

# *A Regula Fidei*

*An Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*

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## **Abstract**

This is a general introduction to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England *via* a discussion of divine revelation, the *regula fidei* (rule of faith), and the use of creeds and confessions in general. I am deeply indebted to the work of William Henry Griffith-Thomas's *Principles of Theology* and the lectures of the Rt. Rev. Leonard Riches of Reformed Episcopal Seminary from his recorded lectures from around 1997–1998.

As is my custom, I cite as much as possible from easily available resources, so that the reader can follow up on the citations. Haste in preparation of this document has not allowed me to source check and make attributions as thoroughly as honesty and my custom require. No plagiarism is intended; if something sounds *really* intelligent and useful, it's likely that I got it from someone else!

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## 1 Revealed Truth

God's nature (his essential being) and character (his manner of conduct) are not like that of his creation. This *creature-creator distinction* is clearly revealed in Scripture.

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways,” declares the LORD.

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!  
For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?<sup>1</sup>

The most important instrument by which God reveals himself is in his own son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the living Word of God.<sup>2</sup> “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.”<sup>3</sup> Though this revelation of God was tangible,<sup>4</sup> it was also transient, ending with his ascension.

That did not mean that revelation ceased. In fact, the next most substantial revelation of God both preceded and succeeded the living Word of God. It is the document we call the Bible, Scripture, and the Word of God. While it is a subordinate means of revelation, it is in no way a deficient means. The living Word of God himself depended on it, responding to Satan's temptations with the words “it is written ...”<sup>5</sup> It continued after his departure through the mouths and pens of the apostles and some of their disciples. And though the canon (the various texts that make up the Bible) is closed, it's truths and applicability surmount cultural and historical boundaries.

## God unveils himself in a variety of ways

1. Humanity in the *imago dei*. “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all

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<sup>1</sup>Isaiah 55:8 and Romans 11:33–34.

<sup>2</sup>Revelation 19:13.

<sup>3</sup>Hebrews 1:3.

<sup>4</sup>1 John 1:1–3.

<sup>5</sup>Matthew 4:4–7.

the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”<sup>6</sup>

2. God uses history as a revelatory tool: Judaism’s and Christianity’s history with respect to the rest of the world. “
3. Creation, nature, and the human discovery thereof, “natural philosophy” (the sciences), theology, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”<sup>7</sup>

## Possibility of revelation assumes:

1. Supreme personal being who communicates
2. We, who are able to be communicated with, having a capacity to receive revelation, a function of the *imago Dei*, the “image of God” in us.
3. Christian revelation is the revelation of a Person to persons.<sup>8</sup> Facts about the activity of God yield doctrine. Revelation is what God does and says. The record is what men have written about what God does and says.<sup>9</sup>
4. Revelation, being in history, is akin to history—progressively growing in sophistication and clarity, under God’s hand in history and from his mouth.<sup>10</sup> Pre-historic actions ⇒ described in the OT, pointing to ⇒ fulfillment in the NT ⇒ with post-apostolic application throughout the rest of history. In other words, we rely on the authority of Scripture *and* the catholicity of the *regula fidei* (about which more is found on p. 5) for “safety” in our restatements of truth in helpful ways.

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<sup>6</sup>Genesis 1:26–27.

<sup>7</sup>Psalms 19:1.

<sup>8</sup>Griffith-Thomas, p. xviii, ¶4.

<sup>9</sup>Here I am assuming a healthy doctrine of inspiration, plenary inerrancy, not dictation or “ghost writing”, but Holy Spirit-driven human activity as described by Peter. “First of all . . . no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20–21).

<sup>10</sup>Consider G. Vos on the stages of prophecy, fact, and interpretation.

5. Revelation is life, it speaks about life given and life received. “The ‘chief end of Revelation’ is not philosophy, or doctrine, or enjoyment, or even morality. Christianity has these, but it is far more than them all. It is the religion of Redemption, including Salvation past, present, and future. The ‘chief end’ of God’s self-manifestation is the union of God and man, and in that union the fulfillment of all the Divine purposes for the world.”<sup>11</sup>

## **The Scriptures are a S.N.A.P.**

1. Sufficient: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises.”<sup>12</sup>
2. Necessary: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”<sup>13</sup>
3. Authoritative: Consider Jesus’ use of the Scriptures in responding to Satan.<sup>14</sup>
4. Perspicuous (able to be understood): “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”<sup>15</sup>

## **2 The *Regula Fidei*—Rule of Faith**

How can we know what is the essence of the Christian faith?

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<sup>11</sup>Griffith-Thomas, p. xx, ¶1.

<sup>12</sup>2 Peter 1:3–4.

<sup>13</sup>Matthew 5:17.

<sup>14</sup>Matthew 4:4–7.

<sup>15</sup>2 Timothy 3:16–17, see also 2 Peter 3:15–16.

## What is ‘Faith’?

1. Faith is the human response to divine revelation (Jesus reveals: Mat 11.27, Joh 1.18 & 14.6; we must respond: Heb 11.6, Mat 16.15), driven by the Spirit of God.
  - a) Faith has two sides
    - i. It is the truth about God (Hooker, “certainty of evidence”), Faith is not blind, but intelligent, resting on facts. Act 6.7 “the faith”, Jdg 1.3, Tit 1.4, Phi 1.27, resulting in:
      - A. Doctrine: two Greek words: *didachē* and *didaskalia*. Coupled with the word “Christian” (since these words themselves can either stand for truth or error) means the fundamental truths of revelation arranged in systematic form; produced by,
      - B. Theology: the “science” of God’s revelation. Whereas doctrine is general, speaking about the essential matters of the faith, theology speaks about the facts and phenomena of revelation in the Bible, one might say the method by which doctrine is acquired.
    - ii. It is the trust which corresponds to God’s truth (Hooker, “certainty of adherence”). Mat 8.5 “great faith”
  - b) Believing all the articles of the Christian faith should lead to trusting in God, knowing the facts and trusting the author of the facts should be connected. (There can be a difference, since even demons can believe: Jam 2.19) Therefore, personal trust is the necessary aspect of faith developed from a knowledge of the truth.
  - c) Faith is a growing commitment, “from faith to faith” (Romans 1:17).
    - i. *Credo Deum esse*<sup>16</sup>: I believe God exists
    - ii. *Credo Deo*<sup>17</sup>: I believe what God says
    - iii. *Credo in Deum*: I trust in God

<sup>16</sup> *deum*, accusative; *esse*, pres. act. inf.

