

**Thirty-Nine Articles:
The Historic Basis of the
Anglican Faith**

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1 The Present Status of the Articles

At the back of every copy of the Church of England Prayer Book are printed thirty-nine short statements about the Christian faith. These Articles of Religion were first drawn up by the Church of England in 1553, were revised and somewhat abbreviated in 1562 and ratified and made binding on the clergy in 1571. ***Since then, the Thirty-Nine Articles have continued to be an authoritative statement of the beliefs and teaching of the Church of England.*** For example, at the present time every Church of England clergyman ordained in England is told at his ordination: "The Church of England . . . has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion . . ." and the ordinand is required to affirm: "I declare my belief in the faith . . . to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness . . ." The same declaration must be made on appointment to a parish or bishopric.

It will be seen that the Thirty-Nine Articles are not only an historical document of the sixteenth century, setting out the doctrinal position of the Church of England at the time of the Reformation when it declared itself a national church free from overseas control; they remain a guide to the doctrines which the ministers of the Church of England are required to believe and teach. They therefore merit careful examination by those who are interested in discovering the historical doctrinal position of the Church of England.

The Thirty-Nine Articles as a doctrinal confession are not restricted to England. They are also incorporated in many of the constitutions of churches of the Anglican Communion elsewhere. When settlers from England migrated overseas they took with them their ways of worship. Thus, during the last two centuries especially, the Church of England has expanded overseas through the migration of settlers to the new colonies as well as through the activity of missionaries both within and beyond the borders of the old colonial empire. The churches which came into being as a consequence were organized at first as a part of the Church of England; but at the present time almost all have been formed into self-governing denominations, though continuing in close fellowship and communion with the Church of England at home. These churches, with the Anglican churches of the British Isles, form what is called the Anglican Communion. It is interesting to see how the Thirty-Nine Articles have been treated in the constitutions which govern the fellowship of these churches. The great majority have adopted the Articles in some way, either by incorporating them in their constitution, or by approving of them by canon, or by including them in their Prayer Book, or by the requirements of clerical subscription, or by the examination of ordinands in the teaching contained in the Articles. Thus, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, the Church of England in Australia, the Anglican Church of Canada, the Church of the Anglican Provinces of New Zealand, South Africa, West Africa, Uganda and Japan, ***are all committed to the teaching***

contained in the Articles, and within the British Isles itself the autonomous Anglican Churches in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland **have all adopted the Thirty-Nine Articles as their doctrinal standard**. However, not all the churches of the Anglican Communion have adopted the Articles. For example, the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon, and the Church of the Province of Central Africa have omitted the Articles from their doctrinal basis. In the Anglican Church in China and in the West Indies the position of the Articles as the doctrinal basis of the Church is not clarified, while in the Church of the Province of East Africa, each diocese is at liberty to adopt the Articles or not at its discretion.

It would, however, be a mistake to think that those Anglican provinces overseas which have accepted the Articles have done so simply as a legacy from the past without deliberately committing themselves to the doctrines contained therein. Their constitutions are comparatively of recent origin, drawn up after careful deliberation. The Church of England in Australia adopted a new constitution only as recently as 1961. In this constitution the Thirty-Nine Articles were given a prominent place under 'Ruling Principles'. To quote that constitution, the Book of Common Prayer of 1662 and the Thirty-Nine Articles are the 'authorized standard . . . of worship and doctrine', and no action of the Church or of any of its ministers can be legitimately discharged within the Church, if it contravenes any principle of doctrine of the Articles. At his ordination a minister of the Church of England in Australia is required to make the following declaration:

The Church of England in Australia, being an Apostolic Church, receives and retains the Catholic Faith, which is grounded in Holy Scripture and expressed in the Creeds, and within its own history, in the Thirty-Nine Articles, in the Book of Common Prayer and in the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons. Accordingly, I, A. B., do solemnly make the following declaration: "I firmly and sincerely believe the Catholic Faith and I give my assent to the doctrine of the Church of England in Australia as expressed in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons; I believe that doctrine to be agreeable to the Word of God."

In view of these facts, the Articles cannot be said to be merely a period piece in the life of the Churches of the Anglican Communion, but are still reiterated as the doctrinal expression of Anglicanism and are required to be believed and assented to by the great majority of the clergy exercising their ministry within it. It might therefore surprise the general reader without first-hand knowledge of the state of thought within the Church of England at present, to be told by Canon G. W. H. Lampe, Ely Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, that "The articles do not now represent the general mind of the church."

However undesirable such a dichotomy between the official profession and actual opinion amongst the clergy may be, the existence of the divergence is confirmed by the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, the Very Reverend W. R. Matthews, who wrote in 1961: "It would be difficult to find any intelligent churchmen who would

accept the articles in their plain meaning." But though this statement may be judged to be exaggerated, it shows that there is a wide divergence between the teaching of the Articles and the teaching of many of those who have assented to the Articles. Because of this, Dean Matthews advocated that the Articles should be revised so that they reflect current opinion amongst present-day clergy. He wrote: "The fundamental complaint I have to make is that the articles do not represent the present mind of the Church." Professor Lampe is of the same opinion. "If the articles were to serve their original purpose today, it would be by representing the common mind, as far as possible, of the Church of England. This they plainly do not."

It will be agreed that it is not a happy thing that there should be a contradiction between what the clergy officially profess and what they believe and teach. The two should coincide.

It is true that documents cannot coerce belief; but the Word of God can evoke it. Consequently, in estimating what place the Articles should play in the life of the Church in the future, it is important to examine their teaching and their presuppositions in comparison with the teaching of Christ and Holy Scripture. This will be attempted briefly in the following chapters.

For clergy of the Church of England, and for members of the Church of England in Australia there are further important reasons for being acquainted with what the Articles teach and their Scriptural basis.

The Church of England in September 1, 1975 reaffirmed its judgement that the doctrine of the Thirty-Nine Articles is a true reflection of the Christian faith revealed in Holy Scripture and from that date onwards requires all its ministers to declare that this is also their opinion. It is therefore a matter of importance to re-examine the contents and scriptural basis of the Articles.

The Church of England in Australia in 1961 adopted the principles of doctrine contained in the articles as part of its standard of doctrine and worship, so that nothing that contravenes these principles of doctrine can be validly enacted or performed in that denomination. *But a standard that is unknown is useless as a standard. Consequently, it becomes a matter of great importance that members of the Church of England in Australia should be knowledgeable on the teaching of the Articles.*

2 The Teaching of the Articles

2.1 *The Doctrine About God*

The Thirty-Nine Articles state on their title page that they were drawn up with a view to obtaining a common consent within the Church of England on matters which were

disputed at the time. This purpose is the explanation of the proportion of space given to various topics, which is governed by the keenness of the debate rather than by the intrinsic importance of the subject. Yet most of the important doctrines of the faith are in fact covered by the Articles. The most noteworthy omission is eschatology, that is, the doctrine of the last things and the return of Christ. In this doctrine the compilers of the Articles do not go beyond the statement of the Creeds (which are endorsed in Article 8). This brevity of statement is not in this case the absence of controversy, because the subject was hotly discussed at the time, but rather because the compilers did not wish to dogmatize about the details in so uncertain a matter, but were content to reaffirm the plain teachings of Scripture, as enshrined in the Creeds, 'He shall come again to judge the living and the dead.'

The first five Articles succinctly summarize the Christian doctrine of God. They deal with an area of doctrine on which there was general agreement at the time. But their inclusion not only fills out a most important aspect of doctrine; these Articles are of great value in view of disputes within the Church of England at present. **In particular two basic doctrines are clearly enunciated in these first five Articles, the sovereignty of God and the finished work of Christ.**

Article 1 begins by affirming the uniqueness of God -- 'There is but one living and true God' -- and ascribes to God 'infinite power'. He is 'the Maker, Preserver of all things'. The absolute sovereignty and control of God over all His creation is an essential doctrine if religion is to flourish and flower. The implicit childlike faith which is characteristic of the Christian religion is impossible unless it is founded on the knowledge of God's infinite power. Trusting prayer is based on a knowledge of God's sovereignty.

There is a notion common these days that God's power is limited -- self-limited by the laws of nature. The notion is similar to the rightly discredited idea that God is 'a God of the gaps', that is, that He operates only in those areas which are still gaps in our knowledge of the working of the laws of nature. However, God is the author of the laws of nature and He is not thwarted in His purposes by them, nor limited in His power. He works His purposes through nature which He created. Because He is an 'unchanging God'. He works uniformly and not capriciously and so we designate the observed uniformity of nature as 'laws of nature'. However, God is not limited in His freedom of action by this regularity, known to us as 'laws of nature'. Yet many modern Christians have fallen into this mistake. For example, they are diffident in praying for seasonable weather, on the view that the weather is controlled by meteorological laws and that as a consequence God has limited Himself in this area. But if limited here, He is limited everywhere, so that all prayer becomes impossible. For there are, in fact, no 'gaps' in nature, though there may still be gaps in our knowledge. But God works through the laws of nature. His sovereignty is not in the slightest degree affected by them. It is God who sends the rain, so Jesus taught. Droughts are His judgment; the drought and the breaking of the drought of Elijah's time were the result of prayer, according to James. If we prefer to think of the

weather as caused by meteorological laws, we must remember that these are secondary causes. God's 'infinite power' is primary and we may have access to Him by prayer.

The sovereignty of God is the basis of the Christian faith, but is not in itself sufficient to sustain the childlike glad trust in God which characterizes Christianity. To a knowledge of God's sovereignty must be added a knowledge of His wisdom and His love. Thus the Article affirms a God of 'infinite power, wisdom and goodness'. Unlimited in these three attributes, God is one in whom we may put our complete trust. **The Bible abounds in examples of this God-honouring trust. Thus Job, suffering fearful 'blows of fate', recognizes that ultimately there is no such thing as fate or chance but all is under the disposition of a wise and loving God. 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord' (Job 1:21).**

A knowledge of God's infinite power, wisdom, and goodness' is the basis of Christian character and conduct. This is illustrated in the life of Joseph. His faith in God's all-controlling providence raised him above the vindictiveness which assails our common humanity and which his brothers assumed he would be subject to. He was free from vengeful thoughts and able to forgive freely because he recognized that it was not his brothers but God who ultimately shaped the details of his life. 'It was not you who sent me here, but God' (Genesis 45:8). 'As for you, you meant evil against me here, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive' (Genesis 50:20). **This last verse reflects the truth that God's absolute sovereignty does not diminish the reality of our decisions or our responsibility for them.**

Humility is characteristic of the Christian ideal and results from a recognition of a loving and wise God's sovereign control of all details of life. 'Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.' (I Peter 5:6). This sentiment is most admirably illustrated in our Lord's life and summarized in His words, 'The cup which my father hath given me, shall I not drink it?' (John 18:11).

Belief in God who is 'of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things' is basic to Christian faith, and though it is played down if not directly denied in many modern theologies, it is boldly affirmed in this opening sentence of the Articles. Article 1 also affirms the spirituality of God and His unity in trinity. The terms it uses in definition of the Trinity are based on our Lord's last commission to the eleven disciples (Matthew 28:20) when He sent them in the name of God to preach the Gospel to all nations. In this commission Jesus expanded the well known Old Testament phrase 'the name of Jehovah' into 'the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost', not thereby changing the disciples' religion but revealing more fully the eternal character of the Lord whom they had worshipped all their life.

Article 5 'Of the Holy Ghost' expands into a short sentence what is stated in the last phrase of Article 1 about the equality in all respects of the Holy Spirit with the other two persons of the Trinity.

The three intervening Articles deal with the person and work of the Son. They affirm with the greatest clarity the supernatural element which characterized the life and death of Jesus. His person is supernatural, being the union of the Godhood and manhood without the loss of any of the essential features of either. The Article affirms the central Christian truth that in Jesus, God has entered into a new and intimate relationship with that part of His creation we know as mankind. God has always been in relationship with His creation. But in the incarnation God entered into a new and unique relationship with men; a relationship which He does not intend to terminate, and which is designed to lead men into eternal fellowship with God through salvation, that is to say, through the forgiveness of their sins. This is a message of a supernatural objective and end. This is the authentic Christian message and it is clearly enunciated in Article 2.

Article 2 affirms unequivocally the historicity of the supernatural birth of Jesus. He was born of a virgin He was eternally pre-existent before His birth. The literal historicity of the resurrection of Jesus is the subject of Article 4. The language could not be more straightforward or plain, in its affirmation of Christ's real resurrection, of His ascension into heaven, of His present reign and of His return to judge the world at the last day.

The person of Christ cannot be separated from the work of Christ if thinking about His person is to avoid becoming merely speculative. On the other hand the work of Christ cannot be understood unless it is seen in the light of the knowledge of His person, who it was who died and rose and will return. Revelation alone gives the key to understanding the meaning of life of Him who 'went about doing good'. The Thirty-Nine Articles rightly hold in close relationship the person of Christ—true God and true man—and the work of Christ. Article 2 affirms that He died 'to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men'. **The phrase 'to reconcile his Father to us' has been criticised as unbiblical doctrine, on the ground that in the parable of the Prodigal it is the son who needs to be reconciled to his father; but this is only one aspect of the matter. The reiterated New Testament concept of the wrath of God against sinners, and the curse under which sinners stand (that is, the curse of God, for ultimately it can have no other source) is a full vindication of the phrase. Christ has delivered us from God's wrath and from God's curse, to use the language of Scripture.** That is to say, His death had an objective efficacy of removing a barrier of guilt which prevented our holy God from receiving us into full and intimate fellowship with Himself, which is eternal life. This barrier God has Himself removed, through the death of Christ. 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son . . .' (John 3:16).

The Articles affirm that Christ's death is efficacious for salvation and the restoration of fellowship, and moreover that it is completely efficacious, needing no supplementing from our side.'The offering of Christ once made is that 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' (Article 31).

Article 15 also holds in close unity the person and work of Christ. He was truly and fully human 'Christ in the truth of our nature was made like unto us in all things, sin only except'; and the purpose of His incarnation was to accomplish His redemptive death. 'He came to be the Lamb without spot, who, by sacrifice of himself once made, should take away the sins of the world.'

