, was hugely influential for the group of young Anglicans who would become the founders of Methodism and the authors of the Great Awakening on both sides of the Atlantic in the middle of the eighteenth century. As one historian has written:

Law’s main contribution in preparing for the revival was that he set before men a forgotten ideal of the Christian life, and when they tried to attain to it they found that their unaided efforts were but vain. As Henry Venn said, the pun was perhaps unintentional, ‘Law came before the Gospel.’⁴⁹

Law wrote another treatise in 1739, entitled *The Grounds and Reasons of Christian Regeneration Or, The New Birth*. In which, Law asserted the unique efficacy of Christ’s saving Atonement and the necessity of heartfelt conversion in individuals convicted of their sinfulness and aware of their only hope in the indwelling Christ. He spoke of the necessity for a truly spiritual and inner faith.⁵⁰ All of which found great resonance for his successors. One of whom was George Whitefield. Whitefield’s message would be the necessity of spiritual new birth. His unprecedented revival ministry contributed significantly to the difficulty over the language of Baptismal regeneration for many.

Whitefield’s Neo-Puritanism

Whitefield preached against the merely intellectual and flaccid religion he encountered in the United Kingdom and North America. He preached against “falsely placed religion,” or the religion of good works—that religion which emphasized going to church, doing hurt to no one, being constant in the duties of the closet, and giving

⁴⁸Zabriskie, 54-55.

⁴⁹Ibid, 122.

⁵⁰Richard Tighe, *A Short Account of the life and Writings of the Late Rev. William Law, A.M.* (London: J.Hatchard, 1813), 22-29.

occasional alms to the poor.⁵¹

⁵¹Frank Lambert, "The Great Awakening as Artifact: George Whitefield and the Construction of Intercolonial Revival, 1739-1745." *Church History* 60 (1990): 228.

At the heart of Whitefield's preaching was the call for conversion. Whitefield called on men and women to "repent and therefore be converted, that your sins may be blotted out ... [and] see that you receive the Holy Ghost before you go hence."⁵² Whitefield said that true Christianity meant a deeply spiritual new birth, and this could only be given in the believer's Baptism of the heart. Moreover, the individual and not the Church possessed the means of confirming salvation. The signs of which could be seen plainly. He claimed that there were some five marks of the real new birth: a spirit of prayer and supplication, not committing sin, conquest over the world's temptations, loving one another, and loving enemies.⁵³ Whitefield positioned himself as the heir to the Anglican Reformers whose theology he felt was being undermined and betrayed by the Latitudinarian hierarchy in the Church.⁵⁴ Whitefield's kind of emphasis on the new birth was reminiscent of the earliest Puritans who settled New England in the early seventeenth century.⁵⁵

By his pioneering use of advance publicity materials, the printing press, and huge revival meetings, Whitefield's influence throughout Britain and especially the North American colonies was tremendous. He managed to create "a common language of the new birth that evangelicals employed everywhere to distinguish themselves from those

⁵²Ibid, 227.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid, 230-233.

⁵⁵Ibid, 226.

who had not undergone a spiritual conversion.”⁵⁶ As such, with his definition of the new birth as personal, individual and conversion-based, Whitefield restored to the American and British landscape a reinvigorated neo-Puritan understanding of the new birth.

Daniel Waterland on Baptism

While Whitefield and the Great Awakening were revitalizing the Church and touching the souls of tens of thousands within it, another consequence was the increasing difficulty over the language of Baptismal regeneration. To address this confusion, a theory was enunciated most effectively by Daniel Waterland in the 1730's. He wrote that the Prayer Book language of Baptismal regeneration was never intended to describe a spiritual 'conversion' in the Evangelical sense of the new birth. He proposed that 'regeneration' was the ancient word which the Church had traditionally applied the act of sacramental Baptism itself. He further maintained that while the sacramental act of 'regeneration' was a necessary and significant step toward salvation, the action of the Holy Spirit on the inner life of the Baptized was the process of 'renovation.' And it was this 'renovation' which approximated the spiritual new birth and inner moral change that the Evangelicals were really talking about. Waterland's theory offered a way out of any objection to the language of the Prayer book by asserting that the continual conversion of the Holy Spirit is the work which is done after Baptismal regeneration brings an infant into the Church.

Waterland defined the regeneration of sacramental Baptism as as such:

⁵⁶Ibid, 240.

Regeneration on the part of the grantor, God Almighty, means admission or adoption into sonship, or spiritual citizenship: and on the part of the grantee, viz. man, it means his birth, or entrance into that state of sonship or citizenship. It is God that adopts or regenerates, like as it is God that justifies. Man does not adopt, regenerate, or justify himself, whatever hand he may otherwise have (but still under grace) in preparing or qualifying himself for it. God makes the grant, and it is entirely his act: man receives only, and is acted upon; though sometimes active in qualifying himself, as in the case of adults, and sometimes entirely passive, as in the case of infants. The thing granted and received is a change from the state natural into the state spiritual; a translation from the curse of Adam into the grace of Christ. This change, translation or adoption carries in it many Christian blessings and privileges, but all reducible to two, viz. remission of sins, (absolute or conditional,) and a covenant-claim, for the time being, to eternal happiness. Those blessings may all be forfeited, or finally lost, if a person revolts from God...; and then such person is no longer in a regenerate state, or a state of sonship, with respect to any saving effects: but still God's original grant of adoption or sonship in Baptism stands in full force, to take place as often as any such revolter shall return, and not otherwise: and if he desires to be as before, he will not want to be regenerated again, but renewed, or reformed. Regeneration complete stands in two things, which are, as it were, its two integral parts; the grant made over to the person, and the reception of that grant. The grant once made continues always the same; but the reception may vary, because it depends upon the condition of the recipient.⁵⁷

⁵⁷Waterland, Daniel. *Regeneration Stated and Explained According to Scripture and Antiquity in a Discourse on Titus iii.4,5,6*. A New Edition (London: F.C. and J. Rivington, 1800), 11-13.

Waterland then goes on to elaborate how it is that the salvational effect of the Holy Spirit takes part in the life of the Baptized person. He explains renovation as a renewal of heart or mind.⁵⁸ While regeneration is of course a renewal of the larger state of the human person, renovation is a more particular kind of renewal, “namely, of the inward frame or disposition of the man.” He allows that regeneration may in fact be offered a person where “renovation has no place at all, for the time being.” Implying that the two are part of the same thing, which is the life of the baptized, but are not necessarily coincident in the sacramental action of regeneration itself. He provides however that “renovation may be, and should be, with respect to adults, before, and in, and after Baptism.” “Preventing grace must go before, to work in the man faith and repentance; which are qualifications previous to Baptism, and necessary to render it salutary.” He explains that for the adult baptized, “those first addresses, or influential visits of the Holy Spirit, turning and preparing the heart of man, are the preparative renewings, the first and lowest degrees of renovation” which are afterwards fixed in the “dwelling abode” of the human heart such that “renewing grows and improves through the whole course of the spiritual life.” All of which leads to his interpretation of the scriptures that Christians need not be repeatedly regenerated (as they are already regenerated the one time) but to be renewed—“be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind,” and “be renewed in the Spirit of your mind,” and “renewed day by day.”⁵⁹

It is not too hard to see why the Waterland definition of Baptismal regeneration allowed for détente with Evangelicals—it was quite similar to the covenant theology of Baptism espoused by the Puritans and Baxter, and then by Whitefield and his successors. Indeed, one of the great Episcopal Evangelicals of the nineteenth century, Bishop Meade of Virginia, would teach a view of Baptism that either Baxter or Waterland could have supported.⁶⁰

⁵⁸This whole paragraph is a paraphrase of the material from the aforementioned text, pp. 13-16.