<sup>17</sup> *deo*, ablative, literally, ‘I believe/trust that which is from/of God’.

## Creeds, Confessions, and the Articles

1. “Faith is response to divine revelation, and confession is the expression of faith.”<sup>18</sup>

- a) Creeds and confessions are “short, comprehensive statement[s] of belief suitable for discipleship and worship” (p. xxiv, ¶4), sometimes driven by heresies, sometimes for the need for direction, sometimes for clarity.
- b) Confessions have been contrasted with creeds. I agree with Griffith-Thomas’s position that they are developments (i.e., lengthier versions) of creeds.
- c) Helps to establish a *regula fidei* for the believer and for the church.

- i. Definition

- A. A *regula fidei* is a “rule of faith”, core doctrine outside of which one may not step without defining oneself as outside of the faith altogether. It answers the question, “what are the essentials/non-negotiables of the faith?”
- B. Consider Paul’s idea expressed this way: “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world . . . as for all who walk by this *rule*,<sup>19</sup> peace and mercy be upon them . . .” (Galatians 6:14–16).

- ii. Examples

- A. The summary of the law: “You shall love God with all . . . and your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.”<sup>20</sup>
- B. “By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.” (1Ti 3:16)
- C. The Apostles’ Creed (perhaps late second century), traditionally held to be a baptismal *credo*.

<sup>18</sup>Griffith-Thomas, p. xxiv, ¶2. Note the similarity to *lex orandi, lex credendi*.

<sup>19</sup>Greek *kanōn*, a rule or standard, a law, as used in the phrase “the canon of Scripture”.

<sup>20</sup>Luke 10:27, from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

- D. The Nicene Creed (325 A.D.), traditionally held to be a more mature version of the Apostles' creed.<sup>21</sup>
  - E. The Athanasian Creed (late 5th or early 6th cent.), a strong statement of Trinitarian doctrine.
  - F. The canon (rule) of Vincent of Lérins (died c. 445 A.D.): “that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all. That is truly and properly ‘Catholic.’”<sup>22</sup>
  - G. Lancelot Andrewes “counting to five”: One Bible, Two Testaments, Three Creeds, Four Councils,<sup>23</sup> Five Centuries.
- iii. Causes: “why do we need another statement of faith?”
- A. The Bible is 66 books (for the Protestants and Orthodox, more for the Roman Catholics), in three languages, across more than two millennia and three cultures (Near Eastern, Greek, Roman). Thus, it has inherent complexities due to the necessity of integrating a large amount of information, presented in different ways and over different times.
  - B. Ignorant, thoughtless, and wicked people are able to twist and pervert Scripture to make it say what they want and it's helpful to have a basic measuring stick against which to (relatively) easily discern accuracy.
  - C. It is my experience that those organizations which say that the Bible is their only creed are not self-aware. There is always a set of written or unwritten rules to which members must adhere. I know of no exception whatever. Self-awareness about one's own epistemology (sources of infor-

<sup>21</sup>Note that the 39 Articles follow the general outline of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

<sup>22</sup>From Chapter 4 of The Commonitory (a.k.a. The Commitorium), A.D. 434; see [WWW.ANCIENT-FUTURE.NET/VCANON.HTML](http://WWW.ANCIENT-FUTURE.NET/VCANON.HTML) and [ANGLICANHISTORY.ORG/GRAFTON/V6/180.HTML](http://ANGLICANHISTORY.ORG/GRAFTON/V6/180.HTML).

<sup>23</sup>Namely: 1. the first council of Nicæa (A.D. 325), 2. the first council of Constantinople (A.D. 381), 3. the council of Ephesus (A.D. 431), and, 4. the council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451). Some also include the fifth through seventh councils with respect to their Christological definitions only, excluding the various rulings regarding styles and customs. It's beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the place of the councils. See the Wikipedia articles [EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/ECUMENICAL\\_COUNCIL](http://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/ECUMENICAL_COUNCIL) and [EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/FIRST\\_SEVEN\\_ECUMENICAL\\_COUNCILS](http://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/FIRST_SEVEN_ECUMENICAL_COUNCILS), as well as the Catholic Encyclopedia article [WWW.NEWADVENT.ORG/LIBRARY/ALMANAC\\_14388A.HTM](http://WWW.NEWADVENT.ORG/LIBRARY/ALMANAC_14388A.HTM).

mation and processes of thought) is absolutely critical in being able to sort through all kinds of stuff.

It's out of such contexts that the 39 Articles came.

### 3 The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion of 1563

#### History

For a lengthier treatment of the historical context of the Articles, see the appendix "Historical Context for the Thirty-nine Articles", page 28.

##### 1. Context, general

- a) The reformation is at full speed on the continent: Luther in Wittenberg (1517), Huldrych Zwingli in Zürich (1522), Bucer in Strasbourg (1523), Peter Martyr Vermigli in Naples (1539), Calvin in Geneva (1541)
- b) It has started in England in 1537 with Tyndale's partial translation of Scripture.
- c) The Council of Trent started in 1545.

##### 2. Context, specific

- a) 1536: *The Ten Articles*, put forward by Thomas Cranmer. Two sections: 5 one doctrine, 5 on ceremonies. Evidence the reforming beginnings, but not a reformed stance. Attempted to provide some landmarks for where the church was and was going.
  - i. The binding authority of the Bible, the three ecumenical creeds and the first four ecumenical councils
  - ii. The necessity of baptism for salvation, even in the case of infants
  - iii. The sacrament of penance, with confession and absolution, which are declared "expedient and necessary"
  - iv. The substantial, real, corporal presence of Christ's body and blood under the form of bread and wine in the Eucharist
  - v. Justification by faith, joined with charity and obedience
  - vi. The use of images in churches

- vii. The honoring of saints and the Virgin Mary
  - viii. The invocation of saints
  - ix. The observance of various rites and ceremonies as good and laudable, such as clerical vestments, sprinkling of holy water, bearing of candles on Candlemas-day, giving of ashes on Ash Wednesday
  - x. The doctrine of purgatory, and prayers for the dead in purgatory (made purgatory a non-essential doctrine)
- b) 1537: *The Institution of the Christian Man* (also called *The Bishops' Book*), written by a committee of 46 divines and bishops headed by Thomas Cranmer.
- c) 1538: *The Thirteen Articles*, Cranmer presiding with Lutheran & English clerics. The 13 were never sanctioned, but formed a key link to the official 39.
- d) 1539: *The Six Articles*, far less reformed, evidencing what some have called the 'Henry' effect, by which Henry changes his theology, depending on motives and movers. These Articles include prison sentences for reading the Bible and a capital sentence for denying transubstantiation. They reaffirm:
- i. transubstantiation,
  - ii. the reasonableness of withholding of the cup from the laity during communion,
  - iii. clerical celibacy,<sup>24</sup>
  - iv. observance of vows of chastity,
  - v. permission for private masses, and,
  - vi. the importance of auricular confession.
- e) 1552–1553: *The Forty-two Articles* constituted the original version of the 39 Articles.
- f) 1553: Mary Tudor repealed the 42 Articles.
- g) 1558: Elizabeth I restored the Articles and commissioned them to be better articulated, seeking a form for unity for Protestants in England.