2.2 *The Authority of Holy Scripture*

The Articles highlight the supernatural character of Christianity. Since its truths are not to be read in the book of nature, whether of the natural world around us or the natural working of mind or conscience within us, it becomes a matter of importance to ascertain where a knowledge of this supernatural religion is to be found. The Articles are clear that God's revelation is contained in Holy Scripture (Article 6), which is defined as 'God's Word written' (Article 20).

There was no controversy at the time the Articles were composed with regard to the supernatural character of the Word of Scripture. Christianity was recognized by all as a religion of revelation and all confessed that that revelation rested on the Word of God -- for revelation can have no other base. It was further agreed by all that the Bible was the Word of God. But at this point a disagreement of enormously important consequences developed which may be stated briefly in a twofold question: (a) Was the Bible the only Word of God, that is, the only source of revelation? (b) Was the revelation contained in the Bible clear and perspicuous, so as to be self-interpreting?

The Council of Trent had affirmed in its fourth session that 'it receives and venerates with equal affection of piety and reverence' Holy Scripture and ecclesiastical tradition, and this was universally taken to mean that tradition ranked on an equality with Scripture as a source of God's revelation. The effect of this was, in fact, to subordinate Scripture to tradition, as tradition was so much more voluminous than Scripture and was explicit on topics absent from -- or at best, obscure in -- Scripture.

Ecclesiastical tradition in itself is an amorphous concept. So many of the sentiments of the Fathers and later church authors are no longer regarded as true, and so many features of church rites have been superseded, that a criterion is needed to distinguish true tradition from the fallacious in which it is embedded. If this criterion is not to be the written word of Holy Scripture, as the Articles maintain, it has to be the dominant current teaching of the organized Church. It follows that if tradition is to share the unique authority of Holy Scripture as a guide to faith and conduct, the current teaching office of the Church (in the Roman Church, the papacy) must in turn be endowed with infallibility; for only by coincidence with the current teaching of the Church can the authentic tradition be defined and separated from erroneous opinions of the church authors, amongst

which it is to be found. As Pope Pius IX put it, 'I am tradition'. In this way both Holy Scripture and also tradition itself, as something subsisting in the past, are subordinated to current church teaching, which, as a consequence, is all that the ordinary Christian needs to be in contact with.

Thus Trent, by placing Scripture and tradition on an equality, ensured that Scripture would be effectively subordinated to the current teaching of the Church, so that Scripture could no longer fulfill its proper role (which inalienably belongs to it as the Word of God) of correcting current church teaching and practice.

The subordination of Scripture to current church teaching was strengthened by the Roman Catholic insistence (in answer to our second question) that Scripture is not clear nor perspicuous, but obscure in its meaning, so that its teaching cannot be gathered from its pages by the ordinary method of reading them, but needs an interpreter to inform the reader of its meaning. This interpreter is said to be the Church as endowed by God with infallibility for this purpose. **The result of such teaching is that there is little reason for the ordinary Christian to read the Bible, for he will be misled unless he follows closely the guidance of the Church in his reading;** whereas by going directly to this teaching of the Church he will have not only an infallible but also a fuller and clearer guide to the revelation of God.

Over against the Council of Trent the Church of England affirmed the sufficiency of Holy Scripture as the source of God's revelation, and not only its sufficiency but also its self-sufficiency. It needs no outside interpretation.

Article 6 states quite plainly the sufficiency of Scripture as the source of divine revelation. 'Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation.' Since revelation, or the action of God in making Himself known to men, is for the purpose of salvation, **the statement that Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation implies that there are no fresh truths of revelation to be discovered either in nature or in church history and tradition which are not to be found in Scripture.** Nature, the work of the Creator, certainly illustrates the divinity of God -- 'The heavens declare the glory of God' (Ps. 19:1), and human history provides many examples of God's providential care -- for those who have eyes to see God's hand. **But the Articles affirm that ultimately there is only one source of our knowledge of God as Saviour, Holy Scripture, or 'God's Word written'.**

The Articles are careful to avoid a common modern mistake of making a division between God's Word written and Jesus Christ, the living Word. The Articles reflect the recognition that a knowledge of Jesus, the Word of God, is inseparable from a knowledge of God revealed throughout the Old and New Testaments. Article 7 affirms that Christ is the voice behind all Scripture. 'Both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man.'

Holy Scripture is the instrument by which God's salvation is brought to men. It is a suitable instrument because salvation comes to us in the form of a promise couched in the words of Scripture and based on the acts of God narrated in Scripture. The promise is God's promise, whether spoken by the Holy Spirit through the words of a prophet or prophetic writer, or from the lips of our Lord Himself or His apostles. The promise is held out for us for acceptance -- 'offered' as the Articles puts it. Since it is God's promise it is a reliable and unfulfilling promise which will not deceive those who by believing it put their trust in Him who makes this promise of eternal life.

Article 6 affirms not only the sufficiency of Scripture but also its self-sufficiency. Scripture is self-interpreting, that is to say, that it has the properties of any other carefully written book in that its meaning is intelligible to the reader. This is implied by the statement of the Article, '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.' This sentence rests the knowledge of revelation contained in the Bible on our natural faculties and abilities. **A complete knowledge of revelation may be obtained simply by reading the Bible and by straightforward deductions from its statements. By these affirmations the Articles excludes the necessity for an authorized interpreter of the Bible.**

There is nothing surprising that this should be the case. The gift of intelligence, which finds expression in reading with comprehension and drawing plain deductions from statements, is one of God's highest gifts to mankind and it would indeed be remarkable if, in giving us a revelation of Himself designed to lead to our salvation, God by-passed this gift and gave us a revelation in written form which could not be safely understood without the aid of an outside interpreter.

The affirmation that the Scriptures are clear and perspicuous can be put to the test very simply by reading them, if not in the original languages, at least in a good translation, of which there are several in English. Their clarity and perspicuity will become immediately evident.

An intellectual apprehension of what the Scriptures are saying is not difficult and does not require an outside interpreter. However, acceptance of the truth of what is being said, and apprehension of our own relationship to it, is another matter and comes about only when the Spirit of God writes His Word on our heart, that is, touches the inmost point of our personality so that we align ourselves with what is being said. This in turn leads to a much deeper apprehension and understanding of what the Bible is all about. It is here that the 'church', i.e. the Christian fellowship, plays its vital role in a Christian's understanding of the Bible. God has set Christians in community in order that each should minister to other, so that all may grow together into the fullness of the likeness of Christ. We cannot 'go it alone' as Christians. **We each help each other to a fuller understanding of God's revelation, not in an infallible way but by drawing attention to the plain teaching of Scripture and its implications for life, and by witnessing to its verification in experience. This is**

what preaching should consist in -- exposition of the teaching of Scripture and its application to life's situation. In so far as modern preaching fails to do this, progress of the Christian community in the knowledge and ways of God comes to a halt.

It is sometimes objected that the numerous denominations of protestantism are a sign that the humble and straightforward reading of Scripture as the Word of God within the Christian fellowship is insufficient to lead to a sure knowledge of the mind of God. But an examination of these differences will show that they concerned with matters not contained in Scripture, matters 'not to be read therein nor to be proved thereby.' Thus these differences do not prove that Scripture is either insufficient or unclear; rather they show that Christians quarrel and divide about things not sufficiently important to be included by the Spirit of God amongst the matters treated of in Holy Scripture. On such a matter, whether it is episcopacy, or adult baptism, or any of the other points that divide protestant denominations, Article 6 states definitively that it is 'not to be required of any man, that is should be believed as an article of the Faith.' The way forward in church union is to recognize these matters of indifference for what they are and not to allow them for a moment to be barriers to full Christian fellowship across the denominations. For fellowship is the Christian's duty.

The Thirty-Nine Articles state that all revelation given for salvation is contained in Holy Scripture. This follows from the statement that all necessary articles of faith are contained in Scripture; for nothing that God has revealed is unnecessary or optional for belief. **It follows that individuals as well as all human institutions ought to be subject to the mind of God as revealed in Holy Scripture, and in particular that Christians and the corporate Christian fellowship (or 'church') and the institutions which are based on this fellowship ought to be subject to Holy Scripture.** None of the Articles specifically formulates this duty of individual and institution to conform to the direction of Holy Scripture, but the subjection of church activities to Holy Scripture is clear from the language of many of the Articles. The most conspicuous example is Article 8 'Of the Creeds'. This Article shows that the Church of England accepts the Creeds -- those most venerable of all church traditions -- not because of their own intrinsic authority but because 'they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.'

Ecumenical (or general) councils of the church -- the most authoritative organ of the voice of the organizational church -- are judged by the same standards. Article 21 asserts: 'Things ordained by them [general councils] as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared that they be taken out of Holy Scripture.'

Article 20 states that the Church in arranging its domestic life and worship is at no point to come into conflict with Scripture, and this principle is illustrated in the language of many of the subsequent Articles which condemn various practices current in the religious life of the times, as for example the use of a language not

understood by the congregation (Article 24), the forbidding of the clergy to marry (Article 32), the reservation and adoration of the sacrament (Article 28), and indulgences, adoration of images and relics, and prayers to the saints (Article 22). **The reasons given for rejection of all these practices is that they are contrary to or unsupported by Holy Scripture.**

'Secular' institutions, in particular the government, are subject to the same test. 'We give . . . to our Princes . . . that only prerogative, which we see to have been given always to all godly Princes in Holy Scriptures by God Himself' (Article 37).

2.3 *The Doctrine of Salvation*

The Reformers' great concern was that the Church should know and preach the Gospel of the grace of God. The basis of the Gospel of grace is the doctrine that God has provided a full and complete ground of salvation in the death of Christ. This is affirmed in Article 31 and referred to in Articles 2, 15, and 28. Salvation becomes ours by way of God's promise (based on Christ's death) and our believing the promise. Article 7 refers to the promise; Article 11 refers to our response of faith. This latter Article states that God judges us worthy of ourselves but only on account of Christ's worthiness. Faith is the means by which we participate in this salvation -- faith in God known in the death and resurrection of Jesus. **We make no contribution from ourselves to our salvation. From Beginning to end it is of God's grace. Our Justification, or our being accepted as worthy by God, does not wait on any 'work' of ours which we may accomplish in the time-process in which our life is set. It is simultaneous with our apprehension, in the inmost recess of our personality, of the grace of God in Christ and it precedes any action of our will from which 'works' flow. We are saved by God solely on the basis of Christ's 'works' and the means whereby God saves us is our believing His truth.**

The knowledge that our salvation is of God and is not suspended, even in part, on the outcome of our own vacillating efforts is a doctrine full of great strength, nerving us to battle and endure for our Saviour even in the face of defeat. Article 11 'Of the Justification of Man', which succinctly states this key doctrine, deserves to be quoted in full. 'We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour 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.' (The homily referred to is the third of the first book of the Homilies of the Church of England.)

The doctrine of salvation of a sinner entirely by the grace of God greatly enhances our understanding of the love of God, and redounds to God's glory; **but it is not a doctrine which would have occurred to anyone if it were not taught in Scripture.** All mankind is conscious from time to time of guilt, and it seems natural

that the way, if any, to expiate guilt is by some action of our own, perhaps a sacrifice or prayer, perhaps more ascetic and painful action, perhaps reformation of life. But the Reformers saw that the Bible taught that none of these things was the ground, or shared in the ground, of our forgiveness and salvation. However, the biblical doctrine is so strange to our natural ideas, and the activity of our wills as the ground (or contributing vitally to the ground) of salvation is so congenial to human thought, that whenever the Bible is not carefully read and expounded, or whenever it is no longer regarded as authoritative, the Gospel of God's grace is lost (or at least obscured) and no longer has the liberating and exhilarating effect on our life that it should have.

Many of the Articles are devoted to cutting off the ways by which history showed the Gospel of God's grace could be eroded or diluted by the doctrine of salvation by our works. Articles 9 and 10 teach that human nature, since the advent of sin, no longer has the power to enable it to act in a way that is pleasing to God. Article 9 speaks of 'original or birth-sin', that bias of our nature which draws us to act against the will of God known to us in our conscience. God did not create mankind thus and it meets with God's disapproval. This bias towards sin remains in us even after our adoption as God's children, so that the apostle Paul can speak of 'the sin which dwells in me' (Romans 7:17 ESV [R.S.V.]) and of the 'flesh' whose desires run counter to those of the Holy Spirit, so that we are not able to do what we would (Galatians 5:17). Such a nature is no satisfactory basis for winning our way to heaven by our own works. We are always in need of forgiveness.

Article 10 speaks of the weakness of our will, which of itself can never choose God. As fallen sinners our nature is self-centred, not God centred; though a moment's reflection shows that this is wrong in a creature -- in a being, that is, who is not self-sufficient but is contingent and dependent, as we know ourselves to be. However, we have not the strength of will to abandon this self-centredness of ourselves so as to become God-centred. Our wills simply serve our nature, which is now self-centred. They cannot change our basic nature. Such being the case, it is impossible that our will should be the means of our salvation.

Articles 9 and 10 make clear that in ourselves there remains no way by which we can begin to return to God. This idea is highly uncongenial to our natural way of thinking. It can only be maintained so long as it is recognized as clearly taught in Scripture, and so long as Scripture in its plain meaning remains authoritative for the Christian.

Article 11 states that the way of salvation is by the merit of Christ, though faith. Article 12 is a postscript to Article 11, explaining the place of good works and Christian conduct. Our salvation is not based on our conduct, but Christian conduct is the consequence of our salvation. Good works are an outward indication of our new relationship to God, 'By them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.' **However, our conduct is never as perfect as it should be; it**

can therefore never merit our salvation, for taken by itself it comes short, and so deserves God's condemnation.