⁵⁹Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:23, and 2 Corinthians 4:16.

⁶⁰See William Meade, *Companion to the Font and the Pulpit*, (Washington: J. and G.S. Gideon, 1846).

The Proposed American Prayer Book

The first official revision of the Prayer Book to take place since 1661 was the 1785 effort in America which produced the so-called 'Proposed Book.' The Proposed Book was produced by an abbreviated representation of the Anglican Church in the newly liberated America. The seven former colonies to the south of New England met in Philadelphia in 1785 in convention, and issued a draft of a Prayer Book. Most interestingly, the resulting book was quite similar to the proposed revision of 1689, which had been kept under lock and key for over a century. The preface to the Proposed Book outlined the principles for its revision, and made mention to the common cause taken with the quashed revision of a century before. Marion Hatchett has shown in his work on the American Prayer Book, that the Proposed Book was heavily indebted to the 1689 attempt, and likewise to the 1661 *Exceptions* of the Presbyterians at Savoy. This was in large part owing, says Hatchett, to the attempts which many American churchmen had made to finally "excise from the Prayer Book certain elements to which exception had been taken since the early days of Puritanism."⁶¹

Notably, the Proposed Book made some very obvious changes in the language of Baptismal regeneration. In the 1662 text, as we saw at the Savoy Conference, the prayer of thanksgiving for the newly baptized read as follows:

We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this Infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own Child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy Holy Church.⁶²

But in the Proposed Book that same prayer read as follows:

We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to receive this Infant as thine own Child by Baptism, and to incorporate him into thy holy Church.⁶³

⁶¹Hatchett, 5.

⁶²Marshall, 260-261.

⁶³Ibid, 260-261.

In the 1662 Prayer Book the Confirmation Rite had said:

Almighty and everliving God, who hast vouchsafed to regenerate these thy servants by Water and the Holy Ghost, and hast given unto them forgiveness of all their sins; Strengthen them, we beseech thee, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, and daily increase in them thy manifold gifts of grace: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the spirit of knowledge and true godliness; and fill them O Lord, with the spirit of thy holy fear, now and forever.⁶⁴

But in the Proposed Book, the rite was written as such:

Almighty and everliving God, who hast vouchsafed to receive these thy Servants into they Church by Baptism, and hast given them grace now in their own Persons to confess the true Faith, wherein they were to be instructed according to the promise then made for them; strengthen them [*rest is same*] ...⁶⁵

The changes in Baptismal language once sought by the heirs to the Puritans were finally included into a revision of the Prayer Book for national usage. But this was not to last. The High Churchmen who remained after the American Revolution objected to many of the revisions in the Proposed Book. Although it must be said that most of their objections had little to do with the Baptismal language, one who did object however was the Rev. Thomas Claggett (later Bishop) of Maryland. Claggett wrote that his congregation did not approve of the new book. He wrote: “their objections are ... that our new Reformers have altered too much, & have Presbyterianized in many instances, particularly they have virtually denied ye Doctrine of Regeneration in Baptism ...”⁶⁶ Another influential critic of the Proposed Book was Bishop Seabury of Connecticut. He wrote on June 29, 1786 to William White that by “making no mention of Regeneration in

⁶⁴Ibid, 432-433.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Blunt, 3.

Baptism, you appear to give up [the point], and open the door to error and delusion.”⁶⁷

⁶⁷Hatchett, 105.

The Proposed Book only lasted until the General Convention of 1789—which included all of the dioceses of the former colonies, and importantly a far greater representation of clergy and even bishops. That convention undid most of the revisions in the Proposed Book pertaining to Baptismal language. However, Hatchett has observed that while the language of regeneration was restored in 1789, the American Prayer Book would still be indebted to the Proposed Book in that it did not preserve the ancient rubric which had so bothered Baxter, et. al, which asserted that children baptized are “undoubtedly saved.”⁶⁸ Furthermore, Hatchett explains that while the Proposed Book did stand, and while the English bishops objected to it on various grounds, they never objected to its Reformed Baptismal language, and they never made the revision of the book in any way a condition for their consecration of American bishops.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, the language of Baptismal regeneration would remain in the Prayer Book.

The Decades Before the Tracts

At the turn of the nineteenth century, after the period of Revolution and strife was ended, and Anglicans could return to matters less martial, there began to arise increased controversy over the subject of Baptismal regeneration. The emphasis on the spiritual new birth as distinct from the sacramental rite of Baptism had reasserted itself as one of the dominant theological tenets of the American religious landscape—in New England, the Middle Atlantic and the South. Both in the cities and on the frontier, and the language of the Prayer Book continued to offend these sensibilities. Accordingly, we begin to see a flurry of articles and republications of century-old treatises and commentaries on the old Baptismal debates, largely as the result of High Church scholars and bishops answering the concerns of various churchmen over the matter of the Baptismal language of regeneration. In the letters of Bishop Hobart—the representative figure of American High Churchmanship before the Tracts—we encounter the following concern of a parochial clergyman over this issue:

⁶⁸Ibid, 124.

⁶⁹Ibid, 2.

I trust the peculiar disadvantages of my situation, will apologize for calling your attention for a moment to an expression in our Baptismal service, the precise meaning of which, it is doubtful whether I correctly understand; at any rate it is one of the objections against which, as stated by dissenters, I have never been able satisfactorily to remove.⁷⁰

Bishop Hobart responded to this letter with the recommendation that the correspondent consult the numerous articles written on the subject of Baptismal regeneration in *The Churchman's Magazine*, between 1804 and 1810. Not surprisingly, we—who may still read them—encounter in these works the Waterland position repeated again and again.⁷¹

In one issue of *The Churchman's Magazine* we encounter the following editorial commentary on the history of the debate over the language of Baptismal regeneration:

The Church of England has often been greatly misrepresented on the subject of Baptismal regeneration. It appears from her language in the Baptismal offices and other parts of the service, that she considers every baptized person as regenerated. But she does not use this term in the sense in which it is applied by many ... to denote the inward change which is wrought in the soul by the operations of the Holy Ghost. This inward change in our spiritual character [the Church] styles renovation. On the authority of scripture and primitive writers she distinguishes between Baptismal regeneration and spiritual regeneration, or more properly, between regeneration and renovation. The former term ... applies to that change which by Baptism is wrought in us when we are translated from the world which is destitute of covenanted means of salvation, and in which we are “children of wrath,” into the church, ... and receive a title on certain conditions to all the blessings of redemption, and thus become

⁷⁰Joseph Prentice,—Letter to Bishop Hobart, April 3, 1810. *Archives of the General Convention, Volume VI, The Correspondence of John Henry Hobart, May, 1808 to February, 1811*, ed. by Arthur Lowndes, (New York: Privately Printed, 1912), 386.