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<sup>24</sup>It is noted that “as the Act of the Six Articles neared passage in Parliament, Cranmer moved his wife and children . . . out of England” (see Wikipedia on the **THE THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES**).

- h) 1563: The 42 are reduced to 38.
- i) 1571: The *Thirty-nine Articles* appear in their final British form with the listing of the Apocrypha and the affirmative clause of Article XX.<sup>25</sup>
- j) 1615: The Irish Articles.
- k) 1801: The American Articles.

## Sources

The 39 Articles are derived from many reformed confessions and statements. Sharing many characteristics with other reformational statements, the 39 Articles were not only concerned to show the supremacy of Scripture, but also that the truths contained in the Articles were also in accord with the early church and her creeds. Sometimes called a *via media* between Protestantism and Romanism, a reading of the Articles demonstrates that this is not at all true. It was more a place in theology suspended in tension between non-conformist reformers, Anabaptists, and Roman Catholics. It was no compromise hoping to make everyone happy. It was a stand-off that ultimately made everyone unhappy!

One sees relationships of language and ideas between several statements and confessions.

- Lutheran: in particular the statements of the Confession of [the Diet of] Augsburg and the Confession of Württemberg, from which there are verbally identical phrases and even whole paragraphs.
  - 1529: Greater and Lesser Catechisms of Luther
  - 1530: Confession of Augsburg, followed by the Diet of Speier, which protested any forcing of conscience in religious matters, and as augmentation of Articles written in Schwabach and Torgau, Melancthon's work
  - 1537: Articles of Schmalkald
  - 1551: Saxon Confession

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<sup>25</sup>“The Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies and authority in controversies of faith . . . .”

- 1552: Confession of Württemberg (framed on model of Augsburg), containing 35 articles. Used by Parker in the revisions of the Edwardian 42 Articles as a precursor to the 39 Articles in 1563.

Additionally, one sees a kind of cross-breeding of ideas across the Channel, whether there was a direct influence or not.

- Zwinglian
  - 1523: 67 Articles of Zwingli
  - 1534: First Confession of Basel
  - 1536: First Helvetic Confession
- Genevan
  - 1536: Institutes of the Christian Religion
  - 1562: Second Helvetic Confession
  - 1618–1619: Synod of Dort
  - 1646: Westminster Confession
- Roman: even the Roman work at Trent had an influence on the work of the Articles—albeit negative.
  - 1545–1563: Trent
  - 1564: Creed and Catechism of Pius IV

## Character and Manner of Expression

The Articles define the standard of belief for the Church of England. They identify points both identical with the larger Christian world and distinctive from that world. Thus, there are historical and doctrinal perspectives.

Beyond historical and doctrinal character, the practical value is more important. Hence the title: *Articles Agreed upon by the Bishops and Other Learned Men in the Synod at London in the Year of Our Lord God 1552 for the Avoiding of Controversy in Opinions and the Establishment of a Godly Concord in Certain*

*Matters of Religion.* The Articles addressed the needs of the church, her peace, stability and well being.<sup>26</sup>

In this way, the Articles differ from some of the other better-known reformational statements, both for their terseness and their pastoral character. It's interesting to note what the Articles do *not* address, for example: the necessity of bishops, the rightness of the English church over all other churches, the gentleness of the language on baptism, and the pastoral character of Article 17 on predestination.

Any other approach would actually have been counter to the stated intent. It would not have avoided controversy, but created it and not in a healthy way. The more precise one becomes, the more one excludes larger Christendom, until only one person could be left—the drafter of the statement! That's why one sees a great deal of weight on both Biblical and historical (i.e., “catholic”) foundations, such that being in concord with the early church was required for Christianity, but not to the binding of the consciences of men on non-essentials. (Unity in the Essentials; Diversity in the Non-essentials; Charity in Everything). We may not be more precise than God is.<sup>27</sup>

In other words, as accurate as one needs and seeks to be to respond to given situations, humility is also fundamental. Truth as revealed in Scripture is objective revelation. However, our understanding and restating of truth in helpful ways is a subjective perception of the objective truth. The record is infallible

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<sup>26</sup>Emphases mine. Hardwick notes that the Articles were not intended to be a complete body of divinity, but enumeration of some truths, which have been denied by some persons.

<sup>27</sup>This perspective is to be contrasted with the comments of F. Bente in the *Concordia Triglotta* (see the Preface on page iv and page 3, respectively, for the following quotations).

The Lutheran Church differs from all other churches in being essentially the Church of the pure Word and unadulterated Sacraments . . . the precious truths confessed by her symbols in perfect agreement with the Holy Scriptures constitute the true beauty and rich treasures of our Church, as well as the never-failing source of her vitality and power.

Not being formally and explicitly adopted by all Christians, the specifically Lutheran confessions also are generally regarded as particular symbols. Inasmuch, however, as they are in complete agreement with the Holy Scriptures, and in this respect differ from all other particular symbols, the Lutheran confessions are truly ecumenical and catholic in character. They contain the truths believed universally by true Christians everywhere, explicitly even by inconsistent and erring Christians. Christian truth, being one and the same the world over, is none other than that which is found in the Lutheran confessions.

and we can have confidence therein. But we must be humble concerning our approach.<sup>28</sup> Knowledge points to mystery, and together knowledge and mystery lead to worship.

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<sup>28</sup>See 1 Timothy 6:15–16, Isaiah 55:8, Romans 11:33.

