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## THE BASIS OF ANGLICAN DOCTRINE AND FELLOWSHIP

AS "SET FORTH" IN THE THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES.

BY C. SYDNEY CARTER, F.R.Hist.S., Principal of  
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SINCE the divisions of the East and West and of the later Reformation, even if not earlier, there has necessarily been no properly "Catholic" dogmatic theology apart from the general acceptance of the fundamental doctrines enshrined in the Catholic Creeds. The distinctive theology of each "particular or National Church" has therefore to be sought for in its authorized public Confessions of Faith. These impart a historical doctrinal continuity to each section or branch of the Catholic Church, and they are the dogmatic standard of final appeal by which all the devotional language used in subordinate manuals of worship must be tested. Consequently we must look to our own authorized Confession of Faith as enunciating the distinctive theology of our branch of the Church Catholic.

I would like to emphasize this point, since there is a tendency in some quarters to assume that this distinctive Confession of Faith is subordinate to, if not superseded by, the superior authority of the "teaching of the Catholic Church." But it is an incontrovertible fact that for the Anglican Churchman in Holy Orders no such indefinite standard of general Catholic Truth or Teaching possesses superior claims, or is an allowable Court of Appeal from the teaching "set forth" in the Thirty-Nine Articles, which, together with the Prayer Book, are the supreme doctrinal authority for clergy of the Church of England. To them alone, and not to some nebulous standard of "Catholic Truth," has he to give his "Declaration of Assent."

Now if Christian doctrine is the product of truth and of individual minds, we may say that its history is the record of various efforts to embody the contents and implications of the Gospel in definite propositions and conclusions in order to systematize them. In such attempts the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion issued by our Anglican Reformers take a prominent and important place, even though in their influence upon Christian theology they may fall behind the epoch-making "Institutes" of John Calvin. But by their fidelity to Scripture, their charity, breadth and moderation of statement the Articles have appealed ever since their first compilation to widely varying types of churchmen. Canon Dixon well declared of them: "They showed a surprisingly comprehensive and moderate spirit. The broad soft touch of Cranmer lay upon them when they came from the furnace. Nearly half were such as is common to all Christians, but even in these the brevity of state-

ment and the avoidance of controversy is to be admired." <sup>1</sup> From a different angle—that of an outstanding Broad Churchman of the Victorian era—Charles Kingsley—we get similar testimony. Kingsley declared of our Church, "Her Articles bind men to none of the popular superstitions, but are so cautious, wide and liberal that I could almost believe them to have come down from heaven." <sup>2</sup>

I would like to say a word first of all as to the precise character or orientation of the Articles. This is very clearly brought out in what I believe was the first commentary on them, that written by Thomas Rogers. Rogers was Archbishop Bancroft's Chaplain, and his commentary, which he entitled "The Catholic Doctrine of the Church of England," was circulated by Bancroft throughout his Province of Canterbury.

This title reminds us that the Articles are "Catholic," while the further delineation of his aim and purpose—"to prove that their teaching was in accord" with the doctrinal standards of the various Reformed Confessions, or as he expresses it—"with all the neighbour Churches Christianly reformed"—"in all matters of chiefest importance and fundamental points of religion," tells us that the Articles are also "Reformed." I would like to observe in passing that these terms "Catholic" and "Reformed" are mutually inclusive rather than complementary characteristics. For we may boldly affirm that the Articles cannot be properly "Catholic" unless they are also "Reformed." I would also emphasize what I consider to be the most conspicuous evidence of their Catholicity—that is their constant and consistent appeal to the Bible as the sole Divine Rule of Faith. Not only is this truth plainly enunciated in Article VI, but in several other Articles there is a similar definite assertion or implication. For example, we are taught that "Creeds" are only to be believed because "they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture." Even though it is definitely asserted that the Church "hath power to decree Rites and Ceremonies," its authority is to be entirely subordinate to that of "God's Word Written." Again the decrees of "General Councils" are also discredited unless they are "taken out of Holy Scripture"! The lawfulness of the Marriage of the Clergy, the unlawfulness of Praying in an unknown Tongue, the doctrine of Purgatory, Transubstantiation and the Worshipping of Images are, we find, all judged by the same supreme standard. In the imperfectly authorized Canons of 1571 a subordinate reference is made to the teaching which "the old Catholic Fathers and ancient bishops" have collected from the Scriptures. Now it is certain that the *one thing* "of the Faith" which these "Catholic Fathers" "collected from the doctrine of the Old and New Testaments"—that is what is called "the unanimous consent of the Fathers"—that which "has been believed *always, everywhere and by all*"—was the fact of the supreme authority of Holy Scripture as the ultimate Rule of Faith for the Church. So that our Articles in reasserting this Rule are conspicuously Catholic.