⁷¹See, for example, *The Churchman's Magazine* (New York, NY) Vol. V, 1808, p. 125; Vol. VII, 1810, p.26; Vol. VIII, 1811, p.46; and *The Churchman's Magazine* (Hartford, CT) Vol. I, 1821, p. 47; Vol.II, 1822, p. 15.

‘children of grace.’ ... The Church of England applies the term renovation to that spiritual change which some ... denote by the term Regeneration.⁷²

This is nothing if not a restatement of the Waterland definition of Baptismal regeneration.

The English High Church bishop Samuel Bradford, in that same issue of the magazine, enumerates the ways in which Baptism is a mean of salvation in four basic points:

1. It is a solemn rite of admission into his church. Whereby the Church is like the saving Ark.
2. It is a sign of the cleansing of our souls from the pollution of sin, and the renewing of them after the image of God by the divine spirit.
3. It is a seal of the covenant between God and humanity in Jesus Christ. Like circumcision, Baptism is the seal of the new covenant wrought between humanity and God by Christ.

⁷²*The Churchman's Magazine* (New York, NY) Vol. V, 1808, p.124.

4. It is the means of obtaining the blessings it represents when used rightly. Baptism and the Gift of the Spirit are conjoined because Christ gave the Spirit to the Church.⁷³

Bradford's review of Waterland answers the doubts of some as to the regeneration given in sacramental Baptism with the following explanation:

those who are regularly baptized are incorporated into the visible Church of Christ, and thereby, on certain conditions, entitled to the pardon of their sins, and received into the number of the children of God through Jesus Christ; and as they are dedicated to the Holy Ghost together with the Father and the Son, so they have a right to expect and depend upon his gracious influences, so long as they do not willfully violate their Baptismal covenant. They are thus born again, or regenerated, into a new state, entered upon new relations, obliged to live new lives. ... This is Baptismal regeneration; and it will be attended also with the renewing of the Holy Ghost, where there is no obstruction to his sacred influences.⁷⁴

We see in Samuel Bradford's writing a keen awareness of the debate's extreme positions, both on the far Reform side and the far Catholic side. Bradford offers a critique of both the extreme Calvinist and strict formalist views of Baptism, asserting that it is necessary to be careful neither to slight nor neglect the external institutions of religion, nor to depend upon our compliance with them, unless we at the same time answer their end and design. He explains that:

The institutions of Christ do not work like charms; but being appointed to be used by reasonable creatures, there is a disposition of mind in the person using them, necessary to the rendering of them effectual. ... Some of an enthusiastic temper are ready to undervalue or neglect all the external ordinances of religion ... [which owing to their divine institution] is an act of rebellion against the divine Being who instituted them... on the other hand, there are great numbers of professing Christians who satisfy themselves with a superficial and cold compliance with the external institutions of Christianity, whilst they are devoid of all that is truly spiritual and internal... they are baptised in the name of Christ, ... but they

⁷³Ibid, 129.

⁷⁴Ibid, 132.

are not renewed in the spirit of their mind...⁷⁵

Waterland Loses Ground to Higher Sacramentalism

The Waterland compromise position, which is so Catholic and yet so amenable also to the Puritan position of Baxter and even Whitefield, began to come undone by the assertions of some in the High Church party. In 1815, a sermon by the English cleric Richard Mant was widely distributed by the S.P.C.K. which created an enormous uproar over the issue. Mant enunciated a higher view of the sacramental regeneration of Baptism—asserting moreso than Waterland ever did that it was the instrumental means of grace, and the only

⁷⁵Ibid, 283.

ordinary means appointed by God for the sanctifying and cleansing of those for whom Christ gave himself to bring them to salvation ... and though the children shall not be damned for want of Baptism, yet I doubt whether the parents may not, for their neglect and contempt of it.⁷⁶

In a subsequent commentary on the Prayer Book, which would become a standard work itself, Mant included a charge of Pelagianism to any who disagreed with the doctrine of Baptismal regeneration which he enunciated.⁷⁷ Needless, to say, the Calvinist Evangelicals in the Church were outraged at Mant's views. One of these, Thomas Scott, the staunch Calvinist commentator to whom Newman 'almost owed his soul,' would lead a campaign to stem Mant's teaching.⁷⁸ The debate was not settled until Christopher Bethell's work, *A General View of the Doctrine of Regeneration in Baptism*, first published in 1822, reasserted the old Waterland position and quelled the fire.

The General Convention Proposal of 1826

Interestingly, in 1826 at the General Convention, John Henry Hobart himself

⁷⁶Richard Mant,—Sermon XXV, Necessity and Benefits of Baptism, *Sermons for Parochial and Domestic Use*, (Oxford: J. Parker, 1813), 255.

⁷⁷Richard Mant, *The Book of Common Prayer ...*, (Oxford: J.Parker and F.C. and J. Rivington, 1820), 403.

⁷⁸*Correspondence of John Henry Newman with John Keble and others ... 1839-1845*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1917), 111.

proposed the following amendment to the Prayer Book to further the cause of settlement over the debate about the language of regeneration. The proposal, which passed unanimously in the House of Bishops, reads as follows:

And to correct the injurious misapprehension, as to the meaning of certain terms, in the first collect in the office of Confirmation, the Bishops *unanimously* propose the following resolution: *Resolved*, that after the first collect in the office of Confirmation, the following be inserted, to be used at the discretion of the Bishop, instead of the first collect: Almighty and everliving God, who hast vouchsafed in Baptism to regenerate these thy servants by water and the Holy Ghost, *thus giving them a title to all the blessings of thy covenant of mercy in thy son Jesus Christ, and now dost graciously confirm unto them, ratifying the promises then made, all their holy privileges; grant unto them, ... [rest is same].*⁷⁹

Bishop Hobart initiated this amendment not to undo the doctrine of regeneration but to clarify any misinterpretation of what the Prayer Book language of regeneration was actually teaching. Moreover, the proposed amendment was not a revision as such, but an alternative prayer only. Reasonably, this High Church heir to the Laudians' Catholicity was not the heir to their intolerance and anti-Puritan political stiffness. Hobart's impetus for the proposal is given in this quotation:

The expressions in the prayer are liable to be misunderstood, and create serious objections on the part of many, I have found, to using the ordinance. The object of the proposed prayer was not to relinquish the expression of regeneration, as applied to Baptism, but to guard against the misconstruction that would make this synonymous with renovation, sanctification, conversion, or any other term by which the renewing of the Holy Ghost might be denoted.⁸⁰

The early Evangelical leader, Bishop Alexander Viets Griswold likewise observed the situation in the new American Church in which the trouble over words was causing dissatisfaction with some clergy and laity for the Prayer Book's Baptismal language. His reasoned assessment was:

In the present state of religion, there is, we have observed, some confusion in the use of theological terms. Christians hear them, every one in his own language, and in the tongue wherein he was born. This makes it necessary for us frequently to make these explanations. An alteration in some few expressions in our Liturgy would make these explanations less necessary,

⁷⁹House of Bishops, *Journal of the General Convention - 1826*, The Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States, 77.