## A The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion

Notes:

- The Thirty-nine Articles were originally subtitled *Articles Agreed upon by the Bishops and Other Learned Men in the Synod at London in the Year of Our Lord God 1552 for the Avoiding of Controversy in Opinions and the Establishment of a Godly Concord in Certain Matters of Religion*.
- The Articles were adapted in the Colonies by “the Bishops, the Clergy, and the Laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, in Convention, on the twelfth day of September, in the Year of our Lord 1801”.
- The adaptations made by the Colonial church are noted in italics after the original language.
- The headings and footnotes are not part of the Articles, but have been added as divisions for instructional and reference purposes.

### Articles I–VIII: The Catholic Faith

#### The Substance of Faith: Articles I–V

##### Article I: Of Faith in the Holy Trinity

THERE is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

##### Article II: Of the Word, or Son of God, Which Was Made Very Man

THE Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took man’s nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile

His Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.

**Article III: Of the Going down of Christ into Hell**

AS CHRIST died for us, and was buried, so also is it to be believed that He went down into Hell.

**Article IV: Of the Resurrection of Christ**

CHRIST did truly rise again from death, and took again His body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith He ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until He return to judge all men at the last day.

**Article V: Of the Holy Ghost**

THE Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.

**The Rule of Faith: Articles VI–VIII**

**Article VI: Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scripture for Salvation**

HOLY Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of Holy Scripture, we do understand those Canonical books of the Old and New testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.

Of the names and number of the Canonical Books.

Genesis.

Exodus.

Leviticus.

Numbers.

Deuteronomy.

Joshua.

Judges.

Ruth.

The First Book of Samuel.

The Second Book of Samuel.

The First Book of Kings.

The Second Book of Kings.

The First Book of Chronicles.

The Second Book of Chronicles.

The First Book of Esdras. <sup>29</sup>	The Proverbs.
The Second Book of Esdras. <sup>30</sup>	Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher.
The Book of Esther.	Cantica, or Songs of Solomon.
The Book of Job.	Four Prophets the Greater.
The Psalms.	Twelve Prophets the Less.

All the books of the New Testament, as they are commonly received, we do receive, and account them canonical.

And the other books (as Hierome<sup>31</sup> saith) the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine. Such are these following:

The Third Book of Esdras.	Baruch the Prophet.
The Fourth Book of Esdras.	The Song of the Three Children.
The Book of Tobias.	The Story of Susanna.
The Book of Judith.	Of Bel and the Dragon.
The rest of the Book of Esther.	The Prayer of Manasses.
The Book of Wisdom.	The First Book of Maccabees.
Jesus the Son of Sirach.	The Second Book of Maccabees.

### **Article VII: Of the Old Testament**

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New; for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, being both God and man. Wherefore there are not to be heard which feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the law given from God by Moses, as touching ceremonies and rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet, notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the commandments which are called moral.

### **Article VIII: Of the Three Creeds**

The three Creeds, Nicene Creed, Athanasius' Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed; for

<sup>29</sup>Modernly known as Ezra.

<sup>30</sup>Modernly known as Nehemiah.

<sup>31</sup>Jerome.

they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.

### ***Of the Creeds***

*The Nicene Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed; for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.*

## **Articles IX–XVIII: The Life Of Faith/Personal Religion**

### **Its Commencement (Justification): Articles IX–XIV**

#### **Article IX: Of Original or Birth Sin**

ORIGINAL sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated, whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek φρόνημα σαρκός (*frónēma sarkós*)<sup>32</sup> (which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire of the flesh), is not subject to the law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized, yet the Apostle doth confess that concupiscence and lust hath itself the nature of sin.

#### **Article X: Of Free Will**

THE condition of man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God. Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and

<sup>32</sup>See, for example, Romans 8:5, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on *the things of the flesh* . . ." See the extended section, Romans 7:25–8:13.

acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing<sup>33</sup> us that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will.

#### **Article XI: Of the Justification of Man**

WE ARE accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort; as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.

#### **Article XII: Of Good Works**

ALBEIT that good works, which are the fruits of faith and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins and endure the severity of God's judgement, yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.

#### **Article XIII: Of Works Before Justification**

WORKS done before the grace of Christ and the inspiration of His Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make men meet to receive grace, or (as the School authors say) deserve grace of congruity: yea, rather for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin.

#### **Article XIV: Of Works of Supererogation**

VOLUNTARY works besides, over and above, God's commandments, which they call Works of Supererogation, cannot be taught without arrogancy and impiety. For by them men do declare that they do not only render unto God as much as they are bound to do, but that they do more for His sake than of bounden duty is required: Whereas Christ saith plainly, When ye have done all that are commanded to you, say, We be unprofitable servants.

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<sup>33</sup>At the time of the writing of the Articles, this word still retained its original Latin-based meaning of "preceding, going before", *pre + venio*.

## **Its Course (Sanctification): Articles XV–XVIII**

### **Article XV: Of Christ Alone Without Sin**

CHRIST in the truth of our nature was made like unto us in all things, sin only except, from which He was clearly void, both in His flesh and in His spirit. He came to be the lamb without spot, Who by sacrifice of Himself once made, should take away the sins of the world: and sin, as S. John saith, was not in Him. But all we the rest, although baptized and born again in Christ, yet offend in many things: and if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

### **Article XVI: Of Sin after Baptism**

NOT every deadly sin willingly committed after Baptism is sin against the Holy Ghost, and unpardonable. Wherefore the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after Baptism. After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given and fall into sin, and by the grace of God we may arise again and amend our lives. And therefore they are to be condemned, which say, they can no more sin as long as they live here, or deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent.

### **Article XVII: Of Predestination and Election**

PREDESTINATION to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby, before the foundations of the world were laid, He hath constantly decreed by His counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation as vessels made to honor. Wherefore they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God be called according to God's purpose by His Spirit working in due season; they through grace obey the calling; they be justified freely; they be made sons of God by adoption; they be made like the image of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ; they walk religiously in good works; and at length by God's mercy they attain to everlasting felicity.

As the godly consideration of Predestination and our Election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh and their earthly members and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith

of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: so for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust them either into desperation or into wretchlessness of most unclean living no less perilous than desperation.

Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise as they be generally set forth in Holy Scripture; and in our doings that will of God is to be followed which we have expressly declared unto us in the word of God.

**Article XVIII: Of Obtaining Eternal Salvation Only by the Name of Christ**

THEY also are to be had accursed that presume to say that every man shall be saved by the law or sect which he professteth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law and the light of nature. For Holy Scripture doth set out to us only the name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved.