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. of Ch. of Eng.*, III, 520. <sup>2</sup> *Letters and Memoirs*, p. 177 (1895).

I would like here to correct a false assertion which is frequently made—viz. that the Rule of Faith to which our Church appeals is “the Scriptures and the First Four General Councils,” or “the Scriptures and the Undivided Church.” I do not know of any foundation for these assertions from the authorized Formularies of our Church. On the other hand, everything goes to support the correctness of Cranmer’s statement, that “The Holy Scriptures ought to be to us both the rules and judges of all Christian doctrine.” It is true that the Act of Supremacy, 1559—an “Erastian” and not a “Church” authority, be it noted—empowered its Ecclesiastical Commissioners to judge “heresy” by the Scriptures and the First Four General Councils. But this clause of the Act was repealed in 1641 when the High Commission Court was abolished, and therefore this standard of reference is no longer in force.

But it has been objected that Article VI is ambiguous as to whether the “Church” or the individual is the proper interpreter of what is to be “read in” or “proved by” Holy Scripture. Some have even claimed that the language supports the well-known dictum “The Church to teach, the Bible to prove.” This point is, however, made quite clear by the language of the *Homilies*, and for once we can fully agree with Newman’s statement, in “Tract XC,” that the *Homilies* are “authoritative when they explain more fully the meaning of the Articles” (p. 71). Now the *Homilies* urge the humble Christian to search the Scriptures to discover the Truth. “We are to search diligently for the well of life in the books of the Old and New Testaments.” We are distinctly told that even “the humble man may search any truth boldly in the Scriptures without any danger of error.” If he be in doubt as to its meaning through “ignorance,” he is not directed to seek for an authoritative interpretation from the Church, but instead to read the Scriptures again for further enlightenment. He is exhorted “the more to read and search Holy Scripture to bring him out of ignorance.”<sup>1</sup> The Articles, in fact, assert the right of private judgment of the individual Christian with regard to the “rule of faith,” and in this liberty they are supported by the Prayer Book, or to be exact by the “Ordinal,” which exhorts the newly ordained presbyter to teach “nothing as required as of necessity to eternal salvation” but that which *he himself* “is persuaded can be concluded and proved by Scripture.”

But having emphasized this Catholic character of the Articles, especially in their appeal to Holy Scripture, a further question arises as to the *nature and extent of their authority*. Is it right to describe them as the basis of distinctive Anglican doctrine? And is their authority in our Church paramount, or only co-ordinate with or even subordinate to, other authorized Anglican formularies? This question leads me to refer to an official statement recently made by a Committee of Bishops and endorsed by a Resolution of the Lambeth Conference last year—a statement which I cannot but regard as both erroneous and seriously misleading, and which,

<sup>1</sup> *Homilies*, pp. 2 and 6 (1844).