⁸⁰Meade, 78.

and would remove one great obstacle to the success of our labors. But till such alteration, by the permission of God and the wisdom of his Church, shall be made, let us be careful to rightly understand her language, and to embrace her sound scriptural doctrine.⁸¹

Yet, as had already happened in 1789, 1689, and 1662, the proposed amendment to modify and clarify the language of Baptismal regeneration did not meet with sufficient conciliar approval—the 1829 General Convention did not second the change. The old language would still remain in effect, with no alternative allowed.

The Oxford Movement

The tenor of the dialogue between Evangelical and High Churchman was raised several octaves in the 1830's when the fruit of Romanticism began to blossom in the once 'high and dry' garden of Anglican High Churchmanship. The nature of High Churchmanship would take on a totally new character in the 1830's, and this new character, while in many ways similar to the Evangelical emphasis on interiority and spirit, would cause a new level of division between the descendants of the Puritans and Laudians over the sacrament of Baptism and the Prayer Book language of regeneration.

⁸¹Ibid, 79.

Chadwick argues that the crucial—if vague—distinction between the “old-fashioned high churchmen and the Oxford men” was the element of feeling, “the sense of awe and mystery in religion, the profundity of reverence.”⁸² The difference was not so much of doctrine but of atmosphere. As Newman wrote, “material phenomena are both the types and instruments of real things unseen.”⁸³ Newman’s fellow Romantics saw the finite world as a lense through which to glimpse the eternal. And it was this notion of reality, this “sacramentalism of nature and of the world,” which fueled their deepened sacramental vision.⁸⁴

⁸²Owen Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), 28.

⁸³John Carrick, *Evangelicals and the Oxford Movement*, (Bridgend: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1984), 13.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

Newman believed that the Church—through the sacraments—was the channel of God’s saving grace. Insofar as the Tractarians believed in sacramental justification they believed in the sacramental justification of Baptism, or Baptismal regeneration. And it was this which really antagonized the Evangelicals. As well known nineteenth-century Reformed writer Merle d’Aubigne wrote, “malice could not invent a stratagem more likely to impede conversion than this idea that all men baptized of water are regenerated.”⁸⁵

The Baptism of Puseyism

E. B. Pusey was the immediate cause of the revival of debate over Baptismal regeneration in the 1830's and 1840's. Whatever detente had been offered by Waterland’s successors in the previous decades, it was breached by Pusey’s Tracts 67-69 on Baptism. These tracts were no mean pamphlets. Rather, they were enormous pieces of work amounting to hundreds of pages each. Looking to patristic sources, diverse liturgies, and countless biblical passages, Pusey asserted that Baptismal regeneration was not only a normative doctrine, it was the only acceptable understanding of the sacrament of Baptism from the perspective of scripture and tradition. He said:

Baptismal regeneration, as connected with the Incarnation of our Blessed Lord, gives a depth to our Christian existence, an actualness to our union with Christ, a reality to our sonship to God, an interest in the presence of our Lord’s glorified Body at God’s right hand, a joyousness amid the subduing of the flesh, an overwhelmingness to the dignity conferred on human nature, a solemnity to the communion of saints, who are the fulness of Him who filleth all in all, a substantiality to the indwelling of Christ, that to those who retain this truth, the school which abandoned it must needs appear to have sold its birthright.⁸⁶

⁸⁵Ibid, 23.

⁸⁶Edward Bouverie Pusey, *Tract 67— Tracts for the Times*, Vol. II (New York: Charles Henry, 1840), 16.

Quoting from Galatians 4:7, Pusey would go on to explain that “one may then define Regeneration to be ‘that act whereby God takes us out of our relation to Adam, and makes us actual members of His Son, and so His sons, as being members of His Ever-blessed Son, and if sons, then heirs of God through Christ.’”⁸⁷ Quoting from Colossians 2:12, Pusey explained that sacramental Baptism “is our new birth, an actual birth of God, of water, and the Spirit, as we were actually born of our natural parents; herein then also are we justified, or both accounted and made righteous, since we are made members of Him who is alone righteous.”⁸⁸ Pusey explains that the ancient Church teaching is that by the sacrament of ritual Baptism:

we be engrafted into Christ, and thereby receive a principle of life, afterwards to be developed and enlarged by the fuller influxes of His grace; so that neither is Baptism looked upon as an infusion of Grace distinct from the incorporation into Christ, nor is that incorporation conceived of as separate from its attendant blessings.⁸⁹

But, Owen Chadwick writes that Pusey was sufficiently ambiguous in his definition of regeneration that his tracts on Baptism had little value for the successive debate. Indeed, he only clouded the issue, “for amid all the texts and quotations about regeneration itself, he nowhere considered the meaning of the word regeneration itself, or defined carefully enough the sense in which he was using it, and thereby removed almost all permanent value from the volume.”⁹⁰ But, while it may be true that Pusey’s work on Baptism did not have much value for reconciling the divergent views on Baptismal regeneration, it clearly founded the subsequent liturgical efforts of the succeeding generation of Anglo-Catholic ritualist, and the increasingly Tridentine-sounding Baptismal doctrine of many Anglo-Catholics. The combination of Pusey’s mystical tone and the later defection to Rome of Newman and many others raised the Evangelical’s hackles—leading them to be convinced that the Oxford dons were advocating Romish Baptismal regeneration. As well, as the events of 1849 to 1873 would show, the differences over the doctrine of Baptismal regeneration were increasingly political, and deeply divisive.

⁸⁷Ibid, 24.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Chadwick, 38.

The Gorham Case

In 1849, Bishop Henry Phillpotts of Exeter refused to institute the Rev. George Cornelius Gorham, already resident in his diocese, to a new living at Brampford Speke near Exeter. Phillpotts was notorious for his anti-Evangelical tendency, and he did whatever he could to rid Evangelicals from his diocese. In 1844 the Bishop caused a tremendous row over his charge to the clergy that they wear the surplice without exception. That move had caused scores of walk-outs by parishioners, protests, and the mobbing of High Church clergy after services throughout the diocese. Phillpotts was compelled to rescind the order, but he refused licenses to Evangelical curates, withdrew licenses from proprietary chapels (where Evangelicals often found common cause among the proprietors) and proscribed preachers from the Evangelical society.⁹¹

Bishop Phillpotts subjected the Rev. Gorham to eleven days of examination, and some 149 questions on the doctrine of Baptism, before refusing to institute Gorham at Brampford Speke on a charge of heresy. Specifically, Phillpotts argued that Gorham did not support “the doctrine of Baptismal regeneration” as the Church of England required. Phillpotts based this charge on Gorham’s answers, which espoused the following three points:

1. Baptism is a sacrament generally necessary to salvation, but the regenerating grace of God is not absolutely tied to the ordinance; it may be granted before, after, as well as in Baptism.
2. In either sacrament right reception is as necessary as due administration, and where an infant receives worthily, this must be by the help of a ‘prevenient act of grace.’
3. In no case is regeneration in Baptism unconditional.⁹²

⁹¹G. R. Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England*, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908), 222.