**Articles XIX–XXXI: Corporate Religion / The Household Of Faith**

**The Church: Articles XIX–XXII**

**Article XIX: Of the Church**

THE visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached and the sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.

As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch have erred: so also the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of ceremonies, but also in matters of faith.

**Article XX: Of the Authority of the Church**

THE Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies and authority in controversies of faith; and yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything contrary to God's word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it

be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ: yet, as it ought not to decree anything against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce anything to be believed for necessity of salvation.

### **Article XXI: Of the Authority of General Councils**

GENERAL Councils may not be gathered together without the commandment and will of princes. And when they be gathered together (forasmuch as they be an assembly of men, whereof all be not governed with the Spirit and word of God), they may err and sometime have erred, even in things pertaining to God. Wherefore things ordained by them as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared that they be taken out of Holy Scripture.

### ***Article XXI: Of the Authority of General Councils***

*The Twenty-first of the former Articles is omitted; because it is partly of a local and civil nature, and is provided for, as to the remaining parts of it, in other Articles.*

### **Article XXII: Of Purgatory**

THE Romish doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, worshiping and adoration as well of Images as of Relics, and also Invocation of Saint, is a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture; but rather repugnant to the word of God.

## **The Ministry: Articles XXIII–XXIV**

### **Article XXIII: Of Ministering in the Congregation**

IT IS not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching or ministering the sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called and sent to execute the same. And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard.

**Article XXIV: Of Speaking in the Congregation in Such a Tongue as the People Understandeth**

IT is a thing plainly repugnant to the word of God and the custom of the primitive Church, to have public prayer in the Church, or to minister the sacraments in a tongue not understood of the people.

**The Sacraments: Articles XXV–XXXI**

**Article XXV: Of the Sacraments**

SACRAMENTS ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace and God's good will towards us, by the which He doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm, our faith in Him.

There are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel, that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.

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

The Sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon or to be carried about, but that we should duly use them. And in such only as worthily receive the same, have they a wholesome effect or operation: but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves damnation, as Saint Paul saith.

**Article XXVI: Of the Unworthiness of the Ministers, Which Hinders Not the Effect of the Sacraments**

ALTHOUGH in the visible Church the evil be ever mingled with the good, and sometime the evil have chief authority in the ministration of the word and sacraments; yet forasmuch as they do not the same in their own name, but in Christ's, and do minister by His commission and authority, we may use their ministry both in hearing the word of God and in the receiving of the sacraments. Neither is the effect of Christ's ordinance taken away by their wickedness, nor the grace of God's gifts diminished from such as by faith and rightly do receive

the sacraments ministered unto them, which be effectual because of Christ's institution and promise, although they be ministered by evil men.

Nevertheless it appertaineth to the discipline of the Church that inquiry be made of evil ministers, and that they be accused by those that have knowledge of their offences; and finally, being found guilty by just judgement, be deposed.

#### **Article XXVII: Of Baptism**

BAPTISM is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christian men are discerned from other that be not christened, but is also a sign of regeneration or new birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God, by the Holy Ghost are visibly signed and sealed; faith is confirmed, and grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God.

The baptism of young children is in any wise to be retained in the Church as most agreeable with the institution of Christ.

#### **Article XXVIII: Of the Lord's Supper**

THE Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves, one to another, but rather it is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death: insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ, and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ.

Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of bread and wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions.

The body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is faith.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshiped.

**Article XXIX: Of the Wicked Which Do Not Eat the Body of Christ, in the Use of the Lord's Supper**

THE wicked and such as be void of a lively faith, although they do carnally and visibly press with their teeth (as Saint Augustine saith) the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, yet in no wise are they partakers of Christ, but rather to their condemnation do eat and drink the sign or sacrament of so great a thing.

**Article XXX: Of Both Kinds**

THE Cup of the Lord is not to be denied to the lay people; for both parts of the Lord's sacrament, by Christ's ordinance and commandment, ought to be ministered to all Christian men alike.

**Article XXXI: Of the One Oblation of Christ Finished upon the Cross**

THE offering of Christ once made is the perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual, and there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone. Wherefore the sacrifices of Masses, in the which it was commonly said that the priests did offer Christ for the quick and the dead to have remission of pain or guilt, were blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits.

**Church Discipline: Articles XXXII–XXXVI**

**Article XXXII: Of the Marriage of Priests**

BISHOPS, Priests, and Deacons are not commanded by God's laws either to vow the estate of single life or to abstain from marriage. Therefore it is lawful also for them, as for all other Christian men, to marry at their own discretion, as they shall judge the same to serve better to godliness.

**Article XXXIII: Of Excommunicated Persons, How They Are to Be Avoided**

THAT person which by open denunciation of the Church is rightly cut off from the unity of the Church and excommunicated, ought to be taken of the whole multitude of the faithful as an heathen and publican, until he be openly reconciled by penance and received into the Church by a judge that hath authority thereto.

**Article XXXIV: Of the Traditions of the Church**

It is not necessary that traditions and ceremonies be in all places one or utterly alike; for at all times they have been diverse, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's word. Whosoever through his private judgement willingly and purposely doth openly break the traditions and ceremonies of the Church which be not repugnant to the word of God, and be ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly that other may fear to do the like, as he that offendeth against common order of the Church, and hurteth the authority of the magistrate, and woundeth the conscience of the weak brethren. Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish ceremonies or rites of the Church ordained only by man's authority, so that all things be done to edifying.

**Article XXXV: Of Homilies**

The second Book of Homilies, the several titles whereof we have joined under this Article, doth contain a godly and wholesome doctrine and necessary for these times, as doth the former Book of Homilies which were set forth in the time of Edward the Sixth: and therefore we judge them to be read in Churches by the ministers diligently and distinctly, that they may be understood of the people.