If a Christian's life on earth is never free from the taint of the old nature, so that his acceptance with God always depends on his relationship with Christ and never on his works viewed in themselves (so much is stated in Article 12), it follows *a fortiori* that a man's life before he comes under the leading of the Holy Spirit as a Christian cannot win God's favour. This is stated in Article 13. The teaching of this Article has met with hostile comment in some modern Christian circles. This is through a misapprehension of the meaning of the language of the Article, which must be construed in close connection with Article 12. The latter states that the Christian's imperfect works are only (fully) pleasing to God **because they are seen in the context of a Christian's standing in Christ. For in themselves these imperfections call out 'the severity of God's judgement', since God is holy. The imperfect works (and even the best are such) of those as yet outside of Christ do not share in the benefit of forgiveness that is through Christ.** It is therefore inevitable that when brought to the bar of God's judgement such works must be described as 'not pleasant to God', for inevitably 'they have the nature of sin'. The Article is concerned to show that sinners cannot in any way merit God's salvation; this remains wholly a gift of God's grace and mercy. Merited salvation is not mercy but reward.

Article 14 makes clear that **no Christian can exceed God's requirements, so as to put himself in God's debt.** It is directed against the Roman Catholic doctrine of works of supererogation. At first sight it may seem extraordinary that any Christian should think that he can be better than God requires. yet the concept is inherent in salvation by merit. For this implies a standard to be attained, and if this is to be fixed within the capacity of the ordinary Christian to attain, plainly the more saintly can exceed it. The overplus of merit is then available for assignment, by papal indulgence, to penitents whose own merits come short of the standard. The Article, basing itself on Scripture, denies the possibility of exceeding God's requirements and says that the notion cannot be entertained without arrogancy and impiety. [Editor's note: See Luke 17:7-10 ESV].

Article 15 insists that no one but Christ attains to God's requirements.'All the rest . . . offend in many things.'

Article 16 teaches that no sinner should despair, for there is always a place of forgiveness and restoration for those who repent.

Predestination

Predestination is the sheet anchor of the doctrine of grace. This is illustrated by the Epistle to the Romans in which St. Paul establishes that our salvation rests on God's grace exclusively. He cites the two twins, Esau and Jacob, as the classic example,

commenting 'Though they were not yet born and had done nothing, either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, she [Rebecca] was told, "The elder will serve the younger"' (Romans 9:11-12, R.S.V.).

So in the Thirty-Nine Articles the doctrine of election is fundamental to the sovereignty of grace. Article 17, the longest of the Articles, deals with topic. (1) Its first sentence affirms that all who reach heaven do so because before the foundation of the world God chose them and unalteringly decreed to confer on them this benefit. (2) The second sentence lists the seven stages of the progress of the elect from 'curse and damnation' to 'everlasting salvation' -- God's call, their response through grace, their free justification, their adoption as God's sons, the formation of a Christlike character within them, **their expression of this in a life of good works, 'and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.'** We note here the two-sidedness of grace: God's sovereign initiative works through the faculties of our nature. God calls, we respond; God justifies, adopts, sanctifies, we live out a Christian life and finally attain to everlasting felicity. *But our response is not to be regarded as our own contribution to our salvation but is itself God's gift, 'They through grace obey', 'At length, by God's mercy, they attain'.*

It is the same group of persons who pass through these seven stages, and in this respect the article is reminiscent of St. Paul's 'golden chain' in Romans 8:29 f. However, in these two opening sentences the Article does not go beyond Augustine in affirming the irresistibility of grace and the effectual character of God's call. **The indefectibility and perseverance of the saints is not touched on till the third sentence which comprises the second paragraph. In this third sentence the Article sides clearly with Calvin, going beyond Augustine who taught that the gift of perseverance is not given to all the regenerate and that it is consequently possible to fall from a state of salvation and be eternally lost.** The consequence of this possibility is that no one would know whether he is elect, apart from a special personal revelation from God. Thus Thomas Aquinas wrote: 'No one can know whether he has sanctifying grace' (*Summa Theol. II. 112. 5*); and the Council of Trent affirmed: 'Except by special revelation, it cannot be known whom God has chosen unto Himself' (Session VI, Chapter 12). **However, in its second paragraph Article 17 affirms (3) that our predestination and election in Christ may be known to us and be the subject of our meditation, yielding 'sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort'.** (4) *This knowledge or certification of our election results from knowledge of the promises of God, and from our perception of the working of God's Spirit within us. Consequently we know that we are within the unbroken chain of God's purposes of blessing leading to eternal felicity.* (5) *This knowledge yields not only 'comfort' but increase in active godliness. For love kindles love, and a knowledge of God's steadfast love in delivering us from the curse and damnation we deserve and leading us without fail to 'eternal Salvation to be enjoyed through Christ', fervently kindles love towards God.'*

A perception of the working of the Spirit of Christ in us is the assurance that God has adopted us as sons and chosen us in Christ; **but an absence of this Spirit is no sign that a man is not elect (for all the elect begin in this state!)**. Nevertheless it may be so construed by the spiritually unenlightened, as experience shows. The Article, recognizing this, affirms (6) that the doctrine of predestination is a doctrine for the believer.

The Christian should always view the doctrine of predestination from the standpoint of his position in Christ. Looking backward he sees God's eternal grace choosing him in Christ, calling him, adopting him, glorifying him. As he looks forward he rejoices in the sure hope of salvation, for God is faithful, who called him and will confirm him to the end (I Corinthians 1:8; Philippians 1:6; I Thessalonians 5:24). However, if it is separated from our experience in Christ and from our faith in God, it becomes a merely speculative doctrine (for example in the phrase, 'once saved always saved' which contains no reference to God at all). It then has no religious value, and some of its apparent deductions may run counter to Christian conduct. **Consequently in the Article's fourth sentence and last paragraph it is affirmed (7) that we must regulate our deductions from the doctrine of predestination by the plain teaching of Scripture; for example (a) we must not despair of God's promises, arguing that we are non-elect, nor (b) must we presume on our election to the neglect of the clearly revealed will of God as to our duty and the way we are to live our lives.**

The Article confines itself to discussing 'Predestination to Life'. It does not touch on reprobation (or preterition). [Charlie's comment: But Article 17 does say that the non-elect are under God's sentence: . . . *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 wretchedness of most unclean living no less perilous than desperation.*] The omission is not a denial of the doctrine of reprobation, as is sometimes assumed, but a recognition of the over-whelming predominance of the doctrine of predestination to life in the treatment of the subject in Scripture, compared with the mystery of reprobation which is only touched on in half a dozen passages in Scripture. Predestination to life is a constant topic of Scripture, and consequently appropriately finds a prominent place in the Articles.

The seventeenth Article not only accompanies Calvin beyond the point where Augustine stopped short, **but it effectively excludes an Arminian interpretation of predestination.** Arminius, a Dutch theologian of the early seventeenth century, following many predecessors stretching back to the days before Augustine, based God's predestination not on His good pleasure (and so entirely within Himself) but on His foresight of how a man would respond to the opportunities of repentance and faith granted him. For Arminius, God's predestination (or decision about a man's future) follows the foresight of man's own decision. In this way the scriptural word 'predestination' is retained, but is evacuated of any real meaning. **However, the**

Article clearly excludes this Arminian interpretation, for such a doctrine that our predestination is dependent on the exercise of our own will could never be twisted to become 'a most dangerous downfall' were an unspiritual person to have it 'continually before his eyes', for it is the very thing which such people normally imagine to be the case. Nor could it ever lead to desperation or unclean living, for it bases 'predestination' entirely on the quality of a man's continual response to the Gospel.

These warnings of the Article confirm that its subject is the doctrine of absolute and unconditional election, for they deal with false and erroneous deductions which are sometimes made from this doctrine. The warnings are irrelevant in Arminian 'predestination'.

Article 18 concludes the group of articles (9-18) which deal specifically with individual salvation. ***It anathematizes the latitudinarian spirit which would open the gate of heaven to all who live a decent life.*** The doctrine of predestination (as expounded in Article 17) particularizes salvation and grounds it exclusively on Christ's merits and God's free gift; **but the logical outcome of rejection of this doctrine is that God's salvation is generalized into the possibility of salvation, so that actual salvation comes to depend on the quality of a man's response, and not exclusively on God's grace.** The quality of this response becomes the essential differentiating element in salvation. The doctrinal tendency to find a place for man's will in the ground of his salvation reaches its logical conclusion in the view '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'. This view the Article anathematizes, 'For holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the Name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved.' (See Acts 4:12). If we think of our natural state as sinners as being 'without God', and 'children of wrath', and spiritually 'dead' (Ephesians 2) the doctrine of Articles 17 and 18 is unavoidable.

Article 18 contains the only anathema in the Thirty-Nine Articles. Significantly enough it is directed against the full-blown form of the doctrine that salvation depends on man's own works; for it was this doctrine of works that was the basic quarrel that the Reformers had with the papal system of religion. At the time of the Reformation their opponents would have agreed with the Reformers in the sentiments of Article 18. But in the passage of the centuries the Roman doctrine of works has expressed itself within the Roman Communion in very similar language to that anathematized by the Article. Thus Hans Kung has written: 'Yvonne (a Protestant) . . . can win eternal life if she lives according to her conscience and keeps God's commandments.' Kung speaks similarly of how 'a pagan . . . can be saved'. Support for this doctrine of salvation through following the light of conscience is sometimes sought in the Epistle to the Romans, chapters one and two. ***But in these chapters the apostle is not dealing with the salvation of the Gentiles but with the responsibility involved in possessing a conscience, and the culpability that comes from not following it.*** He concludes this argument: 'We before laid to the charge

both of Jews and Greeks, that they are all under sin . . . ' For they are all under law, either of Scripture or of nature, 'that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God: **because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight**' (Romans 9:9, 19f, R.S.V.). The possibility of salvation through the light of nature is no longer a private opinion amongst Roman Catholics but has been endorsed by the Second Vatican Council. In paragraph 16 of its Constitution On the Church, which was promulgated in November 1964, the Second Vatican Council declared:

The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place among these there are the Moslems . . . Those also can attain a salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life.

It is difficult to see how in practice this is distinguishable from Pelagianism.

2.4 The Sacraments and the Church

The Thirty-Nine Articles aim to block off any loophole by which the idea that salvation results from our own actions -- an idea very congenial to our natural way of thinking -- might find lodgement again among the doctrines held by the Church of England. History shows that the sacraments are especially liable to be interpreted in this way. They are easily misinterpreted as religious works, by doing which the sinner obtains grace from God. Consequently the Articles are careful to define the sacraments as essentially God's Word to us. They speak and witness to us "of grace, and God's good will towards us". (Article 25). As in the written word of Scripture, so in the acted word of the sacraments, **it is faith in God and in His promise which brings the blessing promised, whether it be salvation or any other gift. Consequently the Articles make it abundantly clear that if the sacraments are received without faith on the part of the recipient, they are as ineffective as is the Word heard but not believed.** Thus Article 29 declares that "such as be void of a lively faith", although they partake of the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, "yet in no wise are they partakers of Christ." This absolute negative -- *nullo modo*, (See Latin translation of Article 29) "**in no way**" -- **effectively excludes the notion that Christ is in some sense associated with the bread and wine in a local manner so that those who receive the bread and wine, even without faith, in some sense receive Christ.**

Christ dwells in the hearts of the worshippers by faith. He is present to their personalities by His Spirit, and this is the *only* manner of His presence in His Supper. This is unequivocally stated in Article 28. "The Body of Christ is given, taken,

and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the means whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith."

Baptism is spoken of in the same way. It is a "visible sign" of "the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost" (Article 27).

The same Article likens baptism to an instrument of conveyance. Waterland commented: "A deed of conveyance, or any like instrument under hand and seal, is not a real estate, but it conveys one, and it in effect the estate itself, as the estate goes along with it, and as the right, title, and property (which are real acquirements) are as it were bound up in it and subsist in it" (*Works*, VII, p. 147). The deeds remain parchment and wax. They are not the property itself. But they are not merely parchment and wax, nor are they merely reminders of the property. The person who receives them receives the property; yet on one important condition: he must be the duly qualified person to receive them, otherwise the deeds convey nothing to him. **So the sacraments convey eternal life by way of promise to those (and only those) who perceive and believe that promise.**

The sacraments are God's sacraments, God's gracious words of promise to us. Through them God holds out to us everlasting life in Christ. This becomes ours by our response of faith. They are therefore God's instruments, not our works. As Article 25 puts it, "by the which he doth strengthen and confirm our Faith in him". This being the case, an unworthy minister does not hinder the salutary effects of the sacraments, for so long as the promise is clear through them, that promise may be received by faith (Article 26).

The sacraments embody the promise, as does the Word. But they are not self-explanatory, as the Word is, conveying its own meaning by its inherent intelligibility. They depend upon the Word for their actions to be symbolic and meaningful. They are therefore signs of God's grace only so long as they are understood in the context of the Word. But when accompanied by the explanatory Word (whether explicit or implicit) they become "effectual signs". The signs are effectual in two senses: not only effectual because the actions of which they consist, i.e., washing and eating, lend themselves to conveying helpfully the message of forgiveness and incorporation into Christ, but effectual because, like the Word, being clear messengers of God's grace, they are the means of bringing the promised blessings to those who believe and who express their faith in the promise by using its signs. Thus Article 25 describes the sacraments as "sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will towards us".

Though the sacraments depend upon the Word for their character as signs, they go beyond the Word inasmuch as they are actions. **They impress God's promises on our minds not merely by the sense of hearing but by sight and touch, and so they fortify faith.** Moreover, they enable the believer to signify his response to the promises by his actions and not merely by his mental attitude or words. For example,

he looks "to God for a clear conscience" (I Peter 3:21, R.S.V.) as he engages in the sacramental expression of this in baptism.

Because the sacraments are actions, acted promise and acted response, they may be spoken of as *seals* which confirm the promise in our consciousness. Although the New Testament does not refer to the sacraments in this way, it was a favourite thought amongst the Reformers and finds a place in the Articles (Article 27). ***It is the promise of adoption which the Articles speaks of as sealed by the sacrament of baptism. The thing promised, namely our adoption itself, is sealed to us by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.*** "Because you are sons God sent the Spirit of his son into your hearts." (Galatians 4:6).