⁹²Balleine, 224-225.

The case was brought to the Court of Arches, whereby the bishop had to give cause for his failure to institute Gorham. Pusey brought his stores of learning to the Bishop's aid, and undertook to coach the lawyers, which he did with such success, that in 1849 Sir Herbert Fust gave his decision in the Bishop's favor.⁹³ The victory was broadly claimed for the High Church party, and the case began to take on significance for Anglicans on both sides of the Atlantic. The comportment of Bishop Phillpotts and the Court of Arches decision were both criticized in the United States by (the great bishop) John Henry Hopkins of Vermont.

John Henry Hopkins on the Gorham Case

Hopkins, in his 1849 *Address to the Clergy ... in re the Gorham Case*, disagrees with the decision, and shows how Gorham's position—while different than Hopkins' own—was nonetheless in line with the Calvinist position of many of the Anglican reformers. Hopkins examines the roots of Calvinism in the earliest reformed Church of England. Hopkins makes the following six points:

1. Calvin's *Institutes* were established as a university text book at Oxford and Cambridge;
2. The Lambeth Articles under Whitgift "shew decisively the opinion then entertained by her dignitaries, that her Baptismal formularies were not only susceptible of, but ought to be subjected to, a thoroughly Calvinistic interpretation;
3. Hooker puts forth the Calvinistic system, modified, in *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*;
4. King James sent five of the most eminent theologians of the Kingdom to assist at the Synod of Dort;
5. Bishop Burnet's work on the 39 Articles⁹⁴ was the standard treatment;
6. That the Puritan party under Elizabeth made no objection to the term regeneration nor to any thing else in the Baptismal Service or the Catechism which belongs to the present question, and would have if they thought any but their own view was implied therein.⁹⁵

Hopkins goes on to criticize the action of Bishop Phillpotts and the decision of the Court not only for their historical errancy, but for the lack of breadth and toleration which

⁹³Ibid, 225.

⁹⁴Charles P. McIlvaine quotes from Burnet in his attack on the Tractarian definition of the sacraments in *Oxford Divinity Compared* (Philadelphia: Joseph Whetham & Son, 1841), 234-235.

⁹⁵John Henry Hopkins, "The case of the Rev. Mr. Gorham against the Bishop of Exeter, considered," *Address to the Clergy of the Diocese of Vermont— November, 1849* (Burlington: E. Smith & Co., 1849), 28-33.

they exhibited. Hopkins says:

The Church designed to leave a certain latitude to individual opinion on the deep and mysterious subjects connected with the doctrines of grace, which latitude is itself a Law of Toleration, ... and therefore I am compelled to dissent from the judgment of the eminent bishop of Exeter, and from that of the Court of Arches, because it virtually over-rules the system of the Church.⁹⁶

⁹⁶Ibid, 34.

Hopkins says that the decision of the Court of Arches is dangerous for the Church because it pretends to assert that the Church holds one sole doctrine as to the matter of Baptismal regeneration, instead of the true idea that the Church tolerates both interpretations and allows a full liberty of individual opinion on the whole class of questions to which the case belongs. Such a decision as this goes against our “notions and habits of ecclesiastical freedom.” He says the consequence of such a decision and its like “would set the Church in a flame which no human effort could extinguish. It would need a special interposition of Providence to keep the bishops and clergy from an open and formal separation. And the nature of the quarrel would be such, that if a separation took place, it must forever remain a disputed point which was the Church, and which was the Schismatic party.”⁹⁷

Hopkins claims that in all times the Church has allowed latitude in certain unessential matters of doctrine. He says, “To such inevitable controversies we should apply the good old maxim: ‘In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.’”⁹⁸ Hopkins allows that “for aught we can tell, [the Holy Spirit] may have a correspondent work of prevenient grace to perform, before life is imparted in the regeneration of Baptism.”⁹⁹

Hopkins proves himself to be a fair-minded judge on the question. Allowing that there must be room for latitude, he says that Gorham’s view is consistent and in line with the views of the Anglican reformers in this matter. He concludes his pastoral letter:

I consider these different views as matters, not of saving faith, but of theological speculation. And while I am far from being a Calvinist, and do not profess to sympathize with the school of Mr. Gorham, yet I have a high sense of the zeal and

⁹⁷Ibid, 34-36.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Ibid, 37.

usefulness of the class of ministers to which I suppose him to belong; and I should heartily despise myself if I could suffer my own choice in theological opinion to interfere with the defense of his rights, as a faithful representative of the doctrine held by our reformers.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

In 1850, Gorham took his case to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, who in turn invited the two Archbishops and the Bishop of London to assist them to hear the case. As well, the Evangelicals called upon the Rev. William Goode, Rector of All Hallows', London, to serve as the intellectual resource behind their case. In March of that year, the Privy Council ruled in favor of Gorham, declaring: "the doctrine held by Mr. Gorham is not contrary or repugnant to the declared doctrine of the Church of England."¹⁰¹ And Gorham was ordered to be instituted at Bramford Speke.

This final decision in the Gorham case was seen to be an enormous blow to the High Church cause. Indeed, whereas Newman's departure to Rome had caused some to abandon the Church with him, the Privy Council's decision caused many more to leave than did Newman. Cantankerous Bishop Phillpotts resorted to excommunicating anyone who held Gorham's view of Baptism and not his own, even the Archbishops! Phillpotts declared in 1850,

We, Henry, Bishop of Exeter, do solemnly protest and declare, that any Archbishop, who shall institute Charles Cornelius Gorham to the cure and government of souls, will thereby incur the Sin of supporting and favouring heretical doctrines, and we do hereby renounce and repudiate all communion with anyone, be he who he may, who shall so institute the said Charles Cornelius Gorham.¹⁰²

On the other hand, Evangelicals saw the decision as a huge victory. Bishop Charles McIlvaine commented on the case:

The cause of evangelical truth, in the Church of England and elsewhere, is deeply indebted to Mr. Gorham, not only for the manly firmness, ready learning, and great skill, united with the singular patience and unvaried Christian demeanor with which he sustained the protracted and exhausting onsets of the bishop (for it was a contest, more than an examination, on the part of the bishop).¹⁰³

¹⁰¹Balleine, 226.

¹⁰²Henry Philpotts, *A Letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury from the Bishop of Exeter* (New York: Stanford and Swords, 1850), 4.

¹⁰³Charles P. McIlvaine,—*Spiritual Regeneration with Reference to Present Times—A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Ohio* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1851), 30.