Of the Names of the Homilies:

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|---|--|
| 1. Of the Right Use of the Church                 | 8. Of the Place and Time of Prayer   |
| 2. Against Peril of Idolatry                      | 9. That Common Prayers and Sacraments Ought to Be Ministered in a Known Tongue |
| 3. Of the Repairing and Keeping Clean of Churches | 10. Of the Reverend Estimation of God's Word                                   |
| 4. Of Good Works: First of Fasting                | 11. Of Alms-doing  |
| 5. Against Gluttony and Drunkenness               | 12. Of the Nativity of Christ  |
| 6. Against Excess of Apparel                      | 13. Of the Passion of Christ   |
| 7. Of Prayer                                      | 14. Of the Resurrection of Christ  |

- |  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 15. Of the Worthy Receiving of the<br>Sacrament of the Body and Blood<br>of Christ | 18. Of the State of Matrimony |
| 16. Of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost   | 19. Of Repentance             |
| 17. For the Rogation-days  | 20. Against Idleness          |
|  | 21. Against Rebellion         |

*This Article is received in this Church, so far as it declares the Books of Homilies to be an explication of Christian doctrine, and instructive in piety and morals. But all references to the constitution and laws of England are considered as inapplicable to the circumstances of this Church; which also suspends the order for the reading of said Homilies in churches, until a revision of them may be conveniently made, for the clearing of them, as well from obsolete words and phrases, as from the local references.*

#### **Article XXXVI: Of Consecration of Bishops and Ministers**

THE Book of Consecration of Archbishops and Bishops and ordering of Priests and Deacons, lately set forth in the time of Edward the Sixth and confirmed at the same time by authority of Parliament, doth contain all things necessary to such consecration and ordering; neither hath it anything that of itself is superstitious or ungodly. And therefore whosoever are consecrate or ordered according to the rites of that book, since the second year of King Edward unto this time, or hereafter shall be consecrated or ordered according to the same rites, we decree all such to be rightly, orderly, and lawfully consecrated or ordered.

#### ***Of Consecration of Bishops and Ministers.***

*The Book of Consecration of Bishops, and Ordering of Priests and Deacons, as set forth by the General Convention of this Church in 1792, doth contain all things necessary to such Consecration and Ordering; neither hath it any thing that, of itself, is superstitious and ungodly. And, therefore, whosoever are consecrated or ordered according to said Form, we decree all such to be rightly, orderly, and lawfully consecrated and ordered.*

**Church and State: Articles XXXVII–XXXIX****Article XXXVII: Of the Civil Magistrates**

THE Queen's Majesty hath the chief power in this realm of England and other her dominions, unto whom the chief government of all estates of this realm, whether they be ecclesiastical or civil, in all causes doth appertain, and is not nor ought to be subject to any foreign jurisdiction.

Where we attribute to the Queen's Majesty the chief government, by which titles we understand the minds of some slanderous folks to be offended, we give not to our princes the ministering either of God's word or of sacraments, the which thing the Injunctions also lately set forth by Elizabeth our Queen doth most plainly testify: but only that prerogative which we see to have been given always to all godly princes in Holy Scriptures by God himself, that is, that they should rule all estates and degrees committed to their charge by God, whether they be temporal, and restrain with the civil sword the stubborn and evil-doers. The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this realm of England. The Laws of the Realm may punish Christian men with death for heinous and grievous offences.

It is lawful for Christian men at the commandment of the Magistrate to wear weapons and serve in the wars.

***Of the Power of the Civil Magistrates.***

*The Power of the Civil Magistrate extendeth to all men, as well Clergy as Laity, in all things temporal; but hath no authority in things purely spiritual. And we hold it to be the duty of all men who are professors of the Gospel, to pay respectful obedience to the Civil Authority, regularly and legitimately constituted.*

**Article XXXVIII: Of Christian Men's Good Which Are Not Common**

THE riches and goods of Christians are not common, as touching the right, title, and possession of the same, as certain Anabaptists do falsely boast; notwithstanding every man ought of such things as he possesseth liberally to give alms to the poor, according to his ability.

**Article XXXIX: Of a Christian Man's Oath**

AS WE confess that vain and rash swearing is forbidden Christian men by our Lord Jesus Christ, and James his Apostle, so we judge that Christian religion

doth not prohibit but that a man may swear when the magistrate requireth in a cause of faith and charity, so it be done according to the Prophet's teaching in justice, judgement, and truth.

## B Historical Context for the Thirty-nine Articles

1. Secular
  - a) Ottoman Empire of Turkey on the rise
    - i. 1500: Conquers a Venetian fleet trying to regain Lepanto
    - ii. 1516–1517: Gains control of the Levant
    - iii. 1519: Attacks southern France
    - iv. 1521: Belgrade captured
    - v. 1522: Greek Rhodes, off the western coast of Turkey, captured
    - vi. 1526: Hungarians defeated at Battle of Mohács
    - vii. 1529: Held at bay outside of Vienna by the Austrians
    - viii. 1538: A combined Spanish-Venetian fleet destroyed
    - ix. 1541: A major part of Hungary absorbed
  - b) 1501: Michelangelo produces *David*.
  - c) 1503: Da Vinci begins painting *Mona Lisa*.
  - d) 1506: Christopher Columbus dies.
  - e) 1509: Henry VIII crowned.
  - f) 1512: Copernicus initially outlines his ideas regarding the Sun as the center of our system of planets.
  - g) 1519: Charles V, whose “personal union . . . of the Holy Roman Empire with the Spanish Empire resulted in the closest Europe would come to a universal monarchy in the post-classical era”, is crowned.<sup>34</sup>
  - h) 1524–1525: German Peasants’ War, indirectly fomented by the Protestant Reformation.
  - i) 1527: Charles V’s troops sack Rome in opposition to the pope and in alliance with Henry VIII
  - j) 1543: Copernicus publishes his heliocentric theory
  - k) 1546: Two leading Protestant German princes

<sup>34</sup>David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*. Cambridge University Press, September 2000. p. 32, cited in the Wikipedia article **CHARLES V, HOLY ROMAN EMPEROR**.

- are released from captivity by Charles V.
- l) 1547: Henry VIII dies and 9 year-old Edward VI becomes king.
- m) 1551: Persian forces invade the central European country of Georgia.
- n) 1552: Treaty of Chambord is signed between Catholic Henry II of France and three Protestant princes of Germany in exchange for mutual protection from Charles V's continued encroachments on city-states within the Holy Roman Empire. As a result, Charles loses several significant battles in subsequent years, until by 1555, Charles abdicates the throne..
- o) 1552: Hanseatic League privileges revoked in England, signifying England's greater freedom from continental economic interests.
- p) 1553: Edward VI dies and "Bloody" Mary Tudor becomes queen.
- q) 1555: Charles V abdicates the throne of the Holy Roman Empire.
- r) 1558: (Protestant) Elizabeth I becomes queen.
- Religious
- a) The height of the power of the Inquisitions
- i. 1478: The Spanish Inquisition
  - ii. 1536: The Portuguese Inquisition
  - iii. 1542: The Roman Inquisition
- b) 1506: About 2,000 converted Jews are massacred in Lisbon.
- c) 1517: Martin Luther posts the 95 Theses.
- d) 1527: Protestant Reformation takes hold in Sweden.
- e) 1531: Church of England breaks away from Rome and Henry VIII is recognized as the head of the church.
- f) 1535: The Münster Rebellion, an attempt of radical, millennialist, Anabaptists to establish a theocracy, ends in bloodshed.
- g) 1537: William Tyndale's partial translation is published and lays the groundwork for the King James translation of 1611.