coming from accredited leaders and teachers of our Church, must not be allowed to pass without challenge and contradiction. I refer to the statement made in Resolution 33 (c) that "the Conference records its acceptance of the statement of the Anglican Bishops contained in the *Résumé* of the discussions between the Patriarch of Alexandria with the other Orthodox Representatives and the Bishops of the Anglican Communion," "as a sufficient account of the *teaching and practice* of the Church of England." Now in this "*Résumé*," Clause 10 states that "the Anglican Bishops have declared that the Doctrine of the Anglican Church is authoritatively expressed in the Book of Common Prayer, and that the meaning of the 39 Articles *must be interpreted in accordance with the Book of Common Prayer*" (p. 139). This is really an amazing statement, and certainly unsupported by any historical or legal evidence. For a Manual of Devotion is one thing, but a Confession of Faith is quite another. It has been well said that "the primary aim of any liturgical formula is to assist the piety of the faithful, and not to afford a *touchstone of error*."<sup>1</sup> It is true that we may be able to gather the general standard of doctrine from the liturgical phraseology and from isolated expressions in the Prayer Book, but to get an authoritative statement of our Church's Faith we must go to the clearly defined and concise definitions of the Articles. The doctrine of the Church of England may be "contained" in the Book of Common Prayer, but it is clearly and unequivocally "set forth" in the Articles. This is the undoubted meaning of the wording of the "Declaration of Assent" to the Articles, required of every ordained Minister. He does not merely accept the doctrine therein "contained," but clearly "set forth" in the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Prayer Book. The "Set Forth," in the nature of the case, must refer specially, not so much to the statements of doctrine which may be gleaned or implied from certain Prayer Book services and prayers, as to the clear and orderly "setting forth" of Anglican authorized doctrine in the Articles. There is no doubt that it is the Articles and not the Prayer Book which have historically and traditionally been accepted as the recognized standard and expression of Anglican Reformed theology. As evidence of this we may cite the explanatory statement affixed to the Articles which stamps them as the authoritative source of Anglican belief, when it says that Convocation in 1562 drew them up "for the avoidance of diversities of opinion and for the establishing of consent touching true religion." Consequently Canon V of 1604 declares that anyone denouncing the Articles as "erroneous or superstitious" is *ipso facto* excommunicate. Moreover, Rogers in the title of his book not only calls their teaching "Catholic," but he declares them to be the (Catholic) *Doctrine of the Church of England*. In this connection it is not irrelevant to refer to the "Royal Declaration of 1628," drawn up with episcopal advice. This definitely states as a well-known and indisputable fact, that "the Articles of the Church of England do contain the true Doctrine

<sup>1</sup> Gasquet & Bishop, *Edward VI and Bk. of Common Prayer*, p. 184 (1891).

of the Church of England agreeable to God's Word," and the King "takes comfort" from the fact "that all clergymen have always most willingly subscribed the Articles established." There is no hint whatever that the teaching of these authorized Articles is subordinate to that contained in the Prayer Book. But although we may reassert their paramount doctrinal authority over all other Anglican formularies, we feel bound to add that we do not thereby admit that there is, in fact, any contradiction between the teaching of the Articles and the Prayer Book. On the contrary, we would endorse the assertion made in the Canons of 1571, which after declaring that the Articles "agree in all points" with "the heavenly doctrine contained in the sacred books of the Old and New Testaments," proceed to affirm that the "Prayer Book contains *nothing different* from that very doctrine."<sup>1</sup> Doubtless the language of the Prayer Book not being so precisely or theologically expressed as the exact statements of a definitely doctrinal formulary, can sometimes be explained or interpreted in a sense which does not accord with the explicit definitions of the Articles, but in such a case the Articles are undoubtedly the conclusive determining authority.

A word must also be added in this connection concerning the seriously disturbing suggestion made recently in the Report of the Commission of the Church Assembly on "Staffing of Parishes," where it is urged that "some relief would be given if assent to them (the Articles) was no longer required as a condition of ordination" (p. 59). It is quite likely that we could easily fill our parishes and pulpits with Unitarians and Romanists by such a simple device, but we should at one blow destroy the Reformed character of our Church and alter its historic distinctive doctrinal basis. History seems to be once again about to repeat itself, for a similar determined attempt was made in the eighteenth century by Archdeacon Blackburne's party in the "Feathers Tavern Petition" of 1772. It was then decisively rejected by Parliament, and I believe another attempt would meet with a like result to-day. A modern Edmund Burke would again tell such Petitioners, even if they were bishops, that "they want to be preferred clergymen of the Church of England as by law established, but their conscience will not allow them to conform to the doctrines and practices of that Church, i.e. they want to be teachers in a Church to which they do not belong and to receive the emoluments appropriated for teaching one set of doctrines while they are teaching another. This is an odd sort of hardship."<sup>2</sup> Are we, I wonder, to have a twentieth-century revival of a similar campaign?

In any case it would almost appear that many to-day have implicitly accepted the dictum of the famous Arian divine, Dr. Samuel Clarke, who in the early part of the eighteenth century declared that "every person may reasonably agree to forms imposed by Protestant communities whenever he can *in any sense*

<sup>1</sup> Cardwell, *Synodalia*, I, 127 (1842).