The sacraments, being religious actions in which we engage, are easily thought of as primarily our actions, undertaken either for God's honour, or to obtain some merit or grace. In particular the Lord's supper is sometimes thought of as an offering we make to God. Since the offering made by Christ is the only offering that can be made on behalf of sinners which is acceptable to God, the Lord's supper has been interpreted as an offering associated in various ways with the offering of Christ on Calvary. **Article 31 severely condemns this notion.** Christ's offering was made once for all and is complete in every respect.

The sacraments express primarily not our action but God's; yet they are actions which incorporate our response to Him. That response is always and only faith, embodied by the outward action of receiving the sign of God's proffered blessing. Promise and response, both coalescing in symbolic action, make up the sacrament. ***Actions which obscure the promise or which symbolize the wrong response destroy the sign.*** Thus three current malpractices of the time -- non-communicating attendance at the Lord's supper, the reservation of the consecrated bread and wine, and their adoration -- are all condemned in the last paragraph of Article 25 on the ground that they are distortions of the sacraments from their purpose and proper use according to the mind of Christ.

The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper (or literally 'dinner') is a communion, that is, a fellowship with the Lord, and with one another in the presence of the Lord. The basis of the fellowship of the Lord's dinner is His death on Calvary for the sins of the world. He designated the food of the meal as a sacrament or sign of His body given for us and His blood shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins. As we share in this fellowship in the way that He has commanded we acknowledge and proclaim the great fact of His saving death, His sacrifice of Himself which He made for our sakes and which is the ground of the covenant of our relationship with God; we remember Jesus our Redeemer, our Lord and our coming King Who has appointed us a place at His table in His kingdom; we have fellowship with Him and He with us. "He dines with us and we with Him." (Rev.

3:20). **All remembrance of Jesus by a regenerate, Spirit-filled soul is full of precious fellowship. His Spirit is present to our spirit whenever we relate ourselves to Him in our thoughts, consequently the notion of a bare remembrance of Jesus in the Lord's Supper is an impossible notion with regard to anyone who is in a spiritual relationship with the Lord.**

By coming to Him and believing in Him we feed on Him the living bread which came down from heaven, we become one loaf with Him (John 6:32-35, I Corinthians 10:17). We eat His flesh which He gave for the life of the world and we drink His blood which was given for us and which cleanses us from all sin. Our souls rise in communal thanksgiving, the offering of the sacrifice of praise; and we pledge ourselves to His obedience in offering ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice to Him.

The word "sacrament" is a synonym for the word "sign" and the one word may be substituted for the other without any change in meaning. **The Lord's Supper is the sacrament of our redemption. It remains a sacrament, that is, it is not to be identified with the thing signified, for that would annihilate the sign which the Lord appointed and would overthrow the nature of a sacrament.**

The bread and the wine are a sign or sacrament of the Lord's Body and Blood given in death for our sins, that is, they are a sign of Christ crucified for us. **Our Lord's presence is not indicated by way of a sign, but is experienced through the Spirit, in reality, in accordance with His promise, by those who receive the benefit of his passion, the forgiveness of their sins.**

By faith we take and eat and drink the Body and the Blood of Christ (whereof the bread and wine is a sacrament), that is, **by faith we partake of His death for us, and of all its benefits.** Christ in his death for us (or putting it another way, the Body and Blood of Christ) is present only sacramentally, that is to say, only by a sign (the bread and the wine) of this death being present.

But it is not Christ's presence, or Christ as present, which we eat and drink. We eat and drink the signs of His atoning death. They remain nothing but signs -- bare signs if you like to put it thus. His presence, in His risen power, is due to His promise to be among those who meet in His name, and the manner of His presence is His Spirit which He gives to all who believe in Him. He is indeed present, and we partake of that presence, if we wish to put it thus (for it is a person who is present), by fellowship with Him, as with faith we eat and drink the sign (or sacrament) which speaks to us of him.

"His presence" and "His body and blood" are not identical concepts. The true feeding on the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper depends on the reality of His spiritual presence in the heart and the mind of the worshipper. His spiritual presence is not to be thought of as dependent on a 'real presence' of his body and blood but it is the same presence in the Lord's Supper as in every other aspect of the Christian life, it is the presence of Spirit to our spirit made real by God's word, conscious in the mind of the Christian. The Lord's Supper, with the signs of His death intergrated within it, is a

very vivid bringing to mind of Christ and His word and so becomes a deep fellowship with Christ. It is not, however, any different sort of fellowship from that which the Christian enjoys with the Lord in His daily life outside the congregation. But it has the added dimension of being enjoyed in the company and fellowship of others who are enjoying this same fellowship with Christ at the same time so that the consciousness of the presence of Christ's body (i.e. our fellow Christians in their relationship to Jesus) should be no less vivid than the consciousness of the presence of the Lord Jesus present to our spirit (I Corinthians 11:29). We and our fellow Christians were crucified with Christ on the Cross (Galatians 2:20). We have been formed into a unity through being in that crucified body (Ephesians 2:16). The Lord's Supper is a celebration of that event. That is why it is necessary to recognize the body and consider one another, if we are to eat the Lord's Dinner and not merely eat our own dinner (I Corinthians 11:29; I Corinthians 11:20-21).

The grace (that is, the gift or benefit from God) of this sacrament is fellowship with Christ in the Spirit on the basis of the forgiveness of our sins. No greater grace, gift or benefit is possible in this life, and it is brought about on every heart felt remembrance of Christ, a remembrance which the Lord's Supper especially and vividly evokes as we eat and drink together in obedience to our Lord's command, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

Those who, without repentance and faith, eat the bread and the wine in the context of the Lord's Supper eat the sign of His death but they are not brought into any relationship with Christ thereby. "They in no wise partake of Christ" (Article 29). For they do not recognise the divine fellowship of redeemed and Redeemer, which is the Lord's Dinner, nor acknowledge the basis of that fellowship, namely, that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:3).

The Doctrine of Ministry

The pages of the New Testament show that in each Christian church there were various ministries. The Spirit of God was the source of these ministries, distributing to each church member a gift of ministry in accordance with the divine will. The New Testament enjoins on Christians the duty of recognizing these ministries which have God for their source, and of accepting from God what He gives for them through their ministers. But the New Testament does not descend to details with regard to the ministry. ***It would appear that there was considerable diversity amongst New Testament churches not only as to the form of ministry but also as to the duties of office-bearers, such as elders, and as to the way in which the church recognized and commissioned the ministers.***

Article 23 'Of Ministering in the Congregation' follows the example of the New Testament, in that it could not be more general in its terms. It recognizes the fact of ministry, and states that those who minister publicly in the congregation should not do so till their call is confirmed by 'men who have public authority given unto them

in the Congregation, to call and send Ministers into the Lord's vineyard.' ***But who these men are the Article does not specify, and so does not tie the doctrine of the Church of England to any one form of church polity.***

It is, of course, well-known that the Church of England has retained the polity of episcopacy. However, ***none of its formularies goes beyond saying that episcopacy is an ancient form of church polity stretching back to the time of the apostles.*** This much is stated in the Preface to the Ordinal, which adds that it is the Church of England's intention to continue this polity of bishops, priests and deacons. What the Preface omits to say is significant in view of ecumenical discussion. For example, it is not said that it is a polity enjoined in Scripture, or that it is the only valid form of Christian ministry, or even that it is the best form.

Although Anglicans are not required to affirm that episcopacy is the best form of church ministry they are required to recognize that it is a valid ministry, not contrary to Scripture, for Article 36 affirms that the Church of England Ordinal contains nothing 'superstitious and ungodly', nor is it to be thought defective as a form of service for the ordering of ministry.

It is also worthy of notice that the language of the Church of England formularies is careful not to contradict the view held, for example, by Jerome and other Church Fathers, that bishops and priests belong to the one order of ministry. Thus Article 36 speaks of the consecration of archbishops and bishops, but of the ordering of priests and deacons. The same distinction is made in the page headings of the Ordinal, while the Preface speaks of 'these orders', not 'three orders', as it is sometimes misread.

The Doctrine of the Church and the Denominations

One other topic of importance in the Articles remains to be noticed. This is the doctrine of the church, the local congregation, and the association of congregations known as denominations. Though this is a matter only briefly dealt with in the Articles, it is a subject of urgent importance at the present time on account of the interest aroused by ecumenicism and the efforts that are being made towards church union, and consequently it deserves careful examination.

The authority and character of the Church was one of the principle areas of disagreement at the time of the Reformation. We have already seen that the Thirty-Nine Articles very distinctly subordinate the authority of the Church to the authority of Scripture. Of the character of the Church not much is said, but what is said is of great significance. ***Article 19 defines the visible church in terms of a worshipping congregation.*** This is in sharp contrast to the Roman Catholic Church, which defines the visible church in terms of the ministry and in particular the hierarchy. In Roman Catholic theology the bishops are the 'primary and principal' element in the constitution of the Church. ***However the twenty-third Article makes no mention of***

bishops in its definition of lawful ministry, and the nineteenth Article defines the church, not by reference to the ministers, but in terms of the congregation.

The English language currently uses the word 'Church' with several different meanings; for example, for a building, a denomination, or a profession. We should be on our guard lest what is true of the word in one of its meanings is transferred to its use in another, and in particular we need to guard lest the aura of glory which surrounds its New Testament meaning is used to heighten loyalty to institutions other than the New Testament Church.

In the New Testament the word 'church' always means 'a gathering' or 'an assembly'. Acts 19 shows it was not a technical ecclesiastical word, for in verse 32 St. Luke used it of the gathering of the mob in the amphitheatre in Ephesus, and in verse 39 of the regular political assembly of the citizens. In the Old Testament the two Hebrew equivalents of the Greek *ekklesia* are applied to the Old Testament people of God, especially when that people is conceived of as assembling or gathering; for example when gathered around Mount Sinai for the giving of the law, or later on Mount Zion where all Israel were required to assemble three times a year. The usual English equivalents of the Hebrew are 'congregation' and 'assembly', but Stephen in Acts 7 [Acts 7:38] used the word 'church' (*ekklesia*) of this Old Testament congregation of God. ***In the New Testament the Christian Church is the fulfilment of the Old Testament assembly.*** Jesus Christ is its constituent. Just as in Exodus 19:4, 5 God is said to have gathered His people around Himself at Mount Sinai, and as later they regularly gathered at His command around His dwelling place on Mount Zion, so Christ gathers His people around Himself as their shepherd. He gathers them through the preaching of the Gospel: 'The Lord added to their number day by day those that were being saved' (Acts 2:47, R.S.V.). It is Christ who builds His Church (Matt. 16:18). He calls into one flock around Him His sheep, whether near or far off (John 10:16, Acts 2:39).

The Epistle to the Hebrews makes it clear that the assembly or Church, which Christ is building now is a heavenly assembly. In Hebrews 12:18-24 the writer contrasts the assembly of which his readers are members with the Old Testament assembly of the people of God. That earlier assembly was gathered round God on Mount Sinai, but the present assembly into which Christian believers have been gathered is around the heavenly Zion, the city of the living God. This assembly is described as 'the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven'. It is being gathered round Christ where He now is. Our membership of this assembly or Church is a present reality. We have already come to the heavenly Zion and already are members of this 'church of the firstborn who are in heaven'. We are already 'seated with Him in the heavenly places' (Eph. 2:6, R.S.V.; cf. Col. 3:1-4). The book of Revelation gives us several glimpses of this heavenly assembly around Christ in its completed eschatological character; for example, Revelation 7:9 'a great multitude . . . standing before the throne and before the Lamb', and 14:1 'The Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him a hundred and

forty and four thousands, having his name, and the name of His Father, written on their foreheads.'

The Scriptures make clear that Christ is now primarily to be thought of as in heaven, and this is clearly affirmed in Article 4. There are many passages in the New Testament to this effect, such as 'seek the things that are above where Christ is' (Col. 3:1, R.S.V.); 'Jesus Christ who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven' (I Pet. 3:22, R.S.V.); 'Jesus whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things' (Acts 3:21, R.S.V.); 'I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God' (Acts 7:56); 'Absent from the body . . . present with the Lord, (II Cor. 5:8; cf. also Acts 1:11, 2:33, 9:6, 26:15-19; Phil. 3:20; I Thess. 1:10, 4:16; Heb. 9:24-28).

Since Christ is now in heaven, it is there that the New Testament thinks of Him as building His Church, because the Church of Christ is the assembly which He calls into being around Himself. ***This heavenly Church or assembly round Christ is a present, not merely a future, reality, and we are to think of ourselves as already members of it, assembled with Him in heaven.*** It is this Church to which Jesus referred in Matthew 16:18 and which He is now building; it is this Church or assembly which He loved and gave Himself up for (Eph. 5:25). This is the Church affirmed in the Nicene Creed (endorsed in Article 8), 'I believe one Catholick and Apostolick Church'. Its principle of unity is the fact that Christ has assembled it round Himself. It is logically impossible for Him to assemble two Churches; for Christ is to be primarily thought of as in one place only, that is, in heaven, if we are to use biblical imagery, which is the only imagery available in a matter which transcends experience.

We are called into membership of this one Church of Christ by the preaching of the Gospel. As a consequence of membership of Christ's Church there is a duty on Christians to assemble in local gatherings. Interestingly enough this duty was not so obvious to the early Christians that they did not need to be exhorted not to forsake the assembling of themselves together (Heb. 10:25). And the letters of Ignatius of Antioch are notorious for their constant iteration of the duty of Christians to assemble together rather than each to worship God on his own. ***These exhortations confirm that the word 'Church' refers to the heavenly assembly which Christ is gathering. For every New Testament Christian was vividly conscious, as he awaited his Lord from heaven, of belonging to His Church. The fact that they nevertheless required exhortation to assemble together suggests that their concept of the assembly of Christ, of which they all knew themselves to be members, did not of necessity suggest membership of a local gathering.*** It may well be that the phrase in the Creed 'the Communion of Saints', that is, 'the fellowship of Christians', refers to the visible fellowship expressed in local churches or assemblies, just as the preceding clause refers to the heavenly gathering or Church of Christ, which is the regulative antecedent of the local fellowship.