- h) 1545–1563: Council of Trent, prompted by the Reformation, becomes the embodiment of the Counter-reformation, issuing clarifications, condemnations of heresy, liturgies.<sup>35</sup>
- i) 1547: Henry VIII dies and 9 year-old Edward VI becomes king.
- j) 1549: Charles V dismantles the Schmalkaldic League, a defensive federation of Lutheran princes within the Holy Roman Empire.
- k) 1550: The Jesuits (“Society of Jesus”) is founded.
- l) ~1550: A Slovenian Reformed catechism is printed and Iceland becomes fully Protestant.
- m) 1552: Act of Uniformity is issued, requiring use of the Protestant BCP.
- n) 1553: Edward VI dies.
- o) 1555: Latimer and Ridley are burned at the stake.
- p) 1556: Thomas Cranmer burned at the stake.
- q) 1559: Scottish Reformation begins.

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<sup>35</sup>See the helpful Wikipedia article **COUNCIL OF TRENT**.

## C Thinking Anglicanly

The following is taken from an unpublished paper on confirmation.

### Scripture Not God's *Sole* Voice

I have purposely entitled this section in a provocative way. However, I am not diminishing the authority of Scripture in any way! Intellectual honesty demands that we say that the Bible is not our sole authoritative voice and, in fact, that assertion can actually strengthen our view of Scripture!

Anglican thinking has been described as a stool supported by three legs: revelation (primarily Scripture), reason, and tradition. This idea is rightly attributed to Richard Hooker, who puts it this way.

What Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that the first place both of credit and obedience is due; the next whereunto is, whatsoever any man can necessarily conclude by force of reason; after these, the voice of the church succeedeth.<sup>36</sup>

The grievous error attributed to this analogy is that reason and tradition are considered freestanding entities, authorities independent from and on par with Scripture. This conception of reason and tradition is unacceptable in Hooker's thinking.

If so be it were possible that all other ornaments of mind might be had in their full perfection, nevertheless the mind that should possess them divorced from piety could be but a spectacle of commiseration.<sup>37</sup>

By "piety" Hooker means true religion, not mere sincerity of religious feeling; one paragraph prior to the last citation, Hooker wrote, "To make therefore our beginning . . . we agree that pure and unstained religion ought to be the highest of all cares . . ." Therefore, the piety of revealed religion is the source of and the structure for how we understand and use reason and tradition. It would be a fundamental mistake to think that reason and tradition are the source of and structure for how to think about the Bible. Biblically informed reason and

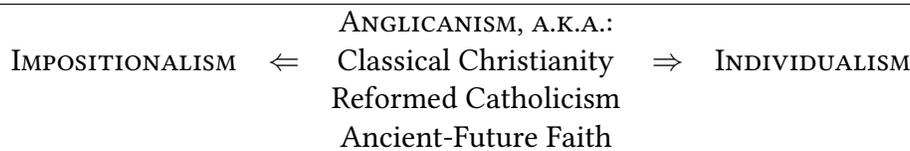
<sup>36</sup>*Laws Of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, Chapter 8.

<sup>37</sup>*ibid.*, Book V, Chapter 2.

tradition (using Hooker’s ranking of importance) are merely tools—helpful and necessary tools—but nothing more than tools for understanding and applying Scripture.

## Anglicanism’s Unique Approach

The result of this heritage puts Anglicanism in a unique position in western Christianity. Especially in the case of Anglicanism, there is a healthy position between two extreme poles of thought in Christianity. The two poles are these: the first I call “impositionalism” and the other “individualism”.



Under impositionalism, I include two sorts of thinking. For Protestants, an example of impositionalism is the regulative principle<sup>38</sup> of some post-reformed groups.<sup>39</sup> For the Roman Catholic Church, impositionalism is expressed in the dogmatic authority of the See of Rome.

I know that these two schools of thought aren’t typically considered related; however, I see variations on the same theme in them. The regulative principle prohibits from practice everything not explicitly stated or reasonably derived from Scripture. Papal authority mandates things, even if they are not explicitly stated or reasonably derived from Scripture. In both cases, the church determines something as being necessary (or necessarily forbidden) regarding matters of faith, which things are neither clearly revealed in, nor reasonably derived from the Bible. This imposes on the faithful disciples of those ecclesial disciplines matters that are extra-Biblical.

At the other extreme pole stands individualism, the final and absolute authority of personal conscience, a far more common mindset among American

<sup>38</sup>The “regulative principle”—sometimes called the “regulative principle of worship”—teaches that that only those elements that are instituted or appointed by command, precept, or example and/or by good and necessary consequence from the Bible are permissible in worship. All else is forbidden.

<sup>39</sup>I use the phrase “post-reformed”, because of my own increasing conviction that what is called “reformed” today is foreign to the thinking of the magisterial reformers (Cranmer, Luther, Calvin, Bucer, Peter Martyr Vermigli, among others).

evangelicals. Called by some “soul freedom” or “soul sovereignty”, the potential of a relatively unified voice of the church of Christ has been muted by the cacophony of personal opinions.

Whether the topic is abortion, capital punishment, the private life of Christians in public roles, law and ethics, or whatever the issue may be, this standard ensures that there will be nearly the same number of opinions as voices in the room. The individualist voice authoritatively allows the individual to bring his or her expectations into the congregation, with each opinion, preference, and perspective having exactly the same weight as any other. This is the ecclesiastical version of Burger King’s “have it your way”.

In the first case—impositionalism—the church can overstep the boundaries of its authority by imposing an ecclesiastical decision as normative for true religion. In the second—individualism—the individual can overstep his boundaries of authority by imposing personal perspective as normative for true religion.

## A Faithful Balance

Contrary to these two polar positions, I believe that we have a wise balance in Anglicanism. The simplest description of this balance, what I have called “thinking Anglicanly”, is this.