<sup>2</sup> Speech by Edmund Burke, *Parli'y Hist.*, Vol. XVII, 251-2 (1813).

at all reconcile them with Scripture " <sup>1</sup> without regard as Waterland said then, " to their meaning and intention, either of the persons who first compiled them or who now impose them." Such a position is really an unwarrantable and illegitimate exercise of the Protestant claim to the right of private judgment. We have had a warning as to the practical consequences of Dr. Clarke's position in Newman's interpretation of the Articles as *not necessarily condemnatory of distinctive Roman doctrines*, an interpretation which to the ordinary and unsophisticated mind still appears a non-natural and dishonest attempt to " explain away " for personal or party interests teaching which is not really believed. We see no reason to call in question the censure of the Oxford Hebdomadal Board in 1841 on Tract XC, when it declared that " modes of interpretation, such as are suggested in the said Tract, evaded rather than explained the sense of the Articles, and reconciled subscription to them with the adoption of ' Roman Catholic ' errors which they were designed to counteract." <sup>2</sup> Let me, however, make it quite clear that we do not claim either that the Articles are perfect or that their language could not occasionally be modernized with advantage, or their phraseology improved. But we are entirely convinced that the general body of doctrine " set forth " in them is not only " agreeable to the Word of God " but also as " necessary for these times " as for those of the sixteenth century. This is all that our modified " Declaration of Assent " demands, because we should not forget that prior to 1865 Assent had been exacted to " *all and every* the Articles." We are undoubtedly committed to the clear doctrinal statements concerning such great questions as the Scriptures, the Creeds, the Church, the Ministry and the Sacraments. But this " Declaration " does not bind us rigidly to minor statements concerning, for instance, a Christian's view of war or the " taking of oaths," since these are not in any proper or technical sense matters of doctrine.

I would therefore again emphasize the fact that the Articles form the basis of distinctively Anglican doctrine, and that their Evangelical Catholic teaching is not only Scriptural and primitive, but is also definitely in harmony with that of other Reformed Churches. They are, therefore, the basis of Anglican *Fellowship* as well as of doctrine, since they are careful to exclude none from brotherly communion who make the same Catholic appeal to the Scriptures as the supreme Rule of Faith, and who hold the Trinitarian faith of the Catholic Creeds. No rule is therefore enunciated in them for any essential form of Church polity or Order.

There is no question that the silence on this subject was deliberately designed, since at this very time our Reformers were living in closest fellowship with those Continental Reformers who, mainly through stress of circumstances, had discarded episcopacy. I have confined myself in this paper to the positive *doctrinal* basis of the Articles, but as regards the Basis of Anglican " *Fellowship*," it is impossible to deny the implied negative teaching of the Articles

<sup>1</sup> Waterland's *Works*, I, 35 (1843).    <sup>2</sup> Tract XC, pp. xiv. and xviii.

concerning, for example, corporate relations with the Church of Rome, or the Orthodox Eastern Church. For not only are several of our Articles framed as deliberate answers to the decrees of the Council of Trent, but "Fellowship" with a Church which is declared to have erred "in its living and manner of Ceremonies," or whose doctrines are described as "superstitious" and "repugnant" to the Word of God, is obviously not even contemplated.

We Evangelical Churchmen have thus in this Basis of Doctrine and Fellowship an unassailable historical birthright, and as long as it remains unchanged, as Bishop J. C. Ryle was fond of declaring, we also have an impregnable position in the Church. But should the Articles be seriously tampered with or Clerical "Assent" to them be waived, a most critical and precarious situation will at once be created which might easily result in disruption.

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"THE NEW COMMANDMENT." By C. S. Phillips, D.D. 6s.  
(S.P.C.K. 1930.)

The Church Historical Society has done wisely to reduce the price of one of its publications to a reasonable figure, without lowering its standard in printing, paper and binding, although the relegation of the footnotes to the end of the book hinders the reader's concentration. Dr. Phillips inquires into "the social precept and practice of the ancient Church." He writes easily, with the literary capacity of a writer to whom style is natural. Yet the work is lacking, particularly in the chapters dealing with the New Testament in synthesis. The author analyses his material well, but too many texts are quoted in full, and the first half of the book is somewhat dull. He does not appear to have obtained a complete view of the terrain before beginning the review. His narrative does not present the synthetic compactness so well maintained in the books of the late Sir Samuel Hill. So the reader has difficulty in memorizing the broken threads of his analysis. Yet there is merit in the book, especially in the account of social practice and principles under the Empire in Sub-Apostolic and early Patristic days. He is at his best when he breaks away from his texts and allows an obviously natural and trained historical instinct to express itself. He maintains throughout a calm, balanced and impartial critical faculty.