Interestingly, one leading member of the Oxford Movement, J.B. Mozeley, was so impressed by the evidence brought forward by the Evangelicals that he attenuated his original position on Baptismal regeneration, and wrote the definitive text on the question, in his 1862 work, *Review of the Baptismal Controversy*.¹⁰⁴

Evangelical Calls for Revision in the 1860's

In the wake of the Gorham case the controversy ought to have died down. But, a new generation of leaders was coming up through the ranks of both parties within the church. And these persons were not to see a church free of great controversy and division between parties. More notably, the United States and the Episcopal Church was about to be ripped in two by more than four years of civil war.

One of the Evangelical leaders to arise after the Civil War was George David Cummins. Cummins reportedly met with an aging Bishop Meade in 1856 who told him:

¹⁰⁴Balleine, 227.

The signs of the times are such as to fill my heart with the deepest anxiety. Matters cannot remain as they are; those holding the doctrines of Baptismal regeneration, of a priesthood, and kindred errors, will go on to greater extremes, and they will take a deeper hold on the clergy and laity of our beloved Church. I shall not live to see it, but a time will come when some one must breast the current and stand up boldly in defence of the truth. On you, and those like-minded, will devolve this duty. I charge you to stand firm, and I look to such as you to bear the standard of God's truth bravely and faithfully ...¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵Annie Darling Price, *A History of the Formation and Growth of the Reformed Episcopal Church, 1873-1902* (Philadelphia: Armstrong, 1902), 108.

While Cummins' hagiographers would seek to cast him in the light of anointed successor to Meade or McIlvaine, it is not a stretch to put him in the line of descent from Baxter and Whitefield. His preaching message, like those of the eighteenth-century Evangelicals, was salvation by personal relationship with Christ. His theology was not particularly erudite or scholarly, but rather it was the moderate Calvinism popular among Middle Atlantic Protestants of the middle nineteenth-century Episcopal Church—"he was a New England Calvinist not a Princeton Calvinist."¹⁰⁶ At the same time, he was very influenced by the work of William Augustus Muhlenberg, and had high hopes for the Anglican synthesis of Protestantism with Catholic ecclesiology.¹⁰⁷ Cummins was seen as a moderate churchman, and was even a reconciler at the 1865 General Convention, and throughout his years as an Evangelical adrift in the High Church Diocese of Maryland.¹⁰⁸ However, in the years after the Civil War, Cummins began to become increasingly dissatisfied with the way the Church was going—theologically, liturgically or missiologically.

Cheney Case

One of Cummins' allies in the Evangelical party of the Episcopal Church, Charles E. Cheney, was a successful rector at a large church in Chicago. Cheney had long shared misgivings about the language of Baptismal regeneration as written in the Prayer Book, and at one point Cheney began to omit the clause, "This child is regenerate."¹⁰⁹ When this practice was discovered by his bishop, the Rt. Rev. Henry John Whitehouse, Cheney found himself in trouble. Whitehouse ordered Cheney to comply with the Prayer Book, and Cheney refused. A long ecclesiastical trial ensued, a decision was handed down, and Cheney again refused to do what the bishop required. Finally, by 1871, after the case had long been in the news, Cheney was deposed for contumacy. The case was seen by Evangelicals to be an example of High Church bishops' prelatial attitude towards them, and reaffirmed many Evangelicals' fears that they were losing ground to increasingly Romeward tendencies in the Episcopal Church.

¹⁰⁶Allen C. Guelzo, *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom: The Irony of the Reformed Episcopalians*, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 98-99.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Ibid, 99-100.

¹⁰⁹Price, 45.

The “Nine” and Evangelical Calls for Revision

By the late 1860's the rise of Ritualism further antagonized Evangelicals, Latitudinarians, and even those surviving old school High Churchmen. The clamor which had been raised over the Oxford Tracts in the 1840's, was again being raised against the ritualistic 'second wave' of the Catholic Revival, which was taking off throughout the diocese of New York and in much of the country. The 1868 General Convention witnessed an Evangelical attempt to proscribe the use of ritualistic liturgical innovations in the Episcopal Church. When this effort to check increased liturgical innovation—use of certain vestments, church ornaments, etc.—was rejected, Anglo-Catholics rejoiced in victory.

In October of 1869, nine bishops of the Episcopal Church wrote a letter in which they proposed a measure to stem mounting tensions over the language of Baptismal regeneration in the Prayer Book. The letter read as follows:

To Our Brethren:

In consequence of very serious indications of a state of mind among many of the Clergy and Laity of our Church—having regard to alleged difficulties in the Prayer-Book, and contemplating action most earnestly to be deprecated—some of the Bishops requested a meeting, in New York, of several Clergymen and Laymen from various parts of the country, whose knowledge of the facts and whose opinions as to needed measures would be valuable. The object was to get such information and comparison of views as might assist the Bishops in forming a right judgment of their duty to God, and to the Church, and to their brethren in the state of mind alluded to.

It became painfully evident that many in our Church are so burdened and distressed in the use of certain expressions in our Formularies, that the inquiry is obligatory as to what ought to be done, in brotherly kindness and charity, for their relief.

The result is the conviction that, if alternate phrases or some equivalent modification in the Office for the Ministration of Baptism of Infants were allowed, the pressing necessity would be met, and a measure of relief would be afforded of great importance to the peace and unity of the Church.

We have always been fully persuaded that our Formularies of faith and worship, in their just interpretation, embody the truth of Christ, are warranted by the teaching of Holy Scripture, and are a faithful following of the doctrines professed and defended by our Anglican Reformers.

The difficulties referred to, we ascribe in great measure to the bold

innovations in doctrine and usage, which at the present time so unhappily agitate our communion, and expose the Protestant and Scriptural character of our Church to distrust and reproach.

The conscientious scruples of men of godly conversation and usefulness deserve the most respectful and affectionate consideration of their brethren. We hope they will be so regarded by the next General Convention. ...

C.P. McIlvaine
Alfred Lee
John Johns
John Payne
Henry W. Lee
G.T. Bedell
Wm. Bacon Stevens
Tho. H. Vail
Ozi W. Whittaker

Bishop Horatio Potter's Response to the "Nine"

Bishop Horatio Potter of New York read this letter with "astonishment and grief."¹¹⁰ Within forty-eight hours, Potter issued a response which he styled a *Pastoral Letter*. In his *Pastoral*, we see how Potter argues that the very notion of revising the Prayer Book "to suit themselves" is an "absolute impossibility."¹¹¹ He claims that their desire to insert alternative phrases into the Prayer Book "for the relief of tender consciences" is totally out of line with the history of their own party—citing the Prayer Book loyalty of "the Simeons, the Venns, the Cecils ... William Wilberforce ... Bishops White, Moore ... and Griswold" who were "men of Evangelical spirit all."¹¹² Potter begs

¹¹⁰*Papers on the Proposition of the "Nine Bishops,"* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1871), 19.

¹¹¹*Ibid*, 20.