It remains true, however, that the most frequent use of the word 'church' in the New Testament is of the local gathering of Christians. These local gatherings, whether at

Corinth, or in the cities of Galatia, or in Jerusalem, were manifestations of the one Church of Christ. Christ had gathered them, and He Himself was present, according to His promise, where two or three were met together in His name. [Matthew 18:20]. Thus, they were gathered round Christ through His Spirit, and consequently nothing was lacking for a complete church or gathering of Christ. *These gatherings were never spoken of as part of Christ's Church because each was Christ's Church, gathered by Him round Himself at a certain time in a certain place. They were manifestations of the heavenly Church, of which every member of the local church was at that very time a member. It is a grave mistake, common in current theology, to reverse the order, and to think of Christ's universal Church as made up by adding together the total membership of the local churches, whether backwards through time or extensively over the earth's surface.*

It is worth noting that Ignatius, who was the first to use the term 'the Catholic Church', seems to apply it to the gathering of Christians around Jesus in heaven. 'Where Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church' (*ad Smyrn.*, 8). From the way Ignatius is arguing it would appear that it is the heavenly assembly ('where Jesus is') which Ignatius designated as Catholic or universal, for he contrasts it with its counterpart, namely its local manifestation in the assembly of Christians round their minister. It is not a spiritualized presence of Jesus to which Ignatius is referring, as this would defeat his argument, which is that just as the Catholic Church is gathered round Jesus (in heaven), so Christians should gather round their bishop (in their own locality). This interpretation of Ignatius's phrase is supported by the gloss placed on it by the interpolator in the longer recension of Ignatius's letters. The interpolator reproduced the section almost verbatim, but instead of the clause, 'where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church', he has 'where Jesus Christ is, there the whole heavenly army is present . . .' *This variation shows that the concept that Christ is in heaven was congenial, and that at least to one contemporary Ignatius's phrase 'the Catholic Church' suggested the heavenly assembly.*

The local churches come into being as their members are joined to Christ. These local churches will never be visibly one assembly until the Second Coming. Then, when Christ will be manifested, the Church (that is, all believers) will be seen united around Him (Col. 3:4). St. Paul in II Thessalonians 2:1 speaks of this quite correctly as our 'gathering together' around Him in the air. [I Thessalonians 4:17]. **But just as at the present time Christ's lordship is not yet manifest as it will be but remains an object of faith, so His gathering or Church is not yet manifest but remains an object of faith, not only in its characteristic of unity, but in all its characteristics as His Church, so that quite properly the Creed affirms 'I believe in one . . . Church'.**

Article 19 gives the marks by which a Christian assembly may be distinguished from assemblies called for other purposes. It defines it in terms of its constitutive principle -- the Word of God. *It states that those who form the assembly have already received this Word of God into their hearts. It is a congregation of believers.* The Article further

states that the activity in which the assembly engages is the ministry of the Word of God. Faith is the highest form of worship, i.e. honoring of a God whose character is love, **and faith springs from hearing the Word of God**. Nor can there be nobler acts of praise and adoration than proclaiming the gracious acts and promises of God. Ministering the Word of God to one another is the primary activity of Christian assembly (Heb. 10:25; cf. Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16). 'I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation will I sing thy praise' (Heb. 2:12).

God's acts and promises may be made known, and a response evoked, both by the preached word and by the acted, visible word of the sacraments. Article 19 defines the visible church in terms of ministry of Word and sacraments and this is essentially one ministry, the sacraments being, as Augustine said, visible words:'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 to over how large an area the congregation forming the visible church (that is, the local church) may be scattered is not defined by the articles. Presumably this will differ from age to age according to means of transport. Article 19 refers to the churches of Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch and Rome. These cities were compact areas of population, and differed widely from some modern dioceses where, because of distance, Christians find the greatest difficulty in assembling together to form a church or congregation in which the Word of God might be preached and the sacraments administered, in the way Article 19 declares the visible church to be constituted.

The visible church is the congregation worshipping according to the Word of God, and there are as many visible churches as there are true congregations. The Articles do not speak specifically of the 'invisible Church' but have only passing references. It is a mistake to think that the Articles deny the concept of the invisible or mystical Church, or to misread Article 19 as though it began 'The Church of Christ is a visible congregation', as is frequently done. Nor is there any ground for the assertion of the Vicar of All Saints', Margaret Street, London, that 'The Church of England repudiates any notion of an invisible church.' The concept of the invisible Church was uniformly held by the Reformers and was affirmed as early as the Bishop's Book of 1537 and the Thirteen Articles of 1538. It would be very unlikely, and in fact is not the case, that the Thirty-Nine Articles repudiated the concept of the invisible or mystical Church of Christ, or fell into the mistake of which Hooker castigated when he wrote: 'For lack of diligent observing the difference between the church of God mystical and visible, the oversights are neither few nor light that have been committed'.

Article 19 is concerned with the church in its visible aspect -- the visible congregation. But the opening clause of Article 26 which also speaks of the 'visible Church' implies a contrast with the Church in its invisible aspect round the throne of God, where the evil is not mingled with the good. **The word 'Church' appears to be**

used of the 'invisible' Church in Article 27, which states that 'they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church', the mystical body of Christ; for all without exception who outwardly receive baptism are admitted to the visible church. But right reception (Latin recte), that is with a believing heart, is the requisite for being grafted into Christ and into the assembly gathered around Him in heaven.

Papal Encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* (1943), paragraphs 17, 40. Cf. Pius X, Encyclical *Vehementer Nos* (1906): 'As for the masses, they have no other right than that of letting themselves be led, and of following their pastors as a docile flock.' And Leo XIII (1890) in Denzinger 1936C: 'The duty of the laity is that of "echoing image like the voices of their masters".'

For example: 'The article starts off with the assumption that the church of God is a visible society', E. J. Bicknell, *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, 3rd edition, revised by H. J. Carpenter (London, 1955), p. 292.

K. N. Ross: *The Thirty-Nine Articles*, p. 47.

Ecclesiastical Polity, III (London, 1954), pp. 2, 9.

Churches in Association

In view of modern interest in church union it may be useful to consider the implications of Article 19 a little further, and to examine the nature of the relationship that should subsist between the local manifestations of Christ's Church, of one or more of which all Christians are members. The basic and only essential bond between these local visible churches or assemblies is the mutual love, interest and prayer that members of one assembly have for members of the others. They receive members of other assemblies as fellow Christians, when they are assured of the individual faith of those members. They are interested in the Christian progress of one another, not only of those within their own assembly but of those in other assemblies. **It is impossible to discover in the New Testament any link or relationship between local churches other than this invisible bond of mutual love of the members one for the other. The same is true for the first centuries of the Church's history. for example, in the time of Cyprian, in the middle of the third century, each Christian assembly, though bound in love to the others, is completely independent of any other assembly.**

Things are very different today. The various local assemblies of Christians are grouped in patterns of fellowship. The groupings or denominations arose in the course of history for various reasons; but what characterizes a denomination at the present time, and is its principle of continuity, is the restriction of fellowship to within the denomination. A denomination need not consist of more than one congregation, but if this congregation restricts its fellowship with regard to members

of other congregations, it is rightly called a denomination. In fact, it would be difficult to find a Christian assembly today which, though not linked in any way with other assemblies, nevertheless recognizes other assemblies as on all points equally as Christian as itself. Such an attitude of full acceptance of other congregations is now limited to those within the same denomination.

Denominationalism is not solely a modern phenomenon. The ancient Church had its pattern of restricted fellowship at a local as well as on a world-wide level. The Meletian schism is an example of the former, while the Novatian and Donatist and Catholic groupings are examples of world-wide denominational patterns of fellowship or 'churches'. Thus, Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 350) took it for granted that in any city which his catechumens might visit there would be several churches of different denominations, all calling themselves Christian churches (Cat. Lectures, 18:26). ***The concept of an 'undivided' Early Church is a modern myth.***

The Thirty-Nine Articles have two references to the denomination, that is, the structure of association of churches associating together for certain purposes. ***The Church is a divine entity, called into being by Christ. Fellowship between churches (i.e., between congregations) is a Christian duty; but it is important to remember that the structures and organizations which such fellowship sometimes brings into being are in themselves human structures and organizations, in contrast to the divine character of the Church of God.*** That is to say, these structures are secular, using that term in a good sense.

The first reference to such a structure linking churches is in Article 21 which speaks of general councils. The essentially secular character of such meetings of leaders from the churches is reflected in the fact that these meetings are under the authority of the secular power: 'General Councils may not be gathered together without the commandment and will of princes.' The truth implicit in this statement, namely that the structure of association of churches is secular, is vindicated by the fact that it is not practical to consummate the amalgamation of denominations (or 'church union') without the aid of an act of the legislature, i.e., 'without the will of princes'.

A second reference to denominational association is in the last paragraph of Article 34 which speaks of a 'national Church'. In a national 'Church', or denomination, the basis of association of the churches is common nationhood. The Article affirms that this is perfectly legitimate so long as the denominational association recognizes that its authority extends only to legislating on matters 'ordained only by man's authority'. The object of a denominational association and of the regulations it makes is to assist the building up (the 'edifying') of the churches.

A denomination is seen in its best light when viewed in relation to the service which it provides for the local Christian assemblies. Thus, it normally provides expert advice and mediation in many areas; it provides training colleges for the ministers and a pool of ministers to draw on to fill vacancies; it provides financial facilities for the

purchase of congregational amenities, such as a church building to assemble in and a residence for the minister. It may provide superannuation schemes at a cheaper rate than insurance companies. It may run a publishing house. It also provides a channel for supporting missionaries in their ministry overseas, and in this respect it has a New Testament prototype in the organization set up by St. Paul to collect and convey alms to the Christians of Jerusalem on the occasion of his last visit to that city. Missionary societies which operate within a denomination but are not coterminous with it furnish the interesting phenomenon -- wrongly regarded by some people an anomalous -- of a denomination (or pattern of fellowship) within a denomination.

Perhaps the most serious danger which the denominational groupings of Christian congregations presents is that such groupings provide a focal point for loyalty. For many members, the denomination replaces the true centre of loyalty which a Christian assembly should have, namely Christ who gathers His assembly together, through His Word, which is the instrument of His lordship.

Nowadays denominationalism is greatly strengthened and perpetuated by the centralized structure that has been built up to serve denominationally linked churches. Organization increases the influence of the denomination in the community. ***Some denominations, especially those who give high-sounding titles to their office bearers, are more effective than others in securing this influence. But it remains true that influence secured by denominational organization is worldly influence rather than the influence which arises from the power of the Gospel, and so it will fail to advance God's glory.*** It falls under the ban, 'But it shall not be so among you' (cf. Luke 22:24-27). God's purposes are not advanced by pressure groups but by prayer, preaching, and Christian living and suffering.

'Parallel denominationalism' may be defined as more than one denomination having churches in the same locality. The parallel denominationalism of the Early Church was terminated by the persecution carried on by Constantine and his successors against all Christians who were not Catholic. Hatch in his Bampton Lectures gives a long list of these oppressive measures.^v In Britain parallel denominationalism has arisen again consequent upon the relaxation of persecution following the failure of the Clarendon Code and upon the repeal of the disabilities previously imposed on Roman Catholics.

The blessing which accompanies parallel denominationalism is liberty of conscience. ***A single denomination has always in history been a persecuting denomination and has maintained its monopoly only by persecution.*** Amalgamation of denominations through negotiation will never completely succeed nor be permanently monolithic without the aid of some such pressure. ***The union of denominations may be beneficial as leading to greater efficiency in their capacity as service organizations; but it is important that efficiency is not purchased at the cost of truth, or of liberty to preach and teach the Gospel, or of the integrity of the life of the local church.*** Thus, the union

v.

of denominations may well be an object to be encouraged, though it is unwarranted to think that such union in itself is a spiritual objective which Christians are under obligation to strive for.

The real way forward is a return to the ancient -- in fact, the original -- pattern, by strengthening the local church's responsibility for matters which affect its own spiritual existence, and by the mutual acceptance of one another, between church and church. These things need not wait for the negotiating of a 'union scheme' of the denominations to which the local churches happen to belong. The duty of receiving fully, freely and with Christian love all fellow Christians whom Christ receives should be laid on the Christian's conscience by the ministry of God's Word. At the same time the restrictive character of the denominational link-up should be weakened by allowing with goodwill, and indeed encouraging, congregations and individual Christians to be in fellowship with each other and to worship together across denominational barriers. But till this duty of Christian fellowship is firmly apprehended, and is permitted to be acted on, merely enlarging the link-up of local churches by denominational amalgamation ('church union') will only strengthen denominational exclusiveness.

The Organization of the Early Churches, sixth edition, p. 81.

3 The Purpose and Character of the Articles

The Thirty-Nine Articles were not designed as a comprehensive survey of Christian belief or a complete theological system, however summary. Though to some extent they fulfill this role, they are really heads of doctrine drawn up for the purpose of defining the Church of England's dogmatic position in relation to the controversies of the time. This explains their somewhat eclectic character and emphasis. In doctrines which the authors regarded as of central importance their language is very clear, full and forthright, as in the two crucial doctrines of the Reformation, the supremacy of Holy Scripture and justification by faith only. But in some of the other doctrinal areas where Christians differ the Articles are intentionally minimal. For example, in an earlier draft certain literalistic views of the millennium were condemned but in the final form of the Articles this explicit condemnation was omitted.

The aim of the Articles may be said to be: In things essential clarity, in things non-essential liberty. This principle is in keeping with the purpose for which the Articles were drawn up and which is stated clearly on the title page, namely that they are 'Articles agreed upon . . . for the avoiding of diversities of opinions, and for the establishing of consent touching true religion'. The Articles were intended to control the teaching within the Church of England and to mark the limits of its comprehension.Comprehension is a relative term. Every association must be

comprehensive and yet there must be an agreed limit to that comprehension, either explicit or implicit, if the association is to remain in being.