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*Thinking Anglicanly means that the church of Christ in history and tradition is first our master and only in the clear light of Scripture may we be its master.*

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By way of illustration of the above principle, consider the fact that the Articles seem to permit impositionalism by saying that “the church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith”. In fact, it’s stated quite strongly.

whosoever, through his private judgment, willingly and purposely, doth openly break the traditions and ceremonies of the Church, which be not repugnant to the Word of God, and be ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly.

However, the Articles reject impositionalism by carefully limiting the authority of the church. They assert that Councils have and do err (see Articles 19 and 21).

And they assert that there is only one place from which “things necessary to salvation” may be derived.

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.<sup>40</sup>

Classical Christianity, the Christianity of the magisterial reformers,<sup>41</sup> says that our faith is intimately linked to the faith of the fathers. The lessons of the continuum of the church are our lessons too. The ultimate authority of Scripture does trump all; however, the pious reasoning and the practical solutions of the historic church stand as examples of thought and practice from which we are required learn.

Think about this pastorally and practically. Pastoral needs of the day do push us to adapt, improvise, and overcome and that’s not necessarily wrong. The individual does matter and the opinions need to be taken into account, such that the church may change practices as necessary. As Hooker writes, “the church hath authority to establish that for an order at one time, which at another time it may abolish, and in both may do well”.

But the demands of the market place determine neither the nature nor the extent of the adaptations. There is nothing new under the sun and not everything is up for grabs or subject to change. The Bible is the primary source book of truth and manual of practice, which together with rational thought and the perspectives and solutions of the historic church (both being informed by Scripture) provide a way for us to think and act. To finish Hooker’s thought started above:

But that which in doctrine and the church does now deliver rightly as truth, no man will say that it may hereafter recall, and as rightly avouch the contrary. Laws touching matter of order are changeable, by the power of the church; articles concerning doctrine not so.<sup>42</sup>

It’s a given that Scripture ought to permeate every idea and practice. It is the primary and superior authority. It’s the main classroom of the school in which

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<sup>40</sup>From Articles XX (Of the Authority of the Church), XXXIV (Of the Traditions of the Church), and VI (Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scripture for Salvation) respectively.

<sup>41</sup>See footnote 39.

<sup>42</sup>*Laws*, Book 5, Chapter 8, Paragraph 2.

we learn to follow Christ and to lead his sheep. But pious reasoning and historic practice are tutors that help us understand what's going on in the classroom of Scripture. We look backward, in order to look forward. *Semper reformanda* only legitimately takes place within the arms of our mother, the church.<sup>43</sup> Statistics and demographics may help us determine where to apply Biblical principle, or perhaps even how, but they never tell us what the principle ought to be.

Griffith-Thomas in his *Principles of Theology* summarizes the idea of thinking Anglicanly in this way.

The one thing to remember is that the Bible is essentially a book of principles, not of rules, and the supreme requirement is that amidst the varied and complex needs of life and worship no Church rule shall contravene a Bible principle. Apart from this there must necessarily be full liberty to “ordain, change, and abolish”.<sup>44</sup>

Thinking Anglicanly is thinking in the context of the continuum of the church's wrestling with doctrine and practice, with our chief cornerstone being the revealed Word of God (the Bible) telling us about the living Word of God (Jesus Christ). It is neither arrogant individualism, nor arrogant bureaucracy, but a careful, consistent pedagogical approach under the authority of all these elements.

## D Suggested Reading

### The Articles of Religion

—Rodgers, John & Packer, J.I. *Essential Truths for Christians: Essential Truths for Christians: A Commentary on the Anglican Thirty-nine Articles and an Introduction to Systematic Theology*, Classical Anglican Press, Blue Bell, PA, published 2011.

This is by far the best work on the 39 Articles I have ever read. Easily readable for the lay person, insightful for the scholar, practical for everyone. If you only want to get one book, get this. Purchasable from Classical Anglican Press, Reformed Episcopal Publication Society, [WWW.RECUS.ORG/PUB\\_SOC.HTML](http://WWW.RECUS.ORG/PUB_SOC.HTML) or Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry, [BOOKSTORE.TSM.EDU](http://BOOKSTORE.TSM.EDU).

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<sup>43</sup>Ask for my unpublished paper on Theological Education and the Church, in which I discuss the nearly ubiquitous theme of “God as Father, Church as mother” throughout the history of the church.

<sup>44</sup>p. 442.

—Griffith-Thomas, William Henry. *The Principles of Theology: An Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles*, various publishers, most recent edition seems to be from around 2005.

Until John Rodgers' work above, this was the best available single resource and the one from which I did my initial studies. Easily available on Amazon, as well as from the Reformed Episcopal Publication Society, [WWW.RECUS.ORG/PUB\\_SOC.HTML](http://WWW.RECUS.ORG/PUB_SOC.HTML).

## Bible

—Wilson, Andrew. *Unbreakable: What the Son of God Said About the Word of God*, 10Publishing (October 1, 2014), England.

This little paperback is a unique, *brief*, highly readable, and unusual approach to the issue of Biblical authority. Published by and available from **10PUBLISHING**, it's also available from Amazon for about \$2.50 new.

There are many possible works one could read on the origins of the Bible. Perhaps it's best if you let me know your interests and I'll try to match them to the correct work.

## History

I can well imagine that folks may sneer at my choice of selections below, since they are but merely web sites. But for the curious, or the initially inquisitive who are unsure where to start, I strongly recommend these, especially Wikipedia! Here is a list of several of the Wikipedia articles to which I referred in this study.

- Ecumenical council
- Council of Trent
- First seven Ecumenical Councils
- Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor
- Thirty-Nine Articles
- 16th century

The online Catholic Encyclopedia at [WWW.NEWADVENT.ORG/CATHEN](http://WWW.NEWADVENT.ORG/CATHEN) is also the normative and freely available 1917 Roman Catholic Encyclopedia rendered on the web. This has been a repeatedly helpful resource.

As you use these resources, let your imagination and interests be your guide! If you want to delve more deeply, a great place to start would be these two books.

—Leuenberger, Samuel. *Archbishop Cranmer's Immortal Bequest: The Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England: An Evangelistic Liturgy*, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004.

Available on Amazon, this very readable book was my first introduction to the “cross-breeding” that took place between the various reformed traditions. It’s also a great read on the Book of Common Prayer.

—MacCulloch, Diarmaid. *Thomas Cranmer: A Life*, Yale University Press; 4th Print edition (February 17, 1998).

This is a large work of over 700 pages. However, it’s also the work that will give you an excellent “peek” into the politics, theology, and piety of Cranmer. Also available on Amazon.