¹¹²*Ibid*.

the “Nine” to recall the “higher type of intellect and piety” of Hooker, Herbert, Ken, Bull, Pearson, Hall, Taylor and Andrews and be reminded of their “intensest love and admiration for the devotions and offices of the Prayer Book in all its parts.”¹¹³ Bishop Potter then asks the rhetorical question, “what new wisdom is it which has just come into the world to discover for the first time that the Prayer book [sic] has something in it which tender consciences cannot bear!”¹¹⁴

¹¹³Ibid, 21.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

Potter goes on to deplore the inevitable “scenes of strife and bitterness” which the alternate phrases in the Baptismal Office might give rise to.¹¹⁵ He refers to the ‘mistake’ of the 1789 framers of the American Prayer Book when they provided an alternate form in the ordinal.¹¹⁶ Moreover, Potter fears that once the Prayer Book is opened for revision, such revision might get out of control—going far beyond the “Nine’s” request for only a modest amendment and alternative phrasing.

Potter then argues that the will of the 1868 General Convention showed that if any revision were to be undertaken it would not be to further “dilute” or “debase” the Catholic heritage of the Prayer Book, but to “reclaim what it has lost.” Potter says that if any change were to be sought, it should probably include: the deletion of the alternate form in the ordination of priests; restore parts of the office for the Visitation of the Sick; restore the Athanasian Creed, the Magnificat and the Nunc dimittis; delete the rubrical permission to omit the sign of the Cross after Baptism; and in short, it would make the Prayer Book “more primitive and catholic—not less so.”¹¹⁷

The Evangelical Response to Potter

Potter’s *Pastoral Letter* was ill-received by the Evangelicals who had written the proposal seeking alternative phrases in the Baptismal language. Bishop Alfred Lee responded with a lengthy rebuttal, in which he makes special criticism of the peremptory and curt tone of Potter’s letter. Lee writes, “is there aught in the position of the Bishop of New York which demands and justifies the manner and tone of this remarkable paper? Have we a new Rome on this side of the Atlantic, whose Episcopal head is the judge of controversies?”¹¹⁸ Lee continues, “Great as our regard for the many eminent clergymen

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Ibid, 37. The alternative prayer which rankled Potter deleted the traditional reference to John 20:22-23 about binding and loosing sins to appease Evangelical consciences. (See Parsons & Jones on this.) The issue seems to have confused some liturgical scholars, notably Paul V. Marshall, whose book *Prayer Book Parallels* asserts that the alternative ordination prayer originated with the 1662 book—which is simply not true. (See Mant, 1820.)

¹¹⁷Ibid, 39-40.

¹¹⁸Ibid,—Lee Letter, 4.

and laymen of the Diocese of New York, and ... its diocesan, we are not yet prepared to recognize any metropolitan see or patriarchate...[and, therefore,] the question is not finally settled for us, we trust not for the Church, by the *ipse dixit* of our respected brother."¹¹⁹ Lee goes on to demolish Potter's argument that the proposal for alternatives to the language of Baptismal regeneration is a novel one.

C.W. Andrews

¹¹⁹Ibid.

One of the Evangelical partisans in the mid-nineteenth-century row over the Prayer Book language of Baptismal regeneration was Professor Charles Wesley Andrews of Virginia Theological Seminary. Andrews had been writing on the questions of doctrine and church order which began to be controverted in the wake of the Oxford Tracts since the forties. An ally of McIlvaine, Andrews was a convert to the Episcopal Church, but maintained the doctrine of his childhood orthodox New England Congregationalism, and was therefore a great admirer of the Reformation and its leaders, in England and on the Continent.¹²⁰ Andrews—like his allies—was disgusted by the way Horatio Potter addressed the alternative language proposal of the "Nine." Among his concerns were not only Potter's prelatical tone, but Potter's historical blindness as to the question of Prayer Book revision.

In his response to the *Pastoral Letter*, Andrews denies Potter's argument that the movement toward revision of the language in the Baptismal Office was itself an innovation of the Evangelicals. He points out the long history of debate over the language of Baptismal regeneration. He also explains how much the Prayer Book always reflected Reformed thinking, and was not to be seen as advocating any Tridentine doctrines, as Newman supposedly asserted in Tract 90.¹²¹ Andrews writes:

The difficulty about this service of over two hundred years' standing (instead of being a novelty, as [Potter pretends],) has been growing more and more serious by the progress of the Romish party. They have come boldly to announce that a moral change—a change of heart, renovation of nature—is effected by Baptism: and taking the offensive, charge those who teach otherwise with teaching contrary to the Prayer book, and violating conscience by using 'explained-away services.' ...

the doctrinal descendants of the martyred Reformers of this Church [hold] ... that this advanced doctrine of Baptismal regeneration is alike contrary to the Bible, to the Baptismal office, to the intention of its authors, ... contrary to all human experience and exceedingly perilous to the souls of

¹²⁰Cornelius Walker, *Memoir of Rev. C.W. Andrews, D.D.*, (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1877), 194.

men.

History has proved that from the structures of this office there is in it a certain *liability* to this perversion, constituting a reasonable, nay, an imperative ground for its revision, or at least an alternative form of expression.¹²²

Andrews goes on to assert the hypocrisy apparent in Potter's letter which criticizes the Evangelicals' attempts to revise the Prayer Book as disloyal while stipulating that "primitive and catholic" revisions would be good. Andrews writes:

[Potter himself] contemplates changes—some frivolous, the remainder in the Romeward direction, under the fallacious title of "Primitive and Catholic"—which would be a revision sure enough. ... Such revision as he contemplates, though not at present, would of course result in a schism, a calamity usually charged upon minorities, but almost always brought on by the intolerance, oppressive legislation and discipline of the majority. The Reformed Church of England started in a schism so produced. It was so at the Savoy Conference. Read the arrogant replies of the Bishops of Charles II. to men every way their superiors, ending in the act of uniformity, which drove out a greater number of the Church's best men than our whole American ministry now contains. They asked for bread and were given a stone. The adversaries of the Church have always rejoiced in that secession. Its friends have long since learned to lament it: for the loss has never been repaired or is likely to be. The same folly was re-enacted at the Wesleyan revival of the last century, now almost universally condemned, and *mutatis mutandis*, it is likely enough to be repeated in our own day by the very parites who say that had they lived in the days of their fathers, they would not have been partakers of their deeds. All see now plainly enough the incurable result of the intolerant and contemptous refusal of reasonable requests in those two cases. The Church of England, from having been the Church of the nation, by those two acts, become the Church of the minority.¹²³

1871 General Convention Proposal

Following the lead of the "Nine"—which had grown to include two more bishops—a proposal was made at the 1871 General Convention which sought to

¹²²Ibid, 8-9.