Attempts are made from time to time to reconcile the Articles with doctrines valued because of their place in Catholic tradition. The best known attempt in this direction is that of John Henry Newman in Tract 90. The attempt still continues. Thus, the Reverend K. N. Ross, Vicar of All Saints', Margaret Street, London, wrote: 'It is not difficult on most issues to show that there is no incompatibility between the teaching of the Church of England and the tridentine decrees.'

It is claimed that the Articles are designedly ambiguous and that the Reformers deliberately used ambiguous distinctions in order to avoid condemning 'Catholic' doctrine while maintaining a reformed position. This would be an extraordinary action if it were true, as it would defeat the object for which the Articles were drawn up, which was the 'avoiding of diversities of opinions, and for the establishing of consent touching true religion'. Deliberate ambiguity is a device not for the avoiding of diversities of opinions but for allowing them. Nor is permission to differ equivalent to the establishing of consent touching true religion.

On those matters which the Articles touched the Reformers intended them to be unequivocal, and there is no evidence that they failed in any important point in this. An example of the inadequacy of the method which seeks to allow room for unreformed doctrines to be held along with assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles is the way the notion of sacrifice is treated in the Articles and in some modern commentaries on them. Article 31 'Of the one Oblation of Christ finished upon the Cross', affirms that Christ's offering of Himself was made once, and 'is that perfect (that is, completed, perfected) redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world'. The Article draws the deduction that 'the sacrifices of Masses, in the which it was commonly said, that the Priest did offer Christ' as a propitiatory sacrifice for sins were altogether erroneous. John Henry Newman seized on the use of the plural 'sacrifices of Masses' to make a distinction. He wrote: 'Here the sacrifice of the *mass* is not spoken of, in which the special question of doctrine would be introduced; but "the sacrifice of *masses*", certain observances for the most part silent and solitary, which the writers of the articles knew to have been in force in time past . . .'

The same distinction is repeated by K. N. Ross: 'It can scarcely be an accident that there is no attack on the sacrifice of the Mass, but only on "sacrifices of Masses".' Similarly E. J. Bicknell wrote: 'It is not "the sacrifice of Mass" but the "*sacrifices of masses*" that is condemned: not any formal theological statement of doctrine -- for such did not exist -- but popular errors (*quod vulgo dicebatur*).'

The purpose of making these distinction between the singular and the plural is to preserve the possibility of believing that the Lord's Supper is primarily a sacrifice offered to God. ***But the distinctions made do not make any difference to the teaching of the Article which excludes the notion of sacrifice as strongly as words are able to***

do. The title of the Article speaks of 'the one Oblation of Christ *finished* upon the Cross', and the Article itself is concerned not merely with the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice but with its completeness in the past. It was once made to provide perfect redemption, *perfecta redemptio*. [Charlie's note: Cf. Hebrews 7:23-28].

The notion that sacrifice is the way for sinners to worship the Almighty is congenial to human thought. All religions contain it and it is central to Christianity. But Christianity recognizes that man is unable to offer any sacrifice worthy to obtain God's favour. Christ alone can make and has made the one sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. This propitiatory work of Christ is finished. The clear, resounding ephapax, 'once for all', rings like a bell through the pages of the Epistle to the Hebrews, effectively excluding any concept of Christ's continuing offering of His sacrifice in heaven or of our continuing it on earth. It is true that the New Testament writers use the Old Testament vocabulary of sacrifice to describe Christian worship under the New Covenant. For they had no other vocabulary available to express the Christian's worship (i.e., the honour of God) than sacrificial terms which were the worship terms of the Old Testament. But all the New Testament uses of this Old Testament language are plainly metaphorical; for example, Hebrews 13:15, 16 'Let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually' where the following words 'that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to his name' clearly indicate a metaphorical use of the concept of sacrifice. And in the next verse Christian generosity to others is the way which the Christian worships and honours God. 'With such sacrifices God is well pleased.' Christian generosity is called 'a sacrifice', not in the modern sense of a going without, but in the Old Testament sense of worship. ***However, the idea of a literal and not merely metaphorical offering as the way to worship God is so endemic to human thought that it reasserts itself whenever the Christian community weakens in its apprehension that the one perfect sacrifice for sinners has already been made, and that we are accepted by God (or justified) through faith, on the ground of the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and His offering once made on Calvary.***

The idea that we have a literal sacrifice to offer by way of worship re-established itself during the centuries, and the Lord's Supper was the natural ordinance on which this concept was grafted. As a consequence those who look to tradition as the source of theology give a prominent place to the sacrificial interpretation of the Lord's Supper. The Reformers were determined to exclude this idea as an aberration from New Testament teaching, and most onlookers would think that they had achieved this fairly successfully in the Prayer Book, Articles and Ordinal. For example, Leo XIII's bull, *Apostolicae Curae*, proceeds on the assumption that it is self-evident that the Reformers have excluded the notion of any real sacrifice in the Lord's Supper.

It is a desperate expedient, as Newman himself later acknowledged, to attempt to read into the Articles by way of distinctions, doctrines which the Reformers rejected. Deliberate ambiguity was against their purposes. Accidental ambiguity in matters of such cruciality and controversy is unlikely to be found in a document

brought to finality over a period of years, and an examination of the text confirms its absence.

The other formularies of the Church of England, for example, the Book of Common Prayer, ought to be interpreted in the light of the Articles and not the Articles in the light of the Prayer Book, because this latter course would be reversing the purposes for which the Articles were agreed upon. The Articles were designed to be the agreed upon doctrinal basis within which the Prayer Book is to be used and interpreted.

The Thirty-Nine Articles, (London, 1957), p. 78.

Tract 90, p. 59.

Ibid., p. 78.

A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (London, 1955), p. 525.

4 Current Criticisms of the Articles

As we have seen, there are some eminent critics of the Articles in the present day who suggest that their doctrinal position should be altered. Some of these criticisms ought now to be looked at more closely. Three Articles in particular have been singled out for criticism: Article 13 'Of Works before Justification', which states that a man's life before God's Spirit indwells him through faith in Christ is 'not pleasant to God', nor can his deeds earn the favour of salvation; Article 18, which states that we cannot be saved by following the 'light of Nature. For holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the Name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved'; and Article 17, which begins '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 . . .' It will be noticed that all these three Articles speak about the mind of God, what sort of life pleases Him, how a sinner may obtain His external salvation of those who by nature are under His wrath. It should be obvious that the religious person must remain absolutely agnostic about such subjects, so remote from our own personal knowledge, and which deal with the mind and purposes of a personal sovereign God, unless that God has revealed His mind on these matters. Nevertheless, they are matters of crucial importance to all who feel themselves guilty with regard to the law of God and who seek a reconciliation with Him.

The Thirty-Nine Articles do not claim to be pleasant doctrine, or even doctrine which is easily commendable to reason. They do, however, very definitely claim that they are the consequences of statements of biblical truth, that is, that they are agreeable to the Word of God. Before any question of revision or supersession of the Articles can

be settled this claim must be examined, and, if true, its implications assessed. This is not the place to establish in detail the biblical basis of the Thirty-Nine Articles but some of the Articles most commonly criticized may be examined.

Article Thirteen

Article 13 is based on the truth that God sees the heart and judges actions, not as things in themselves but in the context of the motives and attitudes of the person performing them.

It is not actions so much as persons acting which God assesses, and Scripture is quite clear that by nature we cannot please God till His Spirit changes us at the centre of our personality. The carnal mind 'is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God' (Romans 8:7, 8). St. Paul testified of nature apart from God's grace, 'In me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing' (Romans 7:18). Our Lord's words have the same import: 'As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. Without me, ye can do nothing' (John 14:4, 5).

The source of holiness is faith. 'Without faith it is impossible to please God' (Hebrews 11:6). 'Whatsoever is not of faith is sin' (Romans 14:23). This may seem strong language; but a moment's reflection will show that it is obviously true. Faith is the fulfilling of the first petition, 'Hallowed be thy name'. God wills that His name should be hallowed. He wills that mankind should acknowledge Him and live in the light of His character. God is reality, and to live by faith in Him is the first step in the life of truth and reality. A life lived on any other basis is shot through with falsity. It is inconceivable that the God of truth should regard as ultimately pleasing actions which cannot be free from the character of unbelief from which they spring.

Thus the statement of Article 13 that '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', is supported by many explicit statements of Scripture as well as by the general consideration of God's holiness revealed in Scripture.

The concluding sentence of the Article follows by strict necessity. 'We doubt not but that they have the nature of sin.' If an action is not pleasing to God, it can only be because it is tainted with the stain of sin. It is out of the heart that actions proceed, and they take their character from the attitude of the heart. The ultimate test of an action is what attitude to God it reflects. If our actions are to pass this test, our 'heart' must have undergone that radical change to which Jesus referred in His words to Nicodemus, 'You must be born again. Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Without this radical change brought about by the Spirit of God it is impossible for our actions to escape the taint of the self-centred (in contrast to the God-centred) nature which is mankind's inheritance since the Fall.

If we are to appreciate the standpoint of Article 13 and the Scripture testimony on which it is based, we need to reflect on the transcendent holiness of God. His holiness is real; God is Truth. This gives seriousness to life, for He will not, indeed cannot without contradiction, wink at a minor element (as we might say) of self-will, rebellion and the ignoring of God, who is the Real and Holy One. If our lives are to be assessed by the eternal Judge, the judgment must turn on our attitude to the righteous and holy Creator. ***The truth is that no work of ours, apart from forgiveness in Christ, can pass this absolute judgment. It is at this level that the Article assesses the acceptability of our works, and not on the level of the judgment that we pass on one another's life and actions, as we assess them as good or bad. It is through a failure to recognize this that much of the criticism of the Article arises.***

The acceptability of Article 13 turns on the question as to how deep rooted the principle of sin is thought to be in the human nature. Does it reach to the inmost core of the personality, to the 'heart', to quote the biblical image? It is impossible to believe that so radical a personal decision as rebellion against God does not reach to the bottom of the heart. And all that proceeds out of the heart has its character, till God gives us a new 'heart' as promised by the prophet.

Article 18 'Of obtaining eternal Salvation only by the Name of Christ' goes closely with Article 13. Only through Christ is there the grace of the new birth, and 'except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3:3).

This Article was criticized by Canon H. W. Montefiore in 'Assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles', a sermon preached on his Institution as Vicar of St. Mary the Great, Cambridge, September 29, 1963; and by Dean Matthews: The Thirty-Nine Articles (London, 1961), p. 15.

Interestingly, Hans Kung in Justification (London, 1966), ix cites Article 13 'Of works Before Justification', together with its related articles, Article 10 'Of Free Will'; Article 11 'of the Justification of Man'; and Article 12 'Of Good Works'; and comments: 'I am unable to see a reason why, as a catholic theologian, I should not as a whole, and with only a few further precisions concur in their content.'

Article Seventeen

Dr. W. R. Matthews, objected to the doctrine of the Articles, which, he said, was Calvinistic. This emotive description of the doctrine is irrelevant to the question of its truth. In particular, the Dean objected to Article 17 'Of Predestination and Election'. As is not unusual in critics of the doctrine of predestination, he misunderstood the phraseology of the Article, which he said wassupralapsarian. The Article, however, is plainly sublapsarian, in that it speaks of God's decree of election being to 'deliver from curse and damnation'; that is to say, the elect are viewed as sinners, viewed after the Fall, or sublapsarianly. ***Both supralapsarian and sublapsarian views put God's decisions into eternity (as does the Article, 'before the foundations of the world').***

Neither concept regards God as making His decision after the event has taken place in time, as though God made up His plans as He went along, after He has seen what has happened; so that Dr. Matthews has mistaken the facts of the controversy when he wrote, 'The "moderate" or sublapsarian party held that the election of the redeemed took place after the Fall and that the Fall itself was not predestined . . . In this respect it is plain that our Articles do not represent moderate Calvinism.' ***Both supralapsarian and sublapsarian hold that God works all things after the counsel of His will. The difference between the two views (which is no longer a live issue) was simply in the logical order of the elements that go to make up the eternal, pretemporal decree or counsel of God. It is a difference which had not come into consideration at the time when our Articles were written.***

This question of predestination or election cannot be resolved from the resources of our own experience or powers of thought. It should be plain that we cannot know the mind and purposes of God simply by reflecting on the limited segment of God's purposes that we know in experience. On the other hand, predestination is abundantly confirmed in revelation. ***No doctrine is more clearly enunciated in Scripture than that God's absolute sovereignty includes sovereignty in the selection of sinners for salvation.*** 'He has mercy on whom He will. So then it is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth, but of God that has mercy' (Romans 9:16, 17, R.V.). Mercy and merit are incompatible concepts, the one excludes the other, so that if our salvation is to be attributed entirely to the mercy of God (as the Scriptures abundantly testify) then, unless all are saved (which the Scriptures do not allow us to conclude), those who receive the mercy of God are chosen by Him in Christ from out of those who all equally deserve His condemnation. The ultimate reason for this has not been revealed to us, but we know that the election of God as all His acts, rests in His sovereign, wise, righteous and loving character.

In summing up his criticism of Article 17 'Of Predestination and Election', as well as that of the doctrinally related Article 9 'Of Original or Birth-sin', and Article 13 'Of Works Before Justification', Dr. Matthews wrote of 'the fundamental defect in the theology of the whole document. The statements made in the Articles are the kind of statements which could be made about human beings. God is envisaged as an immensely powerful sovereign who plans in advance the details of His creation . . . This anthropomorphism vitiates the whole doctrinal statement . . . For, if we believe God is eternal, we cannot rightly think of Him as conditioned by time or space.'

Such criticism of the Articles is merely criticism of the scriptural presentation of God. Revelation makes God known to us by portraying Him as one who acts in time and space. If this manner of speaking about God is untrue or inadequate, there is nothing we can substitute for it but agnosticism.

Dean Matthews extended his criticism of the supernaturalistic language of the Articles (which simply reflects the language of Scripture) to the resurrection of our Lord. 'How many of us, I wonder', he wrote, 'would be prepared to defend in all details

the language of the Articles on the Resurrection and Ascension, with the crass literalism of the assertion that the bones of the Lord Jesus are in heaven?' If the alternative is to believe that Jesus' bones are still in Palestine, this would be simple naturalism and unbelief, in direct conflict with the New Testament witness to the empty tomb and the resurrection appearances in the Gospels. The Thirty-Nine Articles, however, though fully supernaturalistic, do not fall into the 'crass literalism' (if such it be) of saying that our Lord's bones are in heaven, but in a moderate statement keep well within the biblical witness. 'Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things pertaining 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.'

It has always been recognized from the first days of Christianity that the language of Scripture with regard to the being of God has the character of metaphor. The anthropomorphite heretics were those who refused to recognize this. But the recognition does not imply that the abundant metaphors of Scripture are not adequate to convey to us a full and true concept of God as He reveals Himself to us. Furthermore, since God has given us knowledge of Himself only through such language it is impossible for Christian thought and statement about God to do without such language. And the language and images of such statements have the same 'metaphorical' character as they have in Scripture. But the concepts of Scripture have never been 'mythologized', except by the anthropomorphites and their like.

Much of the modern objection to the Articles is really a quarrel with Scripture, for as Dean Matthews acknowledged, 'It is beyond dispute that there is scarcely any statement in them which cannot be supported by texts from the Bible.' This acknowledgement is a vindication of the Articles, for their professed intention it simply to reflect the doctrines of Scripture. **Just as Article 8 commends the three Creeds because 'they may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture', so the Articles vindicate their own statements by their scriptural character.** Article 6 enumerates the principle on which all the Articles are composed, namely, that *Holy Scripture is the sufficient source of saving knowledge of God. The object of the Articles is to state succinctly this knowledge, just as the Creeds do.* Before the Articles can be criticized adversely, or superseded, at least one of these two questions must be answered in the negative. *'Do the Articles faithfully reflect the teaching of Scripture?'* *Applying this latter question to the Creeds, orthodox Christians would answer in the affirmative. The Church of England holds that the same answer must be given when the question is applied to the Articles.* [!!!] Modern critics of the Articles have never applied themselves to question whether the Articles may be said to reflect Bible truth in the same way as the Creeds are believed to do. *The Creeds and the Articles are to be accepted because 'they may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture'.* Is this a correct ground for accepting statements about God? Or are the statements of the Creeds to be accepted on a different ground from the acceptance of the statements of the Articles?

One of Dr. W. R. Matthews's criticisms of the Articles is that their statements distort the proportion of scriptural truth. His criticism is not established from the evidence he adduces, and his warning that 'we must not take [St. Paul's statements on predestination] in isolation from other passages which have a different tendency' was fully recognized by the compilers of the Articles themselves, who in Article 20 remind us that we may not 'so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another'. All that the dean's criticism here amounts to is that we must interpret Scripture correctly, not onesidely. The warning does not in itself establish that the Articles have fallen into this mistake.

Supralapsarianism is the view that God's decision to elect should be regarded as preceding His decision to create and to permit man to fall. The view is based on the fact that in unfettered, purposeful actions, the final result represents the first decision that is made. Sublapsarianism (or infralapsarianism) views God's decision to elect as subsequent to His decision to create and to permit man to fall.

The Thirty-Nine Articles, (London, 1961), p. 12.

Ibid., pp. 19f.

Ibid., 22.

For the scriptural character of the statements of the Articles, reference may be made to such works as An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles, Historical and Doctrinal, by Edward Harold Browne, a former Bishop of Ely, and The Principles of Theology, by W. H. Griffith Thomas.

The Nature of Revelation

In the last resort, the concept that God's revelation is in deeds can only be maintained by a forgetfulness that God is all-sovereign over the world. The fact is that there is no event which God controls more than another and, therefore, every event is equally revelational of some aspect of his character. Yet to say this is to say that no event is revelational in itself. For example, God controlled the migrations of the Syrians from Kir and the Philistines from Caphtor as completely as He brought up the Israelites out of Egypt (Amos 9:7). What is it then that makes the tribal migrations of the Israelites pregnant with revelation throughout the Old and New Testaments, while those of their related tribe, the Syrians, reveal only the one fact of God's general providence to which Amos alludes? Similarly, why are the invasions of neighbouring countries by the Assyrians, and the fate that overtook the Assyrians, revelational of God's character (see Isaiah 10), while the inter-tribal warfare of, say, the Maoris is not? It is not as though God's sovereign control is exercised any the more over the one, or any the less over the other, of these different events, but simply that to the one have been added interpretative propositions and statements, but not to the other. It is the

proposition which is the revelation, giving meaning to the event. Through the proposition we know of God. The event, by itself, reveals nothing.

Modern theology largely ignores the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, and the important consequences of this are seen in modern theories of revelation which place revelation in events. But God guides and controls every event. The new element which brings about revelation is the infallible guidance of the prophet's mind so that he interprets the event aright. Thus it is the interpretation which is revelation to us, and this interpretation is in the form of inerrant propositions. The biblical doctrine is that propositions form in the mind of the inspired prophet through the work of the Holy Spirit who also secures their embodiment in the written Scripture. The activity of God in controlling events is continuous and unchanging (though the purposes of His control will vary); but the gift to man of interpreting the event aright and writing down that interpretation accurately is sporadic. In this gift of revelation the working of God is in accordance with and through the nature which He himself created. It will therefore be natural, not artificial or mechanical, as we observe and examine it.

For an event to be revelational it must be interpreted by God Himself. This, and not merely some human reflection on occurrence, is the real differentiating factor. God interprets through His Word, given in the form of propositions or statements about that event. Thus for the prophets the word of the Lord was not the event, but the interpretation of the event which had been given them by the Spirit. The same is true of that supreme event, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. View detachedly, Jesus had the stature, mien, voice and gait of a Galilean. However, the disciples came to hold a much more significant judgment about Him, expressed in the proposition 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'. They formed this judgment by reflecting (that is, by forming mental propositions) about His acts, and character, and teaching. It is this formed judgment which Jesus said was God's revelation. And it did not come to the disciples of themselves, for it was revealed not by flesh and blood but by the heavenly Father (Matthew 16:17). It is the apprehended, interpretative proposition about Christ that is the revelation, and not the observed action or event by itself.

Temple states, on the contrary: 'the faith in which His early followers believed that they had found salvation did not consist in the acceptance of propositions concerning Him, nor even in the acceptance of what He taught in words concerning God and man, though this was certainly included: but in personal trust in His personal presence, love and power'. This statement contains an inner contradiction. Faith is based on concepts apprehended by the mind; concepts are propositional in character. Certainly Christian faith (and in particular the disciples' faith) was not exercised towards propositions about material things, but towards concepts of a person, His power, and His promises. Nevertheless the disciples' trust in Christ's 'presence, love and power' was ultimately based on the acceptance of propositions about these things, which had been formulated in their minds. The case is no different, though more obvious, with regard to those who 'not having seen, yet have believed', for their knowledge of

Christ's presence, love and power (from which their personal trust in Him springs) is conveyed to their minds by propositions. Trust in Christ as a religious experience is a *consequence* of a revelation given and received ('He who comes to God must believe that he is'). This trust and religious experience is to be distinguished from revelation. Such experience of God is, of course, more than propositional; but the revelation on which it is based, and by which it must be judged, is essentially propositional. A confusion arises unless the meanings of the word 'knowledge' are clearly distinguished from revelation. Such experience of God is, of course, more than propositional; but the revelation on which it is based, and by which it must be judged, is essentially propositional. A confusion arises unless the meanings of the word 'knowledge' are clearly distinguished. Knowledge of God in the sense of revelation of Him is entirely intellectual; it is apprehended by the mind alone. It is therefore propositional. But knowledge of God in the sense of fellowship with Him goes beyond intellectual apprehension, and is *experienced* through all the avenues of our being. In this latter sense knowledge of God is not exclusively, or perhaps not even essentially, propositional; but this knowledge of God is not revelational, though it illuminates revelation and suffuses revelation. ***Yet such religious experience must be based on revelation, if it is to be regarded as true, and not spurious, knowledge of God. Revelation is the test and criterion of such religious experience,*** as to whether it is knowledge of God and the revelation which forms this test is the words of the Scripture and the propositions which these words form.

Denial of 'propositional revelation' makes Christian faith logically impossible in its fullest and deepest expression of trust, for it is impossible to trust absolutely unless we have a sure Word of God. Such denial restricts Christianity to a religion of works, that is, to following Jesus Christ as best we can. Moreover, denial of propositional revelation makes the lordship of Christ impossible of actual realization, for it is only by the sceptre of His Word that he can exercise that absolute lordship over men's consciences and wills which is His by right. For it is wrong to give absolute obedience to an uncertain command or to place absolute trust on an uncertain promise. Indeed, obedience to God as an element in the Christian life implies a command from God to obey. ***If there is no such revealed command (which is apprehended as a proposition) obedience gives place to prudence, that is, to the doing of what seems right in one's own eyes.***

Denial of propositional revelation goes hand in hand with a denial of inerrant revelation. It is commonplace nowadays to assume that the words of the Bible, being human words, must inevitably (either through natural human inadequacy or the presence of sin) distort God's revelation. But the assumption ignores the power of God expressed in the divine rebuke, 'Who hath made man's mouth?' (Exodus 4:11). To assert that its Creator (who saw all from the beginning) cannot fulfill His purposes which He determined on from eternity, namely, to reveal Himself infallibly through human speech, betrays the greatest impiety. [Charlie's note: See Isaiah 46:10].

It is sometimes further asserted that, from the nature of truth, it is impossible that there should be such a thing as an inerrant revelation. A simple illustration will show the falsity of this. If when the clock strikes four, I state 'The clock has struck four', I have made a propositional statement which is inerrant, if words mean anything; and this inerrancy remains characteristic of the proposition, even if (a) my hearer misheard me through deafness, (b) he failed to apprehend my meaning through faulty knowledge of English, or (c) there was no one present to hear me. If it is possible for an ordinary man to make an inerrant proposition which is a revelational fact for those who have ears to hear, it is again the height of impiety to say that God cannot do so if He will; and not make one such inerrant statement only, but to make a whole series of them within the pages of the Bible, and to exclude from among them any erroneous propositions, if He will. That God has in fact done so should be believed by all who give credence to the teaching and attitude of Christ and of His apostles (and, indeed, to the whole of Scripture itself) with reference to the character of Holy Scripture.

The very existence of the Christian religion depends on the infallibility of Scripture, for unless we have a sure word from God it is not logically possible to be Christians, for the Christian religion consists in giving God absolute faith, leading to absolute obedience. Now it would be wrong to ask for or to give this absolute faith and absolute obedience if we did not have an absolutely trustworthy Word from God, for it is wrong to put absolute trust in someone whom we are not quite sure about. Faith is not intended to fill up the gaps where something comes short of full reliability. Blind faith of this sort is not Christian faith, which is the quiet restful trust on God as He has revealed Himself in His Word.

There is another reason why the infallibility of the Bible is required if we are to be Christians in the way that God's people in the past have been. For if the Bible were not absolutely reliable as God's Word we would be in a worse relation to God than those people of the Old Testament times who heard God speaking to them directly at Mount Sinai, or to whom God sent His prophets saying, 'Thus saith the Lord.' The people of God in the Old Testament had in this way a direct word of God which they could trust and obey, giving to this word absolute faith and absolute obedience. Similarly the apostles, when they realized that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, knew that what He had said to them was God's Word absolutely. So they too could put their absolute trust in Him and obey Him implicitly, with unwavering hope in the certainty of the fulfillment of His promises.

Now unless we in our time have an equally sure Word from God in Holy Scripture we would not be able to exercise a religion of absolute faith and absolute obedience, and thus we would not be in a position to be Christians in the way that the apostles were, or those of the Old Testament times.

For God to have given us in the Scriptures His infallible Word means that He has inspired the words themselves. If He had merely controlled the events or inspired the

thoughts but left it at that, we would never be in a position to recover God's Word, because the events and thoughts would have passed into history, beyond the reach of our recovery. But the Scriptures testify that God has not left us in this position of uncertainty about His Word, but that His Spirit has directed the very words that were written so that they can be said to be His words, the oracles of God. Thus following the example of Christ and the apostles we may put our complete reliance in the truth of the Bible, accepting what it teaches us about God and how it directs us to live.

The Articles are based on this principle, for they accept the biblical interpretation of events recorded in Scripture as true revelation. If this is the correct view of revelation, it follows that the Articles should only be discarded or corrected if their compilers misunderstood (that is, wrongly exegeted) the biblical interpretation, and not on the ground that the biblical interpretation on which the Articles are based should itself be discarded or corrected in favour of a new interpretation of the events.

Nature, Man and God, (London, 1934), p. 311.

5 The Future of the Articles

The Thirty-Nine Articles are a problem to many churchmen because they find they do not hold some of the doctrines taught in them. Three solutions have been suggested: first, that the declaration of assent should be glossed by an interpretative declaration accompanying it; or secondly, that the Articles should be revised; or thirdly, that clerical subscription to the Articles should no longer be required. The first suggestion was acted on, for example, by Canon H. W. Montefiore at his institution to the Vicarage of St. Mary the Great, Cambridge. After making the statutory declaration "I assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion and to the Book of Common Prayer and of Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons; I believe the doctrine of the Church of England as therein set forth to be agreeable to the Word of God . . ." Canon Montefiore added, "I make the following supplementary declaration . . . In asserting my belief in the Articles, the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordinal, I take account of the period in which they were written, and I accept them as agreeable to the Word of God as this was then understood and expressed." But this does not achieve much; for the last phrase "agreeable to the Word of God as this was then understood and expressed" simply means "agreeable to their compilers' expression of their understanding of the Word of God". This is merely tautologous; and it is quite different in meaning from the statement of the statutory declaration: "I believe the doctrine of the Church of England . . . therein set forth to be agreeable to the Word of God." The latter has no real relationship in meaning to the former, and so the one does not modify the other. The plain meaning of the declaration of assent is not susceptible to being glossed into merely 'general' sense as is frequently attempted, or to being modified by a supplementary declaration.

Dr. Matthews advocated that the Church of England should bring out a new set of articles as a substitute for those drawn up in the sixteenth century. He gave two reasons. One is that the Articles as they stand are offensive to the religious opinions of those outside of the Christian Church. He was of the opinion that many leading thinkers in the past who rejected Christianity in England did so because they found the teaching of the Articles "repugnant to their reason and conscience . . .", and adds that unless new Articles are drawn up

I see little hope for the evangelization of England . . . I am convinced that the formulation of new Articles of religion, which will express our real belief and be intelligible to those whom we hope to convert, is an absolutely necessary preliminary to any hopeful effort to evangelize our people.

This is a very important matter to consider, but it ought to be recognized that the historical Christian faith has always been a ground of offence to many well disposed and thoughtful persons. The Emperor Marcus Aurelius is an outstanding example, and St. Paul's experience of preaching the Gospel led him to say that it appeared to be foolishness to the Greeks and an offence to Jewish thinkers.

The real question to face in discussing a revision of the Articles is 'Do they truly and clearly reflect God's revealed Word?' The compilers of the Articles would themselves have wished their product to be constantly subjected to this test. The other tests are ultimately irrelevant.

Dr. Matthews's other reason for advocating a new set of Articles was that the Thirty-Nine Articles do not represent the present views of members of the Church of England. It is, of course, highly desirable that the Articles should reflect the common mind of the Church, but that they should be altered to reflect that mind does not follow, for ***it may be that the mind of the Church should be altered to reflect the teaching of the Articles; for both the Articles and the mind of the Church should reflect the mind of God in those matters which have been revealed to us.*** If the mind of the Church does not do this, the matter may be set right by prayer and exhortation and faithful exposition of the revelation. ***If, however, it is the Articles which do not reflect God's revealed mind, then they ought to be revised.*** Critics of the Articles have not in recent years sufficiently examined them along this line, though in the past when subjected to this test they have been vindicated.

Professor Lampe repeats this objection of Dr. Matthews. The original purpose of the Thirty-Nine Articles in Professor Lampe's opinion is that they should "represent the general mind of the Church on the religious and moral issues." But this is not an accurate statement of the intention of the compilers of the Articles. These were not drawn up to reflect the common mind of the Church of their day in the way, for example, that the Archbishop's Commission on Doctrine reflected the mind (if not the common mind) of the Church of the twenties, but rather that they should be a means of unifying the mind of the Church by guiding and informing it. As their title page puts it, they are "for the Establishing of Consent touching True Religion". ***The***

Articles, then, are to be normative, not merely descriptive; they are to establish and not merely reflect the mind of the Church, and for this they must take their character not from the Church and its mind but from the Word of God.

Christian doctrine does not take its authority from the fact that it is held by a majority of those who profess Christianity, nor by a majority of those who have obtained office or eminence in the Church. History gives many examples of when a minority opinion was plainly the correct one. It may be that the present time is a further example. **At all events, it is not the task of Church confessions to reflect majority opinions ('the general mind of the Church') but to reflect the truth, which in a religion of revelation as is Christianity is found by a return to the source of revealed truth, God's Word.**

The Thirty-Nine Articles, (London, 1961), pp. 38f.

The Articles of the Church of England, pp. 104, 107.

5.1 Are the Articles Necessary?

But Professor Lampe has raised another question which is prior to the question of revision, or even of the maintenance of the *status quo*, and that is whether the Church of England needs Articles at all. Are they really necessary? Should they be dropped as a doctrinal statement and the Church remain content merely with the Creeds? This is what Professor Lampe advocates. He believes that the Articles should be retained as an important historical document of the Church of England, witnessing to its beliefs at the time that it separated itself from the Church of Rome in the sixteenth century, but that the Church should now proceed without requiring any assent either to them or to any other Articles which might take their place. He writes: "Our best course would be to dispense with Articles, retaining the thirty-nine but explicitly recognizing them to be an important document of our church which no longer serves its original function and to which no form of subscription should now be required."

The cancelling of the requirements for assent to the dogmatic statements of the Articles would be in keeping with the present temper of protestantism which since the rise of pietism (as exemplified by the Quakers) has seen the progressive eroding of the importance of dogma in Christianity. Luther saw the danger when he wrote in the Smalcald Articles (III:8): "Enthusiasm" (that is, piety that does not stick to the Word of God) "clings to Adam and his descendants, and it is the strength, source and power of all heresies including those of the papacy and of Mohommet." Undogmatic Christianity has very largely replaced the Christian faith of the Reformation amongst Protestants. This attitude can give no value to the requirement of assent to dogmatic statements, but sees this only as a burden, so that

even if the assent is still given in accordance with inherited requirements, it is not treated with seriousness. ***There is, however, no future for undogmatic Christianity -- that is, for a Christianity that follows wherever the thoughts of its current theological leaders may lead -- because Christianity is essentially, and always has been historically, a dogmatic religion. When Jesus asked his disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" and asked His adversaries, "What think ye of Christ, whose son is he?" He incorporated dogma as integral part of the Christian faith. A religion of revelation which is given in the events and words of history must be dogmatic in character. But doctrine that is founded on nothing but enthusiasm, that is to say, on current opinions whether of the individual or of a group, or on opinions sufficiently long held to be called tradition, is unstable and gives promise of no permanence in the future. Historical Christianity is thoroughly dogmatic, and has an unchanging basis for its doctrines -- the inspired teaching of the Scriptures -- though it is always open to an improved understanding of what this unchanging basis teaches.***

The Christian faith must always adhere closely to the Word of God, which means that it will be characterized by dogma. But this does not in itself answer the question whether the Church needs Articles apart from the Word of God in Holy Scripture to incorporate that dogma. At first sight it might seem that it does not. If the visible church is defined as "a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly administered", what more is needed than this word of God preached within the context of the faithful congregation? ***The answer is that nothing more is needed; but this does not mean that the Church of England can do without Articles or the requirement of assent to them from its office bearers.*** The solution to the paradox is the distinction between the church and the denomination which also goes by the name of church, and unless this distinction is clearly kept much confusion in many areas of theology and ecumenical endeavor results. The visible church is rightly defined by the nineteenth Article as "a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly administered according to Christ's ordinance". Such a visible church does not necessarily need Articles, nor assent to Articles, in order to preserve the true Christian faith within its fellowship, so long as the congregation retains and exercises its authority and duties as a congregation. The Christian congregation's duty is to exhort one another as to the mind and will of God, and to admonish one another whenever any deviation from the revealed mind of God shows itself.

This exhortation and admonition by members of the congregation one of another includes, of course, exhortation and admonition of those ministers whom the Spirit of God has placed in the congregation. Only those who worship together and know one another in daily life, can truly exercise pastoral care over one another. ***By mutual exhortation and "submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21) the preaching of the Word of God is kept within the doctrines of the Word of God.*** For by exhortation and admonition from the hearer the preacher prompted by his Spirit-led mind and conscience responds to the exhortation and so keeps within

the revealed Word of God, just as the preacher, by the exercise of his gift, maintains and builds up the spiritual understanding and Christian character of the congregation. **Thus the pastor of the pastors is the congregation itself.** Moreover, if any member of the congregation (whether pastor or not) is not subject to admonition based on the Word of God (for only 'godly admonition' binds the Christian's conscience) then the New Testament makes clear that it is every Christian's duty to withdraw his fellowship from such a brother who walks disorderly.

The Articles of the Church of England, p. 111.

5.2 Denominational Association

In such a visible church, where there is believing fellowship in prayer and God's Word, and where as a consequence the Holy Spirit is present according to Christ's promise, there is plainly less need of a binding doctrinal statement as a basis of association. God's Word mutually ministered and accepted is sufficient. But in the course of centuries churches have become linked in exclusive groupings, as, for example, as has been mentioned, the Novation, Catholic and Donatist churches in the ancient world, and in our own time the various Catholic and Protestant denominations. These groups are usually called Churches, though in fact they have no biblical prototypes. They differ from churches in that they never assemble, nor form a congregation in which the pure Word of God can be preached so as to do its work of informing and correcting the mind and the conscience. Now if such an association in groups is to be helpful to the churches concerned, it is necessary that there should be a clear doctrinal basis for the association, and this is especially needed when, as in most denominational groups, the central organization of the denomination has taken over some of the duties of the congregation, in particular the duty of ensuring that the pure Word of God is preached within it, by the selecting and disciplining of the ministers. More frequently than not, the denomination has a large say in the appointment of the minister of the church, and in the discipline of church members, including the minister. The denomination also very often regulates the worship of the church. In this way the denomination has taken over the duty of ensuring that the pure Word of God is preached and the sacraments duly administered in the way that Christ ordained, on which, according to Article 19, the very existence of the visible church depends. It is therefore a matter of absolute necessity that the denominational association should have a doctrinal basis.

The need for a clear and full doctrinal basis for denominational association is enhanced by the financial sanctions which the denomination comes to possess over the church or the congregation. The denomination attracts to itself gifts and legacies in trust, which its central organization and office-bearers administer. Grants in aid of ministers' salaries or superannuation, or the awarding of theological bursaries, are

examples. Moreover, in some denominations the property which the Church finds convenient to use, such as the church building where it meets, or the house for its minister, is owned or controlled by the denomination. This arrangement is often convenient and helpful, but it puts the possibility of powerful financial sanctions into the hands of those in charge of the central organization. It is a 'this-worldly' type of sanction and has nothing at all in common with the spiritual sanctions or discipline which alone should be exercised in the congregation, namely, the Word of God. for God's Word has the power when it is faithfully ministered to convict a regenerate conscience, and to move the will of the child of God (II Corinthians 7:8-11).

To minimize the possibility of the central organization tyrannizing over ministers of the Gospel in the church, it is not only necessary to have carefully articulated church law (i.e., denominational rules) which preserve the exercise of spiritual principles to the minister and the congregation, and to keep these rules; it is also necessary to have a carefully articulated theological statement which controls all the lawmaking of the denomination's legislative body, and to which assent is required from the ministers which the denomination sends to the churches.

If the denominational association is to be stable, and to serve the purposes for which it was brought into being, it is essential to have a doctrinal basis for the association. Though this theological statement should at every point be based on Scripture, Scripture itself was not written as a document for a basis of association of churches and it is not suitable for this purpose. Yet a doctrinal basis of association is necessary especially when the association takes a form in which the churches hand over to the central organization of the association so many vital matters which concern their own continuance as truly Christian churches. In these circumstances it goes without saying that any assent given to a doctrinal basis of association must be given *ex animo*,¹ and that any required statement of belief that the basis is agreeable to the Word of God must be meant unequivocally. On the other hand, proper liberty for Christian thought should be preserved within the terms of association. ***Thus, on doubtful or less important doctrines the Articles are rightly silent. But ambiguity which aims at the same liberty which silence provides is a false and unworthy method for association, and there is no evidence that the Articles proceed by such a method.***

Members of a Christian association which has a doctrinal basis, as has the Church of England, should be expected to hold that basis themselves, especially if they receive remuneration from their membership. Occasionally clergy leave the Church of England for doctrinal reasons and this is straightforward action. According to the rules of the association mutually agreed upon (e.g., Canon 5 of 1604), roundly to denounce the doctrinal basis as full of erroneous doctrines (as some modern churchmen have done) is automatically to exclude oneself from membership of the association (and so disqualify oneself for holding preferment within it). This also is straightforward and honest. In negotiations for denominational amalgamation the Articles can play a

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useful part. A question that should be asked and answered early in the negotiations is how the negotiating churches stand with regard to the Articles. Not all the Articles are of equal importance for a basis of association. This has been recognized from the beginning. For example, the Act of 1571 which required the clergy to assent to the Articles restricted the requirement to those Articles 'which only concern the true Christian faith and the doctrine of the sacraments'; and by the Act of Toleration of 1689 dissenting ministers were required to subscribe only the doctrinal Articles and not those which treated of church polity, namely Articles 34, 35, 36 and the opening clause of Article 20. But some of the Articles are crucial for any denominational association, and it would be a more straightforward and satisfactory method for the negotiating parties to state how they stood with regard to these than to draw up a new doctrinal statement.

From the heart: sincerely.

Hardwick: A History of the Articles of Religion (1851), pp. 217f.

Gee and Hardy: Documents Illustrative of English Church, p. 638.

5.3 The Articles Incomplete

In conclusion it may be said that there is room for a verbal revision of the Articles to remove some of the obscurities of the language in order to make clear their original meaning. But this sort of merely verbal revision of the Articles would absorb a lot of time and talent which is not worth spending for the small gain in clarity here and there. It is better to allow them to stand as they are, in their Elizabethan English.

Because the Articles were written four hundred years ago it is natural that there are some matters touched on which are less important in our current situation than they were in the sixteenth century. This is no reason for dropping these statements, since they are in themselves correct. Similarly, there are matters which have come to the fore during the last four hundred years and which seem important to the modern Church, but which the Articles omit to treat. In this sense the Articles are incomplete, and there may well be room for a supplementary confession. Both Dean Matthews and Professor Lampe stress the point that the Articles do not deal with some topics of current importance. This in itself is no argument for dropping the Articles, but it does suggest that it might be advisable for the modern Church to put out a supplementary confession which incorporates the Articles, in the same way as the Articles have incorporated the earlier Creeds, but which goes on to speak on topics on which the Articles are silent. But it is a matter of fundamental importance that any such statement by the modern Church should follow the same principles of construction as the Creeds and the Articles themselves. That is to say, **a modern confession must strive to express what the Scriptures have to say to the world of today.**

The historical position of the Church of England is that the Scriptures are sufficient, and that the principles they enunciate are adequate for all human situations. It may be that we need to incorporate those principles in further Articles or other form of confession which speaks to our modern situation. In this way the Church of England would become once more a confessing Church, confessing the faith in the presence of today's form of unbelief and misbelief. *But if our denomination were to decide to supplement in this way the Creeds and Articles already agreed upon, it is essential that it should proceed by the method of basing such a confession quite firmly on the historical Christian doctrine revealed in Holy Scripture, so as to ensure that the declaration prefixed to the Articles might continue to be 'that the Articles of the Church of England . . . do contain the true Doctrine of the Church of England agreeable to God's Word'.*