¹²³*Papers on the Proposition of the Nine Bishops*,—Andrews Preface,—12.

ameliorate the rising clamor over the meaning of the words of Baptismal regeneration in the Prayer Book. The proposal was passed. A *Declaration* was made for the purpose of addressing a “matter deemed to be of much gravity and of great present interest to both Houses of the General Convention.” The *Declaration* was as such:

We, the subscribers, Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, being asked, in order to the quieting of the consciences of sundry members of the said Church, to declare our conviction as to the meaning of the word “regenerate” in the Offices for the Ministration of Baptism of Infants, do declare that in our opinion the word “regenerate” is not there so used as to determine that a moral change in the subject of Baptism is wrought in the Sacrament.¹²⁴

The *Declaration* was signed by forty-eight bishops, including all of the “Nine” who brought forth the proposal and, amazingly, Bishops Horatio Potter and Henry J. Whitehouse—the two bishops which Evangelicals found to be the most hostile to their cause! The language of Baptismal regeneration would remain in the Prayer Book, and no serious revision would be undertaken for another century, but at last a definition of what the language *did not mean* was finally articulated in a conciliar statement.

Then Why the Schism of the Reformed Episcopal Church?

Bishop George David Cummins and the deposed priest Charles E. Cheney were among the founders of the Reformed Episcopal Church, which officially formed on December 2, 1873. The primary cause for the split was their irreconcilable fear that the Prayer Book of the Protestant Episcopal Church was hopelessly un-Reformed and likely to remain that way. Cummins—who signed the 1871 General Convention Declaration—left that Convention ever more certain that the Evangelical desire of comprehensive revision would never come to be.¹²⁵

¹²⁴House of Bishops, *Journal of the General Convention - 1871*, The Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States, 283.

¹²⁵Price, 46.

How did Cummins become so convinced of the ‘Romish’ errancy of the Book of Common Prayer—much more so than his forefathers Richard Baxter, Whitefield, Meade or McIlvaine had *ever* been? After all, Cummins had long held that the Oxford Movement and Ritualism were outsider movements, working to get into the Episcopal Church. After all, the onetime reconciler and disciple of Muhlenberg had long loved the Prayer Book, and supported it as it was even through the 1868 General Convention in New York City, when Evangelicals first got a great whiff of New York Ritualism at a Eucharist service at the Little Church Around the Corner.¹²⁶ Cummins read one tract too many. Cummins read Franklin Rising’s *Are There Romanizing Germs in the Prayer Book?* And his mind began to change. Cummins would later write:

The Prayer Book of the Protestant Episcopal Church was very precious to me, and I longed to see it become the heritage of all Protestant ChristendomThis was my position toward the Prayer Book up through to the year 1868. That year brought with it a thorough change in my viewsHow then, were mine eyes opened?...A copy of Mr. Rising's tract reached me by mail, and I well remember the repugnance which the very title awakened, and with which I began its perusal. That simple agent was the first instrument for awakening my mind ... to the facts of history, into the investigation of which I had shrunk from entering.¹²⁷

Rising argued in his pamphlet that the Tract 90 claims of Newman were true. Taking the opposite tack of most Evangelicals, who argued that the Oxford Movement had misinterpreted the Prayer Book in a ‘Romish’ way, Rising claimed that the Prayer Book had indeed preserved seeds of Roman Catholic doctrine throughout its three centuries of existence. Rising’s point was that the Elizabethan Settlement had allowed certain points of doctrine which when allowed to germinate would lead to full-blown Romanism.¹²⁸

Though the Rising tract was controverted by both sides of the Evangelical - High Church divide, it managed to plant the seed in Cummins’ mind that the Prayer Book was in need of a complete revision. He would write in 1872:

I am more deeply convinced than ever that the root of all our evils lies in the sanction which our Prayer Book gives to the Sacerdotal system. Whether the Reformers and the compilers of our Prayer Book did, or did not, intend to uphold the system, there is enough in the language of our offices to give it countenance. I am, therefore, a most earnest advocate for

¹²⁶Ibid, 108.

¹²⁷Ibid, 109.

¹²⁸See Samuel Franklin Rising, *Are There Romanizing Germs in the Prayer Book?* (1868). This may be found in the St. Mark’s Library of the General Theological Seminary.

a thorough revision of the Prayer Book, to take from it all that can be perverted to the use and maintenance of this false Gospel. Baptismal regeneration, the real presence of our Lord in the elements, the Sacerdotal idea of the Ministry—these are the dangerous errors to be removed by a revision.¹²⁹

¹²⁹Price, 47.

And so, as Anne Darling Price would write in her 1902 hagiography of the Reformed Episcopal Church's misguided evangel, "with a Prayer Book never fully purged of the Romish errors and the various compromises of the days of Elizabeth, with an ever increased drift toward Ritualism and Saramentarianism" the Reformed Episcopal Church was founded.¹³⁰ And instead of revising the 1789 Liturgy, the new church adopted almost verbatim the Proposed Book of 1785, which Cummins' believed would provide a liturgical basis "broad enough to embrace all who hold 'the faith once delivered to the saints,' as that faith is maintained by the Reformed Churches of Christendom."¹³¹

Epilogue

In the latter part of this century, liturgical scholars have promulgated an understanding of initiation in which the sacrament of Baptism is *not* the first event of human salvation, but it is a crucial step in the spiritual work of grace by which a person becomes a Christian.¹³² And while the 1979 Prayer Book and the 1980 Alternative Service Book still retain the language of the new birth in their rites of Baptism, they do so in the normative context of Baptism for adults and older children.¹³³ In effect, the debate over Baptismal regeneration has been resolved by the maintenance of a high sacramental view of Baptism in conjunction with the understanding that it is not the first, final or only step in the process of Christian new birth.

The long controversy discussed in this thesis and the recent shift in doctrinal emphasis in the Prayer Book raises to mind the old adage, *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*. On the one hand, the controversy over the language of Baptismal regeneration in the Prayer Book was nothing if not about how the "law of praying" was antagonistic to the "law of believing" for many in the Church. On the other hand, the current shift toward a norm of adult baptism, in conjunction with the high sacramental understanding of Baptism as the new birth, may also be seen as the result of the centuries of heated dialogue engendered by a largely continuous and uniform liturgy.

The lessons for the future of Prayer Book revision which derive from this long controversy are two-fold. First, some will always controvert with one another over their interpretations of liturgical language. Many of these will demand that the Prayer Book suit their "tender consciences" either by amendment, revision, or strict maintenance of the status quo. Such efforts may tend to promote an atmosphere of insiders and outsiders in

¹³⁰Ibid, 55.

¹³¹Guelzo, 143.

¹³²Paul J. Roberts,—Christian Initiation, in Kenneth Stevenson and Bryan Spinks, eds., *The Identity of Anglican Worship* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1991), 81.

¹³³The BCP says that by the water of Baptism, "we are reborn by the Holy Spirit," and raised "to the new life of grace." BCP, 307-308.) The ASB says that by the Holy Spirit in Baptism, the baptized are given "new birth, adopted ... and made members of" the Church. (ASB, 236.)

the Church, and the communion will suffer from division. Second, Anglicans of diverse theological understandings may continue to work toward a comprehensive Church identity through a shared liturgical life. The basis of this shared liturgical life will be a Prayer Book (as well as a corpus of hymns and other shared liturgical elements) which is primarily rooted in revelation, which has deep respect for the heritage of the saints (in whom Christ has lived incarnate), and which is open to the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit.