

# The 39 Articles



## A Commentary

Holy Trinity Anglican Church

Welcoming ♦ Relevant ♦ Traditional ♦ Evangelical

*an exciting place to be*

# ARTICLES

AGREED UPON BY THE  
ARCHBISHOPS AND BISHOPS  
OF BOTH PROVINCES

AND THE WHOLE CLERGY

IN THE  
CONVOCATION

HOLDEN AT *LONDON* IN THE YEAR 1562

FOR THE AVOIDING OF DIVERSITIES OF OPINIONS  
AND FOR THE ESTABLISHING OF CONSENT  
TOUCHING TRUE RELIGION

REPRINTED BY HIS MAJESTY'S COMMANDMENT WITH HIS  
ROYAL DECLARATION PREFIXED THEREUNTO

## **FOREWORD**

The Church of England accepts the full and final authority of Holy Scripture as the basis for all that it believes. At the Reformation, the Church adopted the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion as a concise and systematic statement of the teaching of Scripture.

Canon A 5, Of the doctrine of the Church of England, states:

The doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the Holy Scriptures, and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures.

In particular such doctrine is to be found in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, The Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal.

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## **I. Of Faith in the Holy Trinity.**

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

As with any document to summarise the Christian faith, the Articles begin with a statement on who God is. After the disciples recognised Jesus as truly God, and after they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, there was a great deal of wrestling over how to explain all this in the face of the ancient doctrine of monotheism – that there is only one God. It was well established in the Torah that God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4), and Jesus repeated it in his own summary of the Law (Mark 12:29). Yet, there now seemed to be three gods: the Father in heaven, the Son who had become man, and the Holy Spirit. They knew that these three were not just different “modes” in which the one God might exist at a given point in time, because they saw all three in action together at the great epiphany moment of Jesus’ baptism: the Father speaking, the Son in the water, and the Spirit descending like a dove.

Thus the doctrine of the Trinity was born. The one true God, already known as everlasting, omnipotent, and the Creator of all, has three “persons,” each possessing the fullness of deity, yet maintaining a distinct “hypostasis” or “subsistence” of their own. Behind these technical terms is the intent to describe the reality that the Father and the Son and the Spirit each exist distinctly and can be interacted with as a person, even though they share one power, one will, one character of holiness, one existence or being.

A term in this Article that may strike the reader as odd is that God is without “parts.” Meaning more than just “body parts,” this refers to what theologians call the doctrine of “divine simplicity.” God is a “simple” being in that he cannot be broken down into component parts. God is not love + holiness + justice + mercy. One cannot consider God’s omnipotence as if it were a distinct “piece” of him, nor separate his wisdom as some sort of component in the great divine construct. No; as the Scriptures say, “God is one.” He cannot be divided into “parts” for individual analysis. If that were to be so, then even his divinity and his existence could be separated out, and philosophers could have a field day with the impossible paradox that there could be such thing as “pure divinity” apart from the personal characteristics of God. No; God is one, and his various attributes are inseparable from one another.

Another term in this Article that may confuse people is the statement that God is without “passions.” Surely, if God is love, he has great passion? The term passion in this context refers to emotions. God is the perfect being, and perfection requires no changes. Emotions, by nature, are constantly changing, thus it is impossible to attribute them to God. The places where the Bible describes God as having emotions (anger at sin, compassion toward his people, etc.), these theologians have called ‘anthropomorphisms’ – treating God like a human for the sake of our better making sense of him. God doesn’t feel angry or loving on

an emotional level as we humans do. Rather, God is angry or loving. God is love by his very nature, not by mere emotional whim. Similarly, God's wrath against sin is not a matter of his losing his patience, but rather is the unleashing of his perfect justice.

## **2. Of the Word or Son of God, which was made very Man.**

*The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took Man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man; who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.*

For the most part, what this Article says is identical to the content of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. The rest is derived from other important documents from the Early Church.

Jesus is first identified as the Son of God and the Word of God. These are two of his most significant titles or descriptions in the four Gospel books. The Word (in Greek: *logos*) is a borrowing from Greek philosophy – the *logos* is the divine mind, reasoning, or intelligence. For Jesus to be called the Word of God (John 1:1-18) is to exalt him as divine, on equal footing with the invisible God. Thus, in order to distinguish between the invisible God and the God-Man, Jesus, the terms 'Father' and 'Son' are employed to describe the relationship between them.

As the Son of God (Matthew 16:16), Jesus is "*begotten from everlasting of the Father.*" The difference between begetting and making is that the thing begotten shares in the identity of its begetter, whereas the thing made does not have that same relationship. So Jesus was begotten, not made – he and the Father are one (John 10:30). Thus Article Two goes on to say that Jesus is "*the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father.*" In simple terms, this means that Jesus truly is God, always has been God, and is the same divine being as God the Father.

What follows is an explanation of how the humanity and divinity of Jesus are related. To say Jesus "*took Man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man*" is to say that the Son of God started off as only a divine person, but added to himself a human existence through his conception and birth from the Virgin Mary. So his human existence didn't come out of nowhere, but was received from his mother, just like everyone else. In that setting, his divinity and humanity were perfectly and completely linked, never to be divided again. Theologians use the Latin phrase *communicatio idiomatum* (communication of properties) to describe this perfect combination of humanity and divinity – once united in the person of Jesus, anything that can be said about his humanity applies also to his divinity, and vice



versa. Thus, we are able to say that God died on the Cross, that Christians worship a Jewish man, and that to see the face of Jesus is to see the face of God.

It is as this perfectly united God-Man that Jesus *“truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.”* This we say of Jesus both as a man and as God; in fact, many theologians throughout history have argued (quite rightly) that Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross for the sins of the world is only possible and valid *because* he is both God and man. In him the two parties estranged by sin (God the Father, and the human race) are perfectly united in one person, so he is the natural (and only) source of reconciliation between the two. In Christ alone our hope is found.

As for the distinction between “original guilt” and “actual sins,” a later Article will spell that out more clearly. Suffice it to say now that every sin and every effect of sin is dealt with by Christ’s perfect sacrifice made upon the Cross.

### **3. Of the going down of Christ into Hell.**

*As Christ died for us, and was buried, so also is it to be believed, that he went down into Hell.*

Although this is a basic part of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it is often misunderstood today – to the point where an increasing number of Christians believe this article of faith to be false. There are two primary sources of confusion resulting in such error: one is a faulty understanding of Hell, and the other is that this moment in Jesus’ existence is not very clearly explained in the Bible.

When we think of Hell, we usually think of the fiery place of judgement where the souls of the damned burn eternally. But as far as the teaching of the Bible is concerned, that image is the “lake of fire,” which is one of the pictures of eternal judgement upon the wicked used in the book of John’s Revelation (20:15). Hell (or its Hebrew term *sheol*), rather, is a generic place where the dead go: usually the wicked (Matthew 5:29-30) and occasionally the righteous (Psalm 16:10). It’s worth noting that Hell itself gets thrown into the lake of fire at the end of the Final Judgement (Rev. 20:14).

It is in this sense, as “the place of the dead,” that we understand Jesus to have descended into Hell. If we take seriously the teaching that Jesus is fully human and truly died, then we must conclude that, in his human spirit or soul, the Son of God went where all dead men go. Indeed, his entrance into death and subsequent resurrection lays the foundation for our own hope of resurrection from death.

The other reason Christ’s descent into Hell is often overlooked is because its explanation in the Bible is not neatly spelled out for us. Our most clear picture is found in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:18-20 which says:

*Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and*

*proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.*

As one might imagine, the precise interpretation of his "preaching to the spirits in prison" and their connection to the souls of those who were drowned in the Flood is a matter of controversy among Christian teachers. Nevertheless, even if the precise activity of Christ in Hell is debatable, his descent there in death is a certain fact, and thus a certain comfort.

#### **4. Of the Resurrection of Christ.**

*Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of Man's nature; wherewith he ascended into Heaven, and there sitteth, until he return to judge all Men at the last day.*

It is universally professed among Christians that Christ rose again from death, and after forty days ascended into heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father, from where he will return to judge the world on the Last Day. What often is not appreciated as clearly are the details this Article describes.

The resurrection of Jesus was a bodily resurrection. Either unintentionally or purposefully, the idea creeps into the minds of some people that Christ's resurrection was "spiritual" but not "bodily." Part of this faulty mindset is related to a non-Christian philosophy that proclaims spiritual matter as good and physical matter as evil, thus claiming that Christ's resurrection gave him a perfected spiritual (and non-physical) body. The Bible contains many clear corrections to this idea: Jesus showed Thomas his crucifixion wounds; Jesus ate fish on a beach with some other disciples; Paul and others wrote of his bodily resurrection and ascension.

When this Article says that Christ rose with "all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature," it is affirming that the perfect human being has a body. In the resurrected Christ, we see not a super-human, not a demi-god, but a perfect human. As he is in his resurrected state, so are we to become in our resurrected state. We will still have a body, we will still eat and drink, and walk and talk; and we will be filled with God's divine glory as he perfectly dwells in us and we in him.

The doctrine of Christ's ascension and session (being seated at God's right hand) also frequently falls short of popular Christian attention. It is a matter of some mystery that he has ascended, in his human body, to the right hand of God the Father in heaven. Must there be an actual location where Jesus is right now, or is it in another dimension, or outside of time and space as we know it? There is much we can only speculate about. What we do know is that Jesus, in his full perfected humanity as well as his divinity, is face to face with the invisible true and living God. If one human being can sit next to God, so can the rest of us. Indeed, in Ephesians 2:6, Paul writes that we are already seated with Christ in heaven, by virtue of the fact that we are one body with Him.

So just as the death, burial, and descent of Christ into hell are sources of hope and encouragement for us as we contemplate our own deaths, so too are the resurrection of Christ and the ascension of Christ into heaven sources of hope and encouragement for us as we contemplate the promise of eternal life. Even though we “aren’t there yet,” we do know that Christ is King, already on the throne, at the right hand of God. All glory and honour and power is his, and for that we can (and must) give thanks.

## **5. Of the Holy Ghost.**

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

The full divinity of the Holy Spirit, and thus his personhood as a member of the Trinity, was one of the many theological conundrums that the Early Church slowly, carefully, and painfully worked out. By the time these Articles were written, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity had been settled for nearly a thousand years, so as with the previous four Articles, there is nothing “new” or particularly controversial to be said here. We read here that the Spirit is consubstantial (“of one substance”) with the Father and the Son, repeating language from Articles One and Two, equal in divinity with the Father and the Son, and is thus also the true and eternal God.

The one term in this Article that merits particular attention is the word “proceeding.” In John 15:26, Jesus taught that the Spirit “proceeds from the Father.” Given the doctrine of the Trinity – one God in three persons – theologians have latched on to this phrase to describe the relationship between the Father and the Spirit to distinguish it from the relationship of the Father and the Son. The Son is “eternally begotten” of the Father; the Spirit “eternally proceeds” from the Father. Although what these terms substantially mean in practical terms are shrouded in mystery (God is beyond our full understanding after all), they are useful words we are given in the Bible to grasp some of the basics of how to understand this three-in-one God.

As we don’t have a clear concept of the difference between “proceeding” and “begotten,” some theologians sought another way to explain the difference between the Spirit’s and the Son’s respective relationships with the Father. Taking the first part of John 15:26 into account, where Jesus adds that he will send the Spirit who proceeds from the Father, the idea arose to specify that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*. Unfortunately, the Nicene Creed had already been written and signed off at two Ecumenical (worldwide) Councils, so when the Latin-speaking West added “and the Son” (or *filioque* in Latin) to that Creed, the Greek-speaking East got very upset over such unilateral action, and this was a major contributor to the final split of Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism in 1054.

There are considerable theological minutiae that can be explored here as the ramifications of these technical-but-significant terms are worked out, but such would be too lengthy for a study of this calibre. Suffice it to say here that the Anglican (and indeed all the Reformation)

tradition has maintained the language of the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, though in the past couple decades a movement towards accepting the original language of the Creed (omitting “and the Son”) has gained traction in the Anglican Communion. As long as we keep our eyes on the words of Christ in John 15:26 and similar passages, we can’t stray too far off course regarding the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

## **6. Of the Sufficiency of the holy Scriptures for salvation.**

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

*Of the Names and Number of the Canonical Books:*

Genesis; Exodus; Leviticus; Numbers; Deuteronomy; Joshua; Judges; Ruth; The First Book of Samuel; The Second Book of Samuel; The First Book of Kings; The Second Book of Kings; The First Book of Chronicles; The Second Book of Chronicles; The First Book of Esdras; The Second Book of Esdras; The Book of Esther; The Book of Job; The Psalms; The Proverbs; Ecclesiastes or Preacher; Cantica, or Songs of Solomon; Four Prophets the greater; Twelve Prophets the less.

*And the other Books (as Jerome saith) the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine; such are these following:*

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

*All the Books of the New Testament, as they are commonly received, we do receive, and account them Canonical.*

This is the Anglican version of the classic Reformation doctrine *sola scriptura* – that Scripture alone has infallible authority over and in the Church. Today, the concept of *sola scriptura* is often misunderstood and stretched in a direction contrary to its original intent, often to uphold “the Bible” against “tradition” in a false dichotomy. In light of such problems today, it is helpful for us to have our doctrine of Scripture spelled out so succinctly here in Article Six.

Without going into detailed arguments about buzzwords such as “infallibility” and “inerrancy,” our belief described here is simply that all dogma – everything that *must* be believed by a Christian in order to be a real Christian – is to be found directly in the Bible or can be proved from the study of the Bible. If a teaching cannot be found in or proven by

Scripture, then it cannot be required for a person to believe, and is relegated to the category of pious opinion. Furthermore, as will be pointed out in another Article, if a teaching is contradicted by Scripture, then that teaching is false and to be discarded.

The books of the Old Testament are then listed, which is an interesting exercise for the modern reader as the familiar names differ slightly between when this Article was written and the present day. Ezra and Nehemiah were known as 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Esdras, the four greater (or major) prophets are what we call Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, plus the book of Lamentations is here considered part of Jeremiah where we often speak of it separately.

The books of the New Testament are not listed because there was no significant controversy over what those books are.

What's particular to Anglicanism here in Article Six, is the listing of "the other Books." Protestants call them the *Apocrypha*, Roman Catholics call them the *Deuterocanon*, Anglicans historically used neither term. For *apocrypha* is a derogatory term emphasising a negative view of those books, and *deuterocanon* is an honorific term that places those books on equal footing with the rest of the Old Testament. Instead, the Anglican position regarding "the other Books" is to note their distinction from the Old Testament without completely throwing them away. As Article Six describes, they are to be read in the church (thus they appear in our liturgies and lectionaries) for teaching about Christian life and manners (or morality) but not for establishing dogma or doctrine.

Thus the Anglican tradition remains faithful to the witness and practice of the Early Church, wherein many great teachers of the faith made frequent use of "the other Books" (such as St Augustine of Hippo) while others were critical of the nature of their authority (such as St Jerome, chief translator of the influential Latin Vulgate Bible).

## **7. Of the Old Testament.**

*The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.*

What to make of the Old Testament has been a challenge for many Christians throughout history, and remains so today. There are many issues that come up – how does the Law apply to us? What does Israel have to do with the Church? Aren't Christians free from the Law? Is it still the Word of God?

One of the earliest mistakes in dealing with the Old Testament is exemplified by the second century heretic Marcion. He came to the conclusion that "the god of the Old Testament"

was a different and inferior god to the one revealed in Jesus Christ and his Father. To him, the Old Testament was an account of the history of God's people longing for salvation but not finding it in their jealous and angry god, Yahweh. As Scripture, therefore, it was useless to Christians, who know the true God through Jesus in the New Testament alone. The heresy of completely rejecting the Old Testament is named after him, *Marcionism*, and it pops up even today when people make the retort "you can't teach doctrine from the Old Testament, that's obsolete!"

Another mistake often made is called *antinomianism*. It's a Greek term meaning "against the Law." Like Marcionism, it rejects the authority of the Old Testament Law, but without tossing the Old Testament completely into the rubbish heap. Antinomians over-emphasise the writings of Saint Paul that describe the Christian freedom from the Law (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:17, Galatians 2:4-5, 5:1-15, and Ephesians 2:14-16), and under-emphasise the continuing value of the Law (cf. Matthew 5:17-18, Luke 24:27). As such, an Antinomian will argue that all Christian moral teachings have to come from the New Testament, such as (and especially) the Sermon on the Mount. Even the Ten Commandments are not to be taught as Christian teaching, claims the Antinomian, unless their New Testament references can be supplied. Like Marcionism, though, this view still ultimately denies the Scriptural authority of much of the content of the Old Testament.

The correct way to deal with the Old Testament, and particularly its central attention to the Law of Moses, is to take the Law *on its own terms* rather than according to our own agenda (be it Marcion's view of an Old Testament versus New Testament god, or the Antinomian's view of the Old Testament Law having finished its purpose). This is where Article Seven comes into the picture.

It begins by pointing out that the whole Bible attests to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and thus the Old and New Testaments work together in harmony; they don't fight each other. Next it points out that the "old Fathers," that is, the holy men and women who lived in the Old Testament times, were not looking "only for transitory promises" – their concern was for salvation from sin just as ours is. And thus their Bible, our Old Testament, speaks to spiritual issues just as the New Testament does. It's not as if Israel is just about territory and the Church is about heavenly citizenship; *both* are about heavenly citizenship. The Old Testament Scriptures were and are God's Word, and their meaning is made clearest *in light* of the New Testament. In other words, a Christian can understand the Old Testament better than a Jew.

This still leaves the question of what to do with the Law. There have been different ways of conceptualising this, but Article Seven here takes the classic Reformers' approach. The commands of the Law of Moses fall into three categories: *religious* law, *civil* law, and *moral* law.

The "ceremonies and rites" of the Old Testament religious law are abolished: the priesthood of Aaron has given way to the Priesthood of Christ; the sacrifices in the Temple have given

way to the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross; all the commandments pertaining to the Old Covenant system of worship no longer bind us. We can learn about worship and holiness from them, but their *function* is completed.

Similarly, the “civil precepts” for how the ancient kingdom of Israel was to be run are not *required* to become civil laws anywhere else. The list of transgressions and punishments, certainly, gives us insight into the justice of God, and can help Christians formulate “godly laws” in the present day, but there is no command or need to imitate the laws of ancient Israel to the letter.

However, Christians are not “free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.” Where the Old Testament Law speaks of right and wrong in God’s eyes, we see eternal teachings that are eternally unchangeable. How a country is run is changeable because countries come and go; how God’s people worship in the Old Covenant is changeable because the Old Covenant came to its completion; but sin is still sin. Now, it is convenient (especially for the Antinomians) that much of the Old Testament moral law is repeated in the New Testament, but the Christian does not need the New Testament to “verify” Old Testament moral teaching. Both are of the Word of God, and both are binding authorities over us and the whole the Church.

## **8. Of the Three Creeds.**

*The Three Creeds, Nicene Creed, Athanasius’s Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles’ Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture.*

Having established the authority of the Bible in Articles Six and Seven, Article Eight here takes us to another teaching authority in the Church’s toolkit: the three Creeds. They are “*thoroughly to be received and believed,*” because they’re founded on the “*most certain*” foundation of Scripture. Many Anglicans make use of the classic Protestant doctrine *Sola Scriptura*, the teaching that *Only Scripture* is infallibly authoritative over the Church. Article Eight here works in tandem with that idea by asserting that although the Creeds are authoritative and binding for all Christian belief, they are so only because they’re derived from Scripture. They are, in a sense, the Church’s best authoritative interpretive lens for summarising the teachings of the Bible.

Each of these three creeds has its own special teaching value and corresponding use in the liturgy.

The Nicene Creed was written in 325 and expanded in 381, both at major ecumenical councils, by delegates representing the worldwide Church at the time. The primary theological issues being addressed in that Creed were doctrines related to the divinity, humanity, and personhood of Christ, and thus that is the longest section of the Nicene Creed. It is recited as part of Holy Communion services.

The Athanasian Creed is a longer document (about two full pages of text), written in the late 400s or early 500s – a century after the death of Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, in whose honor it was written. This Creed's primary focus is on the doctrine of the Trinity, carefully (and repetitively) spelling out the unity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit as well as the distinctions between the three Persons. Because of its later origin, and other details, it is only used by Western Christians, and because of its length it is rarely used in worship services. The original *Book of Common Prayer*, perhaps uniquely, called for its recitation at Morning Prayer on thirteen Holy Days throughout the year. Although this practice has largely disappeared in modern Anglican services, the Athanasian Creed is used here at Holy Trinity Church on Trinity Sunday.

The Apostles' Creed was developed in the first and second centuries largely as a confession of faith to be memorised and recited in the Service of Holy Baptism. It is the shortest of the three creeds, and therefore the most commonly used for teaching, catechesis, and memorisation. It is used as part of Morning and Evening Prayer and Baptisms.

## **9. Of Original or Birth-sin.**

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

This is our presentation of the doctrine of Original Sin. Original Sin is a doctrine often neglected today in many churches, but remains largely uncontroversial among various Christian traditions and denominations. A few variations of it do exist, but, in keeping with the majority of The Thirty-Nine Articles, this Article sets out the doctrine at its basic level without chasing too far down any 'rabbit trails.'

The problem with the human race is that we are sinners, that much is obvious. The doctrine of original sin teaches us that we are not sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners. As fallen people, we have what Scripture calls a "sin nature," or a "desire of the flesh" in opposition to the "desire of the spirit." It is this universal condition that causes us to sin. To reverse this order, and say we are sinners because we sin, is to fall into the ancient of heresy of *Pelagianism*. Pelagius was an early Christian teacher who overemphasised the goodness of creation, and eventually came to insist that people are sinners because they learned from the bad example of Adam. If we would just follow the good example of Jesus, Pelagius said, we would not sin. Ultimately this proved an impossible teaching, both in



everyday life and in accord with the writings of Scripture – we sin because of “the fault and corruption of the Nature” within us, and we are “very far gone from original righteousness” such that our hearts are “inclined to evil” and our flesh “lusteth always contrary to the spirit.” As the great penitential psalm puts it, “*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me*” (Psalm 51:5).

The result of this sin nature is that “in every person born into this world, it deserveth God’s wrath and damnation.” Even before we were old enough to sin, our hearts were evil and inclined against the Lord. “The innocence of youth” is an expression we use to speak of how young children are unaware of so many of the world’s evils; but it is just an expression: even the smallest child is a sinner and a rebel against our Creator.

As Article Nine goes on to describe, this sin nature also remains a continuing problem even for “them that are regenerated” – baptised believers: we have the *phronema sarkos*, which is a Greek phrase found in Romans 8:6, 7, and 27. This can be translated as “lust of the flesh” or “desire of the flesh” or “will of the flesh,” or even “that which the flesh sets its eyes upon.” Simply put, Christians still sin, and we still love sinning. Article Nine here also makes a reference to Romans 8:1 when it points out that “there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized.” This is Gospel – good news – and it is both important and necessary that we understand this: even though we are sinners, and we still sin, the gift of union with Christ takes away our just and rightful condemnation.

There is one final practical observation that can be derived from the last sentence of Article Nine. It makes a point of emphasising that even though we are no longer under the death sentence for our sins, we still have both the lust of the flesh and *concupiscence*. Concupiscence is a term used differently by different Christian traditions; here it refers to the fallen desires of the human will, which are described here to have “of itself the nature of sin.” Thus, even as Christians, forgiven and in God’s good graces, we must recognise that we continue to sin and besmirch the name of our Lord, and must continually repent of those sins.

## **10. Of Free-Will.**

*The condition of Man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God: Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.*

Here in Article Ten we find, among other things, the basics of the doctrine of *Total Depravity*. Total Depravity refers to the biblical teaching that everyone is “dead in their sin” (Ephesians 2:1), and asserts that *depravity*, or the sinful human condition, impacts the *total* human being. Our bodies, hearts, minds, and souls are each touched by sin’s effects. The result of this condition is that even the human will is corrupt, to the point that we cannot

choose to do good works, cannot place our faith in Christ, cannot worship God, on our own (cf the second half of Romans 14:23). If anything good is to come from us, we need help.

Thus another important teaching is described here: the doctrine of *Prevenient Grace*. The word “prevenient” comes from Latin “*pre venire*” – to go before. In the English language of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when this Article was written, it was translated as “prevent.” Thus, when Article Ten here says “we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us,” it means that God’s grace must work upon us before we can be able to do good, or come to saving faith in Christ. This doctrine is also expressed in our liturgy. One of the Collects found at the end of the Prayer Book’s Holy Communion service puts it thus: “Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy name, and finally by thy mercy obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ Our Lord.” This collect not only affirms the doctrine of Prevenient Grace but also adds to it the need for God’s continual grace, such that all our good acts must be “begun, continued, and ended” in God.

Sometimes the teachings of Article Ten may fall into some controversy. Roman Catholic teaching defines Total Depravity differently, asserting that the human will, despite sin, retains the ability to choose what is good. Additionally, the further step of claiming that the denial of human ability to do good and put faith in Christ is sometimes accused of being a strict Calvinist teaching. This is far from the truth. Whatever one believes about the details of predestination, and other teachings related to our salvation, all the Protestant reformers agreed that the human will needs the prevenient grace of God in order to put saving faith in Christ.

Salvation is found solely in the atoning work of Christ. God leads us to faith in him by his own election and choice. Human free will is not enough to cut through the deathly shell of human sinfulness without God’s intervention.

## **II. Of the Justification of Man.**

*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.*

This Article gives us the heart of the classic Reformation teaching of *justification by faith*. Very nearly quoting Romans 3:28-30, Article Eleven simply sets before us the reality that we are not “accounted righteous before God” because of “our own works or deservings,” but because of “the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Merit is an *important* term, especially among teachers of the faith during the time of the Reformation. Many had previously supposed that one could accrue divine *merit* through good works (especially

fasting, almsgiving, and prayer), and that this merit contributed to one's justification. In short, if you do good works, you become a good person.

Such an idea is mistaken. In Article Nine, *On Original Sin*, we saw that "The doctrine of original sin teaches us that we are not sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners." Similarly, here, we find that we are not justified because we do good works, but rather, we do good works because we are justified. As St Paul puts it, *"by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works"* (Ephesians 2:8-10). In short, we are justified by God's grace on account of our faith, by the merit of Christ, not of our own merit. Good works is what we are justified and saved *for*, not *by*. The next few Articles go on to address human works in various instances. Be it sufficient, at this point, to say that no quality or quantity of human efforts can bring about justification from our sins.

This, Article Eleven adds, is a doctrine "very full of comfort." Knowing that it is Christ's merit that saves us, and not our own, liberates us from the endless rigmarole of trying to be better people, trying to make sure our good outweighs our evils, trying to earn our way into heaven. Although it is humiliating to realise that our works can never merit our salvation, it is ultimately comforting that, despite ourselves, Christ has lifted us out of the mire of sin and death, and set our feet upon the solid ground of his Gospel of life eternal.

Finally, it should be noted that this Article makes reference to "the Homily of Justification." This is from "The Book of Homilies," a collection of sermons published during the English Reformation. For a period of time, preachers were running rampant proclaiming their partisan positions in the pulpit, and so these sermons were written and ordered to be read in the churches. Thus, this book is an official teaching document for the Church of England and by inference the Anglican Church of Canada.

## **12. Of Good Works.**

*Albeit that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's Judgement; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.*

The classic competition between *faith* and *works* arouses attention among scholarly theologians, popular authors, and ordinary Bible-readers alike. We know from some parts of the Bible that *"a person is justified by works and not by faith alone"* (James 2:24), yet we know from other parts of the Bible that *"by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9). This apparent contradiction has caused endless consternation among many a Christian, as well as wholesale splits between different traditions of Christianity.

Article Twelve sets out a classic Reformation answer to this question. Good works, it says, “are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification”. As discussed in Article Eleven, *justification* is God’s pronouncement of innocence upon a sinner according to the grace and merit of Jesus, not according to the merit (worthiness) of the individual. Article Twelve here reinforces that notion: our good works “cannot put away our sins” because good works “are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification”.

Our good works are not meaningless, however. They are “pleasing and acceptable to God,” for they reveal “a true and lively Faith” within. This makes them useful to our fellow Christians, also, since the fruit of good works is one way we discern a person who has been justified by God’s grace. This may seem to demote good works to a mere proof of change, but there is something special to be noted in the statement that our works are “pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ”. Our good works are no mere add-on to our salvation, they are integral. Even though God’s act of justification is pronounced before our good works are even possible, those good works are indeed a *necessary fruit* of justification. It is in light of that big picture that St James was able to write “*a person is justified by works and not by faith alone,*” and why St Paul wrote that we are saved “*by the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*”

One final distinction that is helpful to note in this sort of discussion is that “salvation” is bigger than justification. Justification is a legal term, denoting the declaration of innocence over an otherwise-condemned sinner. Salvation, however, encompasses the calling of God that precedes justification, the regeneration and rebirth in the Holy Spirit, the life of sanctification (growth in holiness), and the final resurrection and glorification and perfection of our souls and bodies. Good works are our participation in this overall process, particularly in *sanctification*. Again, even sanctification is ultimately the gracious work of the Holy Spirit upon us. But, as a parent teaching a baby how to walk urges it onward, so God wants us to move our legs while he holds us up. Not that we will someday be able to “walk in good works” without God, simply that one day the workings of his grace will be completed in us, and this life is our time of training (or discipleship) for the eternal life to come.

### **13. Of Works before Justification.**

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

This might seem a bit harsh at first – is it really impossible to do any good works without the inspiration of God’s Spirit? Romans 14:22-23 says “*The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God; happy is he who has no reason to judge himself for what he approves. But he who*

*has doubts is condemned, if he eats, because he does not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*" The immediate context there is dealing with whether it is appropriate or not to eat food that had been associated with pagan sacrifices, which is irrelevant to the issue put forth in Article Thirteen, but the underlying theological assertion made by St Paul there is very telling: *"whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."* To a large extent, this simple phrase sums up Article Thirteen simply and effectively.

But there are a few details and questions that still come up. As argued in previous Articles, it is reasserted here that good works do not *"make men meet [worthy] to receive grace."* Grace is a gift *freely* given by God, and our justification is on the basis of Christ's righteousness, not our own. Our good works before faith in Christ also do not *"deserve grace of congruity,"* which means they aren't even good enough to deserve a matching appropriate reward of any sort from God, because those works *"have the nature of sin."* For, again, as Romans 14:23 says, *"whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."*

Now, this does not mean that everything a non-believer does is entirely and utterly wretched and damning. There is many a "noble pagan" in the world, both today and throughout history. The assertion made here (and in the previous Article) is that no amount of good deeds will ever outweigh one's sins, and that even the good that a non-believer does is still tainted by sin. Perhaps there is a desire for recognition or reward for one's apparent good works – this would be a sin of pride. But even if a non-believer were to do a good work with no selfish motive at all, sin is still present. Why? Because of a lack of faith in the One from whom all good things come. Even when good works are done by non-believers without desire for selfish recognition, they are still done from a view of selfish achievement. Without faith, one cannot credit and thank the Lord who made the good work possible. Thus a sin of omission is accrued along with the good work.

This is a warning and concern to the regenerated (or "born again") Christian also. Our good works, too, are tainted with sin when we do not acknowledge the good grace of God at work within us. This is perhaps why Jesus taught at length about doing our good works out of public view, with only God as our "audience" (Matthew 6).

#### **I 4. Of Works of Supererogation.**

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

By the time of the Reformation, a doctrine of "works of supererogation" had developed. *Supererogation*, loosely translated, means "going above and beyond." Roman Catholic teaching put forth the idea that some good works a person can undertake are in fact beyond the ordinary demands of the law of Christ. A classic example of a work of supererogation

was making (and following through on) vows of life-long celibacy. God does not ordinarily demand such a sacrifice, so to do so willingly out of love and devotion for God was considered a good work above the norm.

But the Reformers took issue with this doctrine. As this Article quotes, *“when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’”* (Luke 17:10). This is consistent with the conclusions drawn in the previous three Articles: we are justified by Christ’s merits, not our own (Article Eleven), the good works we do only proceed from God’s grace of justification (Article Twelve), and we cannot do any good works before we are justified anyway (Article Thirteen). Thus it is fruitless to attempt to discern forms of good works that go “above” the standards of God, as no work, however good, can lead to our justification.

## **15. Of Christ alone without Sin.**

*Christ in the truth of our nature was made like unto us in all things, sin only except, from which he was clearly void, both in his flesh, and in his spirit. He came to be the Lamb without spot, who, by sacrifice of himself once made, should take away the sins of the world, and sin, as Saint John saith, was not in him. But all we the rest, although baptized, and born again in Christ, yet offend in many things; and if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

Although Articles Two to Four already dealt with some basic matters of Christology – knowledge of the Christ – Article Fifteen returns us to that subject in the context of our salvation. Having established the human condition to be one of utter loss in the midst of sin, it is now pertinent to observe the One who was sinless: Jesus.

It begins with a reminder of Christ’s full humanity, with an allusion to Hebrews 2:14, *“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil”* and Hebrews 4:15, *“who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”* A fully human, yet sinless, Jesus is put forth here. This Article also quotes 1<sup>st</sup> John 3:5, *“You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.”*

All this is emphasised in contrast to the rest of us Christians, who, *“although baptized, and born again in Christ, yet offend in many things.”* Article Fifteen goes on to quote St John again: *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1<sup>st</sup> John 1:8-9). These verses are included in the “Words of Comfort” in the liturgy of the Communion service, highlighting their importance to us in the Anglican tradition. The doctrine that Christ is sinless and we are sinful is not meant to put us down in drudgery, but to highlight the fact that Jesus truly is the way of salvation. His victory outweighs our failings, and for that we can rejoice.

One might wonder why this Article was included; it seems like a no-brainer. The controversy at the time was that, among some of the radical reformers, a teaching was

arising that true Christians don't sin anymore. Or, more subtly, an ideal of Christian perfection was being taught, as if we might cease to sin in this life. Article Fifteen keeps us in our place and protects us from such heresies; we are not Jesus, and we will not be entirely like Jesus in this life. Anyone who teaches such human glory before the resurrection is deceived, and to be rejected immediately.

## **16. Of Sin after Baptism.**

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

Where several of the previous Articles, especially the ones dealing with “good works,” put forth a theology in contradiction to the extremes of the Roman Church, Article Sixteen stands against one of the extremes of the radical reformation. Some, zealous for holiness in the church, eager to obey the teachings of Christ faithfully, and confident in the power of the Holy Spirit, came to the conclusion that “real Christians” don't sin anymore. They got carried away with Bible verses like Hebrews 6:4 – “*For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit.*”

To such extremists, a prayer of confession and repentance was only necessary once, at the beginning of the Christian life, and was thereafter unnecessary. Although the full force of this false teaching is not common today, its effects are still felt in some churches that never offer prayers of confession and declarations of forgiveness (or “absolution”) in their liturgies.

But, as Article Fifteen teaches, drawing from verses such as 1<sup>st</sup> John 1:8-9, the fact is that faithful baptised Christians are still sinners. We seek to grow in holiness through the power of the Holy Spirit, but there is no indication that full sanctification will be achieved in this life. Only in death will we be free from sin completely.

Thus, as this Article explains, when baptised Christians sin, “the grant of repentance is not to be denied.” This position is bolstered in Anglican liturgy by including a Confession of Sin in our services. The declaration of God's forgiveness to penitent sinners, is a vital part of the Church's rôle in the life of each and every believer. Nobody can claim that “they can no more sin” in this life. And the Church dare not “deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent.” So we believe, and so we practise.

## 17. Of Predestination and Election.

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

*As the godly consideration of Predestination, and our Election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal Salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: So, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the Devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchlessness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation.*

*Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in holy Scripture: and, in our doings, that Will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in the Word of God.*

If people ask me if I believe in Predestination, I like to answer "Yes of course, all Christians believe in Predestination. It's in the Bible!" Of course, the challenge is what people actually mean by "predestination," and how it links up to other biblical doctrines concerning our salvation.

At the most basic level, *predestination* is the act of God's calling upon people before they're born to come to salvation; *election* is God's actual decision. One of the major sources of this teaching in Scripture is 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 1:9, which says God "*saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago.*" Ephesians 1:4-6, also, teaches that God "*chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.*"

On one level this is a very simple concept and teaching. On another level, what you make of it can have massive implications for the entirety of Christian teaching about salvation, the human condition, and even evangelism. There can be said to be three categories of Christian views on predestination: Calvinist, Arminian, and Lutheran.



*Calvinist theology sets predestination in the context of God's sovereignty.* In his sovereign power, God the Father elects some people for salvation, God the Son suffers and dies for them, and God the Spirit sanctifies them throughout their lives. All this takes place through God-given means: preaching the Gospel, ministering the sacraments, and so forth. Some Calvinists will take this a step further with the doctrine of "Double Predestination," asserting that God not only elects some to salvation, but also elects the rest of mankind to die in their sins. God's supreme lordship over all creation and his perfect and wise eternal purposes are the overarching paradigm holding this together.

*Arminian theology sets predestination in the context of God's foreknowledge.* With a nod to human free will, God the Father elects those for salvation whom he foresees will put their faith in him. Some Arminians take this a step further and assert that if someone abandons his faith in God, then God's election of that person is also undone – someone can be in a state of grace, but later abandon God and be consigned to Hell.

*Lutheran theology sets predestination in the context of God's merciful love.* In grace, God the Son died for the sins of the whole world, making redemption available to everybody. And yet, by way of a divine mystery we cannot untangle, God the Father also only chooses certain people ahead of time for salvation. God's will or wish for universal salvation is upheld alongside the fact that he doesn't elect everyone for salvation.

When it comes to Anglicanism, one finds that all three views of Predestination can fit into the language of Article Seventeen. Each viewpoint may latch on to different phrases therein. Calvinists may emphasise the phrase "everlasting purpose of God" to highlight God's perfect sovereignty. Arminians may emphasise the phrase "those whom he hath chosen in Christ" to highlight that their election is linked to faith in Christ. Lutherans may emphasise the phrase "decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation" to highlight the mystery of God's predestinating will and desire to save sinners from eternal death.

There are, however, certain aspects both of Calvinism and of Arminianism that fall outside of Anglican teaching. This is not to say that Anglicans cannot be Calvinists nor Arminians, but that certain forms of those theological systems do not fit in with the totality of Anglican teaching.

One Calvinist teaching on Predestination that is not mentioned one way or the other is Double Predestination (that God chooses who goes to heaven and who goes to hell). Our foundational documents neither teach nor condemn this point.

One Calvinist teaching that is not embraced, however, is the doctrine of Limited Atonement. This is the idea that Jesus died only for the Elect – that is, those whom God the Father first predestined. While fitting together in a logical system, Scriptural evidence for this position cannot be proven against the default belief that Christ died for the sins of all. The Anglican Catechism of 1662 also denied this Calvinist teaching.

One Arminian teaching on Predestination that does not fit into Anglican doctrine is the claim that human free will is sufficiently free to choose Christ. Sometimes called "Decisionism," this is a view popular among Methodists and Revivalists, claiming that we are saved according to our own decision to accept Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Saviour. Article 10, *On Free-Will*, upholds the classical reformation teaching that the human will is so tainted by sin that it is unable to choose the good – to put faith in Christ – without God's grace preceding us. Thus, the Arminian doctrine of Predestination based on God's foreknowledge of human faith must maintain a doctrine of God's Prevenient (that is, preceeding) Grace enabling that faith to come about, in order to fit into Anglican teaching.

A positive and comprehensive Anglican teaching on Predestination, based on Article Seventeen, is essentially on the same page as Lutheran (and historic Christian) teaching. *First*, we affirm not only God's foreknowledge of those who would be saved, but also God's fore-decision (or Predestination).

*Second*, God's grace upon his elect moves us through a sevenfold process of growth in Christ. Article Seventeen describes the process to be election, obedience, justification, adoption, made like the image of Christ, good works, and finally, everlasting felicity [joy]. This is essentially a paraphrase of Romans 8:29-30. Noting how obedience follows election, we must note that although we cannot say "yes" to God without his "yes" to us (that is, Election), we can, however, say "no" to God: rejection of his election. We cannot lose our election, but we can reject it.

*Third*, Predestination and Election are to be understood as "sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons" (echoing Romans 8:31-33). This sets up a distance from the extremes of the Calvinist view which tend to depict God as cold and arbitrary. Rather than focusing on God's sovereign choice by itself and worrying whether or not someone is elect, we are to see Predestination as God's commitment to us undergirding the evidences of salvation that we see in ourselves. We can look to the Fruits of the Spirit within ourselves as subjective signs of God's election, as Article Seventeen implies. We can look to Baptism as an objective sign of God's election (Romans 6:1-4, Mark 16:16). In short, Predestination is the truth of God's commitment to his people, not a bludgeon of fear.

*Fourth*, as Article Seventeen concludes, "we must receive God's promises in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in holy Scripture: and, in our doings, that Will of God is to be followed." This is a warning against taking a biblical teaching and running with it to an inappropriate extreme, such as living in fear over whether one is Elect or not. This is also an exhortation to an obedient response to God's Predestination. Since he calls us to be Christians, we are bound to believe and live as Christians. In God's Election and through Baptism we have been given the gift of faith; it is our part to receive it with joy and grow in love for God and neighbour, that we might *be the more zealous to confirm our call and election, for if we do this you will never fall* (2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:10).

## **18. Of obtaining eternal Salvation only by the Name of Christ.**

*They also are to be had accursed that presume to say, That every man shall be saved by the Law or Sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that Law, and the light of Nature. For holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the Name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved.*

On the surface this Article seems very simple, very obvious, perhaps even a little bewildering as to why it even needs to be said. The truth is, although this Article is indeed as simple as it sounds, it shakes to the core the false notions that many well-meaning Christians cling to.

Taking the oft-repeated New Testament doctrine, that Christ Jesus is the only way to the Father, and the only name by which we may be saved, Article Eighteen spells out the converse: every alternative to the way of Christ is a false hope. We are not saved by the “Law or Sect” that we profess – being a committed Anglican or Presbyterian or Lutheran is not what saves us; only in the name of Christ are we saved. This rules out the sin of idolising our church, tradition, or denomination (though it does not give us carte blanche to ignore theological disagreements with others, either).

This applies to other faiths: people are not saved by adhering to other religions even if they are “diligent to frame [their] life according to that Law, and the light of Nature.” Being a committed Jew, a committed Muslim, a committed Buddhist, a committed Mormon, a committed Atheist, doesn’t count as “good enough” or “close enough.” Only in Christ is eternal life to be found, for Christ is the only true God.

This Article, perhaps a no-brainer in terms of understanding historical Christianity, has turned out to become one of the most obvious lines of defence against excessive liberalism in the churches. Many have begun to preach that Christ is *a* way to God; Article Eighteen binds us to hold that line: faith in Christ is the *only* way to God.

## **19. Of the Church.**

*The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.*

*As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch, have erred; so also the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of Ceremonies, but also in matters of Faith.*

In the midst of the Protestant Reformation, one of the critical issues that cropped up as Christians became divided from one another was the question of what the Church actually is. The Roman Catholics were insisting that the true Church of Christ was loyal to the Bishop of Rome. But one of the primary points of Protestantism was the rejection of the Pope’s monarchical authority over the Church, and thus the Reformers returned to the Bible in order to discern what actually constitutes the true Church on earth.

This Article is generally representative of what all the major Reformers believed and taught: the visible Church is the congregation, assembly, or gathering of people whose faith is in Christ. In that congregation the Bible is preached and the Sacraments are properly observed, plus whatever things are needed in order to carry out those two areas of ministry, all in accordance with Jesus' teachings.

What things, exactly, are necessary for the proper preaching of the Bible and the celebration of the Sacraments, however, remain points of contention between different European Reformation churches. For example, most of the Reformers maintained a strong rôle for Pastors as learned men who were well-trained in theology and the Scriptures in order to preach the Bible well to the congregation. In the past couple centuries, however, many traditions have increasingly abandoned the need for pastoral academic training; some have done away with it or even rejected it altogether. Meanwhile, the Anglican tradition (uniquely among the Reformation churches) maintained the historic episcopacy, although as part of the *bene esse* (of benefit), rather than *esse* (of the essence) of the church

Finally, Article Nineteen observes that the Church can make mistakes in matters of holy living, in liturgical practices, and in doctrine. This was a rebuke to the Roman claims of the infallibility of the Pope's teaching office; only the Scriptures bear the stamp of God's absolutely unbreakable Word. The Creeds, ancient liturgies, Early Church Councils, and other such influential documents all bear great value and authority, but none of those carry the guarantee of perfection as the Bible does. Thus this Article names four of the five Early Church Patriarchs as having erred in the past, forever cautioning us against putting our faith in the Church over our faith in God.

It is an historical curiosity that the fifth Patriarchy of the Early Church (Constantinople) was not mentioned here. The Church of England, beginning in the time of the Reformation, was constantly reaching out to the Eastern Orthodox Church to explore the possibility of mutual recognition, partnership, and even unity.

## **20. Of the Authority of the Church.**

*The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith: And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation.*

One of the contentious issues during the Reformation (which has in recent times again become a subject of controversy and debate) was the extent of the Church's authority. Some, like the Roman Catholic Church, argued for an unquestionable authority alongside that of the Bible. Others, such as many of the early Anabaptists, rejected the institutional church almost entirely, preferring an extreme form of individualised Christian freedom. Various

Protestant traditions took their stand on various points in between those extremes. The Anglican teaching described here in Article Twenty was among the more conservative positions.

By decreeing “Rites or Ceremonies” this Article particularly refers to liturgy – we believe the Church has the power to assert a common liturgy, or form of worship, to be used in the local churches with all due obedience. (This was one of the points of the Anglican faith which eventually caused the Puritans to separate from the English Church, especially some of the early Separatists who settled Plymouth and most of the rest of Massachusetts Colony.) An example of Scriptural backing for this level of Church authority is in St Paul’s First Epistle to Timothy where he described the Church as “the pillar and bulwark of the truth.”

The Puritans were reluctant to afford such esteem to the authority of the Church, preferring the “Bible only” as our rule for worship. This came to be known as the “Regulative Principle” – the Bible is the rule for worship, we can only do what is expressly commanded therein. Anglicans, instead, along with the witness of historic Christianity, hold to the “Normative Principle,” of which Article Twenty is a clear expression. The Church as a whole is free to worship as she sees fit, so long as nothing is “contrary to God’s Word written.” This is consistent also with how the Church teaches from the Scriptures: we may not “so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another.” Harkening back to Article Six, the language of things being “necessary of salvation” is once again limited to the bounds of “holy Writ,” that is, the Bible.

This Article is perhaps one of the most important ones Anglicans today need to revisit. For many Anglicans have been heavily influenced by other church worship traditions, and frequently import things from other places, especially the “prayer and praise” tradition, with little regard for its compatibility with our liturgy. As a Church with “decreed Rites and Ceremonies,” namely, the Book of Common Prayer, the order of how we worship is largely settled. Local innovation and variance is not in the hands of the individual congregations alone, but is also the concern of the Church on a larger level.

## **21. Of the Authority of General Councils.**

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

For the most part, this Article is an additional layer of clarification attached to Article Twenty. There, the authority of the Church was affirmed for the purposes of regulating the liturgy and settling doctrinal controversies. Now, one of the major historical instruments of

Church authority is addressed: the General Councils, which today we normally call the Ecumenical (meaning worldwide) Councils.

In the year 325, shortly after Christianity was legalised in the Roman Empire, Emperor Constantine called for an assembly of Christian leaders and delegates from throughout the Roman world and beyond, to settle some theological controversies. The major issue on the table was Arianism – a heresy that denied the full divinity of Jesus. The first draft of the Nicene Creed was forged and signed at that council.

Over the next few centuries, subsequent ecumenical councils were called to deal with subsequent controversies. A total of seven were held in the first millennium, before the Eastern (Orthodox) and the Western Church split from one another; some Anglicans point to the teachings of those seven councils as being faithful demonstrations of historic universal Christianity; others (perhaps the majority) point to the teachings of just the first four councils, writing off the latter three as being ancillary or less important offshoots of the first four.

Anglicans affirm the teaching of councils, insofar as their teaching “be taken out of holy Scripture”, without elevating them to an “infallible” status. Article Twenty One asserts that the real ecumenical councils are the ones called by Christian princes, kings, or emperors, thus rejecting the many more so-called “ecumenical councils” called by the Pope after the East and West formally parted ways in 1054.

Most Protestants affirm only the first four ecumenical councils, and even then only their canons pertaining to Christology (the doctrine of Christ). Article Twenty One leaves room for some debate over what to make of the first four to seven councils. Our ultimate guide is always and only the Bible, so whatever we find written in the canons of the ecumenical councils that is agreeable with the Bible, we receive and hold dear as the faith of the true and ancient Church.

## **22. Of Purgatory.**

*The Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping, and Adoration, as well of Images as of Reliques, and also invocation of Saints, is a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.*

Purgatory, in Roman Catholic teaching, is a place where the souls of the faithful go after death to finish the process sanctification. It’s like a temporary hell, or an extension of life’s sufferings, but with the certain promise of heaven when one’s time in Purgatory is complete. It is based on an attempt to differentiate between the “ordinary” Christian and the “perfect” Christian Saint in death.

Over the centuries, a whole theological construct of prayers and indulgences for the souls in Purgatory, resulting in a literal economy of salvation, got so bloated and obviously abusive that it became the very first tipping point that led Martin Luther down the path of Reformation.

Certain priests were assigned the specialty task of hearing confessions and helping local parishes in that function. Known as pardoners, these priests frequently earned for themselves rather unscrupulous reputations, accepting money in place of true penitence.

Worshiping and adoration of images and relics was another staple of medieval piety. Over time the due veneration owed to the great Saints of the past became so bloated in popular practice, that it became indistinguishable from the worship that is to be offered to God alone.

The Reformation did away with these things: no doctrine of Purgatory exists in official Protestant confessions, and the veneration of images (such as icons) is expressly forbidden in the majority of Protestant traditions.

### **23. Of Ministering in the Congregation.**

*It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of publick preaching, or ministering the Sacraments in the Congregation, before he be lawfully called, and sent to execute the same.*

*And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have publick authority given unto them in the Congregation, to call and send Ministers into the Lord's vineyard.*

As a matter of good public order in parish life, statements like Article Twenty Three are found in most Christian denominations and traditions. Only groups, such as the Brethren, Quakers, Salvation Army, and the modern House Church Movement reject the biblical and apostolic practice of having ordained pastor-teachers to preach and minister the sacraments in the Congregation.

Valid ministers are recognised by having been ordained “by men who have publick authority given unto them in the Congregation, to call and send Ministers.” In Anglicanism, Bishops have authority to ordain Deacons and Presbyters (Priests), and to consecrate Bishops.

### **24. Of speaking in the Congregation in such a tongue as the people understandeth.**

*It is a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God, and the custom of the Primitive Church, to have publick Prayer in the Church, or to minister the Sacraments in a tongue not understood of the people.*

This Article articulates the principle that what is said (and sung) in church must be in the ‘common tongue’ (in our case, English).

In the Early Church, virtually every Christian spoke Latin, Greek, or Aramaic. The language of worship was determined according to local region (or diocese) – Greek Christians worshiped in Greek, Jewish-descendant (especially Syrian) Christians worshiped in

Aramaic, and Western (Roman) Christians worshiped in Latin. There were other languages spoken, but those were the main three at the beginning.

Eventually, the faith spread beyond the borders of the Roman Empire. This resulted in the Bible and the liturgy being translated into some new languages, particularly in the East (Persia and India) and the South (Ethiopia). But some peoples who received the Gospel didn't have their own written language; this was especially the case in Europe (e.g. the Franks and the Slavs). As they received the Christian Gospel, many of them also took on aspects of the lifestyle and education of the Greco-Roman world. Converts learned the new languages (Latin or Greek), and thus worshiped in those languages.

After a few centuries, the spoken languages had evolved to a point where the preserved Church Latin was no longer the same language spoken in the street – Spanish, Italian, French, and Romanian had emerged, as had Germanic languages such as English, German and Norse.

The Reformation brought the need for local language worship to a head. It became both a tool and a rule among the Reformers to utilise the local language for the entirety of the liturgy – a principle still relevant today.

## **25. Of the Sacraments.**

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

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

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

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

A Sacrament is “an outward visible sign of an inward spiritual grace.” Article Twenty Five spells out what that means. Sacraments are “not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession.” As Anglicans, we confess that Sacraments are “certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace and God's good will towards us.” They're not so much about our faith, as they are about God's faithfulness to us. Thus, the sacraments are not mere human



rituals that we carry out, but are rites through which “he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him.” In other words, God is at work in the sacraments.

Next, the Article tackles the question of how many sacraments there are. Roman Catholicism has seven: Baptism, Confirmation, Communion, Penance (confession/absolution), Matrimony, Ordination, and Unction (anointing the sick). Article Twenty Five limits the number to “Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel,” i.e. Baptism and Holy Communion. The background for this is the theological assertion that a sacrament has two components: form and matter. The form consists of words (such as “this is my body...” and “I baptise you in the name of...”) and the matter consists of people and objects (water for Baptism, bread and wine for Holy Communion). Only Baptism and Holy Communion have both form and matter clearly prescribed in the Bible.

Lastly, the Article addresses the right use of the sacraments. Holy Communion was instituted to be eaten by God’s people, and not “to be gazed upon” during the Mass or in Eucharistic Adoration, nor “to be carried about.” The 1662 Prayer Book states: “if any [bread and wine] remain of that which was consecrated, it shall not be carried out of the Church, but the Priest, and such other of the communicants as he shall call unto him, shall, immediately after the Blessing, reverently eat and drink the same.”

The Article concludes with the biblical warning about due preparation for receiving the sacraments. The statement that those who “receive them unworthily purchase to themselves damnation” is from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:27-30.

## **26. Of the Unworthiness of the Ministers, which hinders not the effect of the Sacrament.**

*Although in the visible Church the evil be ever mingled with the good, and sometimes the evil have chief authority in the Ministration of the Word and Sacraments, yet forasmuch as they do not the same in their own name, but in Christ’s, and do minister by his commission and authority, we may use their Ministry, both in hearing the Word of God, and in receiving of the Sacraments. Neither is the effect of Christ’s ordinance taken away by their wickedness, nor the grace of God’s gifts diminished from such as by faith and rightly do receive the Sacraments ministered unto them; which be effectual, because of Christ’s institution and promise, although they be ministered by evil men.*

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

The historical origin of this point of doctrine stretches back to the early 400s in North Africa. Saint Augustine was the Bishop of Hippo and he was dealing with a sect of professed Christians (called Donatists) who had separated themselves from the Catholic Church and instated their own ‘purer’ church on account of the Catholics’ apparent leniency toward sin and apostasy. The specific issue the Donatists brought up was that if a clergyman caved

under the pressure of government persecution and denied Christ or worshipped the emperor to save his own life, that man lost his status as a minister, and would have to be re-ordained if he repented of his wickedness and returned to the Church. Universal (Catholic) practice did not re-ordain penitent ministers, the Donatists did. In the end, after much debate, Donatism was ruled a heresy; Ordination (like Baptism and Confirmation) was not a repeatable rite, and true confession and penitence was enough to restore a wayward Christian, whether ordained or not.

This point of doctrine and practice became a standard help in times and places where false teaching ran rampant, and in the milieu of the Reformation the anti-Donatist stance came in handy. For now in the 16<sup>th</sup> century there was a collection of clergymen of multiple perspectives: some were traditionalists, preferring the ways of medieval Catholicism; others were reformers, preferring the ways of the Lutherans in Germany and the Calvinists in Geneva. Others, still, were corrupt with worldly interests, seeking only the social privileges of the clergy.

Thus it became good and proper to rehearse this point of doctrine here in Article Twenty Six – the minister’s ordination status is not lost on account of his sinfulness. Therefore the ministry he carries out in Christ’s name, however imperfect, is still valid for the people in the pews to receive. Just as a puritanical purge of the whole congregation is forbidden in our Lord’s Parable of the Wheat and Tares (Matthew 13:24-32), so too is a puritanical purge of the clergy a bad idea. After all, everyone is a sinner, and if every sin is a violation of our relationship with Christ, then (one would reasonably surmise) it would be impossible for anyone to remain an ordained minister for even a day if it were possible to lose one’s ordination over sin.

Of course, however, clergy discipline ought to be provided for, taken seriously, and enforced. The doctrine of the gift of ordination being irrevocable (at least by one’s own sinfulness) is a doctrine of grace and mercy for the sinful clergyman, and assurance for the congregation in his charge. Like any other instance of God’s grace and mercy, this is not meant to be a licence to sin (Romans 6:1-2).

Article Twenty Six finishes with an affirmation of clergy discipline, going as far as deposition from office. It may be worth clarifying a point of practice here: deposed clergymen have the privileges of ordination removed from them, not the fact of ordination. As we can say “once baptised, always baptised”, so we can also say “once ordained, always ordained.” But, as with either case, the privileges of those gifts can be removed in extreme cases of abandonment of the faith: the clergy may be deposed, the baptised may be excommunicated. In both cases, restoration is always possible via confession and repentance. When that should happen, there is great celebration and a liturgical rite of welcoming, but never is re-baptism or re-ordination necessary.

## 27. Of Baptism.

*Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened, but it is also a sign of Regeneration or new Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed; Faith is confirmed, and Grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God. The Baptism of young Children is in any wise to be retained in the Church, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ.*

Article Twenty Seven is worded in a way that is extremely pertinent to our 21<sup>st</sup> century theological situation. The doctrine of Baptism among our fellow Protestants has drastically changed over the centuries, so it is *easy* for us to lose track of what our historic tradition has received from the Early Church and held on to ever since.

It begins with a negative: Baptism is not just “a sign of profession, and mark of difference” by which a Christian is distinguished from a non-Christian. Practically speaking, this is almost the entirety of what many now believe. To be a Christian, they say, you simply need to have faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism is simply a sign or symbol of that new life, and so when we become believers we get baptised in order to declare our faith publicly. Article Twenty Seven says no, there’s more to it than that.

Baptism is also “a sign of Regeneration or new Birth” (our new life in Christ) and an “instrument” to bring about certain effects. Historic biblical Christian teaching tells us that Baptism actually does something; it’s an instrument in the hands of God and the Church to bring about certain effects. The Article lists four things that Baptism does:

Baptism grafts people (who “receive it rightly” into the Church). This statement can be understood according to slightly different nuances. At the basic level, this affirms that despite its benefits, Baptism does not guarantee its recipient’s salvation. The gift of Holy Baptism must in some way and at some point be “received rightly” by the individual; that is, faith in Jesus Christ must complete its good work. Some get more specific in their understanding of this phrase, arguing that even the benefits of Holy Baptism described in this Article are not automatically conferred by the act of Baptism unless the sacrament is received rightly. However one parses this out, the basic fact remains that all who are baptised have become members of the Body of Christ, and are to be called Christian unless or until they specifically forsake the name of Christ.

Baptism visibly signs and seals “the promises of forgiveness of sin, and our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost”. At face value, this means that the recipient of Holy Baptism is justified and adopted in the biblical sense. On its own, this phrase is a harsh contradiction of popular evangelicalism today, which attributes such benefits to individual “saving faith” which precedes Baptism. Even Calvinist theology would scorn such an assertion; but the next effect of Baptism helps shed more light on this.

In Baptism, “Faith is confirmed”. This statement may seem to assert that only adult believers are to be baptised; however, Anglicans also baptise infants. Since the Enlightenment, the concept of *faith* has been strongly associated with the mind and the will, as if only the mature thinker can truly be said to “have faith” in anything. But this does not accord either with the Scriptures or with reason. Take, for example, the preaching of St Peter on the day of Pentecost: *“Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself”* (Acts 2:38-39). Consider also the severely mentally handicapped, who grow up never being able to understand Christianity with their intellect – are they incapable of having faith? Rather, we understand faith is a gift from God which manifests in the intellect if and when the intellect is sufficiently developed, but may be resident in the person’s heart regardless. In this light, Holy Baptism “confirms” the faith even of an infant. He or she is being raised in the knowledge and love of the Lord by the parents, their faith is said to be their child’s, and so Baptism confirms that faith-by-association.

In Baptism, “Grace [is] increased by virtue of prayer unto God”. The basic definition of a *sacrament* is a “means of grace,” and this statement clearly sets forth Baptism as a sacrament. “Prayer unto God” is given here as the means by which the sacrament works, thus reminding us that the baptismal water is not intrinsically magical, nor are the formulaic words “I baptise you in the name of...” a magical incantation. Rather, the sacrament is effective by virtue of its prayerful nature. It is God who gives grace, as He has promised to answer such prayers.

Thus in this short Article we have a robust starting point in understanding the sacrament of Holy Baptism. Though to understand Anglican teachings more fully, one must also look at the baptismal liturgy – what is said and prayed in that service – to get a more complete picture of what is going on in the act of Baptism, and what the status of the baptised person is.

Article Twenty Seven ends with a seemingly curt and abrupt sentence, that the baptism of infants is agreeable to the teachings of Christ. In some ways this can be frustrating to modern readers. Infant baptism is sometimes written off as unbiblical, and considered pointless or meaningless or invalid. Many people who were baptised as infants and join a church later in life find themselves getting “rebaptised.” And yet, this Article provides no explanation or defence of infant baptism whatsoever. It would have been handy to have such a resource more readily at our disposal. But the power of this brief statement is this: the idea of adult-only baptism was such a fringe opinion in the 1500s when this was written that it was not even considered worth arguing over. All the English Reformers felt the need to say was that infant baptism was good and valid. What confidence we can find in such a brief declaration! We may feel outnumbered on this issue today, but the testimony of

history is so mightily stacked in favour of infant baptism that we need not feel threatened by popular fads to the contrary.

## **28. Of the Lord's Supper.**

*The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another; but rather is a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death: insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith, receive the same, the Bread which we break is a partaking of the Body of Christ; and likewise the Cup of Blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ.*

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

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

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

Article Twenty Eight begins with a negative statement: Holy Communion “is not only a sign of the love...” This rules out Zwinglian memorialism or absenteeism, asserting instead that it “is a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death”. It goes on to assert that those who receive the bread and wine with faith are partakers of Christ's Body and Blood. The Anglican doctrine of Holy Communion is that it is a real act of God, giving grace to those who receive it. Christ is present in the celebration of Holy Communion at the Holy Table, not necessarily in or with the bread and wine specifically.

Transubstantiation “overthrows the nature of a sacrament.” This is the most direct way to criticise the Roman doctrine. A Sacrament is a means of grace – God's use of an ordinary earthly thing to convey a special heavenly thing. The doctrine of transubstantiation, asserting that the bread and wine are no longer bread and wine except in mere appearance, breaks down the definition of a sacrament. If it is only Christ's body and blood, how is it any longer an earthly vehicle for Christ's body and blood?

The Body [and Blood] of Christ is “given, taken, and eaten... only after an heavenly and spiritual manner.” This clearly takes the emphasis off the idea that Christ is truly present, body and soul, in the Sacrament, and directs our attention toward our own faithful participation in Christ through the Sacrament.

Holy Communion was not instituted to be “reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped”. The reservation of the Sacrament is the practice of setting aside some consecrated bread to bring to the sick or homebound after the liturgy was ended. The 1662 Prayer Book states: “if any [bread and wine] remain of that which was consecrated, it shall not be carried out of the Church, but the Priest, and such other of the communicants as he

shall call unto him, shall, immediately after the Blessing, reverently eat and drink the same.”

The Sacrament was “carried about” on solemn holidays such as Corpus Christi. The just-consecrated bread was “lifted up” during the Communion prayers. The consecrated bread was “worshipped” in special liturgies and in private. Such practices are not permitted by the Article.

Article Twenty Nine will cover more of this subject.

## **29. Of the Wicked which eat not the Body of Christ in the use of the Lord’s Supper.**

*The Wicked, and such as be void of a lively faith, although they do carnally and visibly press with their teeth (as Saint Augustine saith) the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, yet in no wise are they partakers of Christ: but rather, to their condemnation, do eat and drink the sign or Sacrament of so great a thing.*

For the Anglican Reformers Christ is present spiritually in the meal, not objectively in the bread and wine. A key phrase is that although “the wicked...press with their teeth the Sacrament...yet in no wise are they partakers of Christ.”

The Sacrament is not magic – eating Holy Communion doesn’t automatically make one a partaker (or member) of Christ. Rather, the unworthy receiver eats the Sacrament “to their condemnation,” which the Exhortation to Holy Communion in the liturgy also highlights with great emphasis.

Unworthy reception of Holy Communion increases our condemnation. We must not presume to go to the Lord’s table trusting in our own righteousness, assuming our own worthiness, expecting cheap grace. Rather, we must come to the Table with “lively faith”, as this Article puts it. This living faith, or active faith, recognises the reality behind Holy Communion: Jesus, fully God and fully man, the Crucified and Resurrected One, the sacrificial Victim and sacrificing Priest, is the only way by which we may approach the Almighty.

This is why St Paul exhorts us to “judge” ourselves and to “discern the Body” for a worthy reception (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:27-32). This is also why the Prayer of Consecration rehearses the Gospel in such detail – the faith to which we hold will be fresh on our minds and hearts as we approach the Holy Table.

## **30. Of both kinds.**

*The Cup of the Lord is not to be denied to the Lay-people: for both the parts of the Lord’s Sacrament, by Christ’s ordinance and commandment, ought to be ministered to all Christian men alike.*

This may seem like an odd point to be made into its own Article of faith. But in the context of its time it came off as revolutionary.

For several centuries in Western practice, lay people had received Communion “in one kind” – only the bread. The wine came to be denied them, only drunk by the priests and bishops, for a variety of reasons. Part of it was financial: supplying wine to communicate an entire congregation requires a great deal more wine (especially coupled with the more frequent lay reception of Holy Communion that the Reformers demanded, this proved an enormous shift in church budgets). Part of it was logistical: wine is much more prone to spillage than the bread. Part of it was excessive piety: some supposed the Blood was more sacred than the Body, and thus fitting only for the clergy to receive. It should be noted however, that receiving either the bread or the wine constitutes a full communion.

### **31. Of the one Oblation of Christ finished upon the Cross.**

*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. Wherefore the sacrifices of Masses, in the which it was commonly said, that the Priest did offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, were blasphemous fables, and dangerous deceits.*

The offering of the Body of Christ for the life of the world (John 6:51) had come to focus on its sacramental presentation at the expense of the once-for-all-time historic death of Christ on the Cross; many treated the Sacrament as if it were an effective sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins alongside Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross.

This, Article Thirty One identifies as “blasphemous fables, and dangerous deceits,” for it leads one to put one’s hope in the offering of Masses rather than on the actual death of our Lord.

The Reformers restricted the concept of sacrifice in the Holy Communion to our offering a “sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.” This phrase has been present in Anglican liturgies to this day.

### **32. Of the Marriage of Priests.**

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

This is an Article that feels like common sense to Anglicans – why on earth would the clergy be forbidden from marrying? The Roman Church today still requires celibacy of their priests and bishops (married men may be ordained to the diaconate). The Eastern Orthodox Church also has a particular set of rules concerning the marriage of clergy, dating back to the Early Church in which various councils set down the basic rule: married men may be ordained to any clerical office (bishop, priest, or deacon), but no ordained person may get married. Men enter the clergy as they are, and remain as they are. If his wife dies, he may

not remarry, though pastoral provisions do exist for clergymen with young children to remarry that their children may again benefit from having a mother.

The Roman Catholic practice of total celibacy for all clergy but the deacons is a heightening of the ancient rule. There was a great deal of trouble in the early middle ages surrounding nepotism (passing an office on to one's child) and simony (selling church offices to the highest bidder), and ruling that all clergymen had to be celibate, like monks, was a major weapon against such corruptions. By the time of the Reformation, clerical celibacy had become virtually universal in the West.

The Reformers, all, were opposed to this restriction. But instead of returning to the Early Church's rule (that a clergyman remains as he is, single or married), they returned to a more permissive stance, as reflected here in Article Thirty Two. Priests and Bishops, ever since, have been permitted to marry "as they shall judge the same to serve better to godliness."

This wording indicates that some clergymen are better off living singly, and others married, according to the gifts of grace at work in them. After all, the examples of the life-long celibacy of Jesus and Paul, in addition to Paul's teaching in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7 about the celibate life, provide a thoughtful balance to his requirements for the clergy in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3 – that a bishop should be a husband of one wife. Some have asserted this means that all pastors must be married, but this requirement has historically been understood to be a prohibition against divorced and remarried men being pastors, as well as against polygamy. Thus Article Thirty Two leaves the option open: our clergy may be married or single, as best suits their calling.

### **33. Of Excommunicate Persons, how they are to be avoided.**

*That person which by open denunciation of the Church is rightly cut off from the unity of the Church, and excommunicated, ought to be taken of the whole multitude of the faithful, as an Heathen and Publican, until he be openly reconciled by penance, and received into the Church by a Judge that hath authority thereunto.*

This is what the Canadian Prayer Book has to say on the subject of excommunication (page 66):

The Minister shall frequently remind the people of what is required of those who come to receive the Lord's Supper, as set forth in the Catechism and the Exhortations.

It shall also be his duty to warn individually any whom he knows to be living in grievous sin, that they presume not to come to the Lord's Table until they give evidence that they truly repent; and if they do not heed his warning, he shall refuse to administer the Communion to them.

He shall deal in the same manner with those between whom he perceives malice and hatred to exist, not allowing them to be partakers of the Lord's Table until they be reconciled. But if one of the parties is willing to forgive and, to the best of his ability, to make whatever amends may be proper, and the other party refuses to do so, the Minister shall admit the penitent person to the holy Communion and refuse him that is obstinate.

Before repelling any from the Lord's Table under the provisions of this rubric, the Minister should consult with the Bishop or the Archdeacon.



After so repelling any, he shall within fourteen days give a written account to the Bishop, who shall take such action as he deems necessary.

Excommunication is the extreme end of church discipline. It is the last resort, the greatest warning that can be given. Article Thirty Three describes how an excommunicant is to be treated: “as an Heathen and Publican” or “as a Gentile and a tax collector,” quoting Matthew 18:17. The beautiful key word following this is “until”. Even at such a pronouncement the hope remains that the person will repent and be reconciled with God and the Church.

Someone who has been excommunicated needs to be reconciled with “penance” and be received back into the Church by an appropriately-authorised “Judge.” Penance is here akin to the visible and active profession of faith a new convert makes, and being received by an appropriate judge (presumably a Bishop, since it is a Bishop who finalises the excommunication in the first place) is akin to the new convert’s participation in the rites of Baptism and Confirmation. The nature of the evil that separated the excommunicant from the Church in the first place will generally set the tone for the appropriate form of reconciliation.

One of the pastoral observations here, finally, is what this Article does not endorse. Excommunicated persons are not to be shunned, kicked out of town, heckled and shouted at by everyone. Rather, they are to be loved and evangelised in the hopes that they will come to restored faith in Jesus Christ and rejoin the Body of Christ.

### **34. Of the Traditions of the Church.**

*It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, and utterly like; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men’s manners, so that nothing be ordained against God’s Word. Whosoever through his private judgement, willingly and purposely, doth openly break the traditions and ceremonies of the Church, which be not repugnant to the Word of God, and be ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly, (that others may fear to do the like,) as he that offendeth against the common order of the Church, and hurteth the authority of the Magistrate, and woundeth the consciences of the weak brethren.*

*Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish, ceremonies or rites of the Church ordained only by man’s authority, so that all things be done to edifying.*

This Article shows us something of the essentially conservative nature of Christian faith and practice: that is, that change occurs as needed, never for the sake of change itself. Uniformity is not required across the globe nor throughout history, but locally, uniformity (or rather, unity) is extremely important, as the New Testament demands (Acts 4:32, Ephesians 4:1-3, Philippians 1:27, 2:2, 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:8). Part of this is to enable worship with “one voice” (Exodus 24:3, Romans 15:6), which can only be done when all the worshippers are on the same page – in agreement of what to say, when to say it, and how to express it.

Article Thirty Four captures this biblical mandate succinctly by first debunking the myth that everything is to be absolutely identical in all places at all times – all may praise God in their own language, and the exact manner of “Traditions and Ceremonies” need not be the same in every detail, indeed they cannot be. Some languages demand different turns of phrase in their spoken liturgy; cultural references shift over time. The basic requirement underlying Christian liturgy given here is that “nothing be ordained against God’s Word.”

What Article Thirty Four then goes on to address is the willing and purposeful violation of the Church’s local or regional rules of liturgy. Martin Luther observed, when writing about the significance of common worship, that although we have “freedom in Christ” (Galatians 2:4, 5:1) we are also subject to the “bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). The English Reformers maintained the historic commitment to clear liturgical standards: the Book of Common Prayer. This Article stands as a corrective witnesses for us against the “spirit of the age,” calling us to reinforce our commitment to understanding and using this gem of our tradition, our common worship, the Prayer Book.

But of course, the commitment to common liturgy and the warning against those who defy it are not mere legalistic statements; these aren’t rules for the sake of having rules. As Article Thirty Four lists, there are several reasons why authorised Church traditions are to be kept, and the liturgy ought to be adhered to (assuming they are not repugnant to the Word of God). First, they are established by due authority, and Christians are taught again and again in the Bible to respect our leaders, elders, or pastors. Second, they cause offence toward the whole Church and especially its “Magistrates” or leaders. This, too, is a grievous sin according to the teachings of the New Testament. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, rejection of the Church’s common practices and liturgies “woundeth the consciences of the weak brethren.” This is one of St Paul’s particular concerns in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 8, where he urges believers who think themselves mature to accommodate those who are “weaker” in the faith. The liturgy is a means to an end – a tool by which we worship God in more perfect unity. One may think oneself capable of worshiping in a manner “better” than the liturgy prescribes, but out of deference to the greater Body of Christ one is to submit in humility and love.

Article Thirty Four ends much as it began: noting that human rites and ceremonies may be changed by proper authority. It notes the ones approved “by man’s authority” because aspects of worship are mandated in the Scriptures directly, such as Holy Communion, Holy Baptism, the reading of the Word, the preaching of the Word, and common prayers. No one has authority to do away with things like these. But as for the additions we make to these, and the forms and structures they take, those the Church may change as and when needed. The final instruction is that such changes are to be made “that all things be done to edifying.” Notice this is not a provision for “preference” or “experimentation” or “spontaneity” or “fresh reimagining.” Many curious innovations have cropped up over the past century under such guises, none of which are strictly biblical values for worship.

Our liturgies are to be edifying, biblical, and true. Individual styles and emotional tones are secondary matters that cannot be allowed to control the shared liturgy. It is impossible for any worship service to be “all things to all people.” Rather, the liturgy is one thing, for all people. We learn to find our place within the rhythms of the liturgy, just as we learn to find our place in the work and narrative of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We do not follow Christ on our own terms, neither do we worship Him on our own terms. That is why we worship with a set liturgy, codified in a Book for all to see, use, and share.

### **35. Of the Homilies.**

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

Of the Names of the Homilies.

*1.Of the right Use of the Church. 2.Against peril of Idolatry. 3.Of repairing and keeping clean of Churches. 4.Of good Works: first of Fasting. 5.Against Gluttony and Drunkenness. 6.Against Excess of Apparel. 7.Of Prayer. 8.Of the Place and Time of Prayer. 9.That Common Prayers and Sacraments ought to be ministered in a known tongue. 10.Of the reverend estimation of God’s Word. 11.Of Alms-doing. 12.Of the Nativity of Christ. 13.Of the Passion of Christ. 14.Of the Resurrection of Christ. 15.Of the worthy receiving of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. 16.Of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. 17.For the Rogation-days. 18.Of the State of Matrimony. 19.Of Repentance. 20.Against Idleness. 21.Against Rebellion.*

During the Reformation, there was a great deal of controversy flying about as different sects taught different doctrines. Many of the Reformers preached what they had heard and learned in Geneva, from the likes of John Calvin. Others preached what they had received from the Lutherans. Others argued for unreformed medieval customs and doctrines. Beyond these were a handful of divergent views as people, both learned and unlearned, spouted their opinions among the people, looking for support and favour.

One of the ways this milieu was addressed was by the publication of a set of sermons, or homilies, that the majority of the bishops of England could agree upon. To this end, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and others assembled a Book of Homilies by 1547, just two years before the first Prayer Book was promulgated. For a period of time, these homilies were mandated to be preached from every pulpit. This accomplished two things at once: the people of England all heard the same doctrine taught in their churches, and the many clergymen who had not been properly educated (be they Papist or Protestant) were equipped to preach accurately the Word of God.

A second collection of homilies was assembled by the next generation of English bishops and published in 1571, and that is what Article Thirty Five here addresses. Both Books of

Homilies are identified in this Article as containing “godly and wholesome Doctrine” and thus to be preached diligently so all may understand them. It therefore follows that the contents of the 21 sermons listed here (plus the 12 sermons in the first Book) form a valuable treasure of “official” (or at least “authorised”) Anglican teachings. This places them among our Anglican formularies – documents that formulate the basis of our interpretation of Scripture.

But there are two major obstacles that hold the Books of Homilies back from functioning in this manner today. First, this Article identifies the Homilies as being “necessary for these times” – that is, in 1571. By linking the need for these Homilies to their particular moment in history, it may follow that they are less relevant or needed in our own day. They may address the controversies of the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century, but the controversies faced in other centuries may not be the same. Nevertheless, in so far that these Homilies deal with doctrine and morals, they should retain their teaching value in any age. The second obstacle to the usefulness of the Homilies is the fact that they have not been extensively used since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, nor have any major re-translations of them been made. If you think the Authorised Version (King James) Bible of 1611, which was translated carefully and masterfully by a team of scholars, is difficult to read, consider how much more challenging these homilies are to read, having been written by one author each, 50-100 years before the Authorised Version!

As a result, study of the Books of the Homilies today is almost entirely relegated to historical interest. Perhaps, in the course of the 21<sup>st</sup> century re-reformation of the Anglican tradition, the Homilies will finally be re-visited and made readily accessible to the reading public?

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

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

Alongside the Prayer Book and The Thirty-Nine Articles sits also the Ordinal – “The Book of Consecration of Archbishops and Bishops, and Ordering of Priests and Deacons”. In modern times, the liturgies of the Ordinal have simply been printed within the Prayer Book itself. Basically, Article Thirty Six declares that the Ordinal the Church in England had been using for the past couple decades was valid and biblical. We intend to keep the historic three-fold Orders (Bishop, Priest, Deacon); and the prayers and gestures (such as the laying-on of hands) prescribed in the Ordinal are not “superstitious and ungodly.”

The Roman Catholic hierarchy had been denouncing the English Ordinal as an invalid liturgy, and therefore asserting that every Anglican ordination was invalid. Article Thirty Six is our basic statement that we reject such claims; our ordinations are biblical and not superstitious.

Roman-Anglican relations continued to decrease over time until eventually an official proclamation from the Pope declared the Anglican order of ministry entirely invalid. Anglican Bishops put forth counter-arguments, and the debates continue to this day. Article Thirty Six remains a solid part of our confession: we firmly believe that our Orders of ministry are valid and biblical, despite others' arguments to the contrary.

### **37. Of the Civil Magistrates.**

*The King's Majesty hath the chief power in this Realm of England, and other his Dominions, unto whom the chief Government of all Estates of this Realm, whether they be Ecclesiastical or Civil, in all causes doth appertain, and is not, nor ought to be, subject to any foreign Jurisdiction.*

*Where we attribute to the King's Majesty the chief government, by which Titles we understand the minds of some slanderous folks to be offended; we give not to our Princes the ministering either of God's Word, or of the Sacraments, the which thing the Injunctions also lately set forth by Elizabeth our Queen do most plainly testify; but that only prerogative, which we see to have been given always to all godly Princes in holy Scriptures by God himself; that is, that they should rule all estates and degrees committed to their charge by God, whether they be Ecclesiastical or Temporal, and restrain with the civil sword the stubborn and evil-doers.*

*The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this Realm of England.*

*The Laws of the Realm may punish Christian men with death, for heinous and grievous offences.*

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

The history of the relationship between the Church and politics is long and complicated. At different times and places, Christianity has favoured a variety of approaches to handling the earthly authority of princes or kings. For centuries, in Europe, there was constant tension between ecclesiastical and secular authorities. The 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries saw perhaps the apex of this conflict in what has become known as the Investiture Controversy. At the root of it, the question came down to this: who gets to invest whom with authority? Do the Pope and his Bishops, who crown Emperors and Kings, also get a say in who they're going to crown? Do the Kings and nobles get a say in who their Bishops are going to be?

For most of history it was taken for granted that the State relied upon a common religion to keep its populace united. The resultant question was to what degree the state controlled the religion, or the religion controlled the state.

During the Reformation, there were many theologies and philosophies concerning the manner in which the Church and the State should run themselves and relate to one another.

In England the chosen solution was that the State (symbolised and personified by the reigning monarch) had governance over all things in the realm, including the Church. Article Thirty-Seven summarises this position.

It begins with a double statement: the King (or Queen) is in charge of the realm, and no foreign influences are to govern anything within the realm. This is expounded further in the third statement of this Article: the Bishop of Rome (that is, the Pope) has “no jurisdiction in this Realm”.

Naming the King or Queen as the governor of the Church, naturally, raised a lot of questions among dissenters and critics, so the second statement of this Article explains it further: “we give not to our Princes the ministering either of God’s Word, or of the Sacraments...but that only prerogative...that they should rule all estates and degrees committed to their charge by God, whether they be Ecclesiastical or Temporal, and restrain with the civil sword the stubborn and evil-doers.” Much like the Church in the Roman and Byzantine Empires, the Church of England would recognise the English crown as its temporal ruler, caller of assemblies, and protector and enforcer of policy, but not as empowered to dictate teaching or practice. This is commonly called an Established Church, best understood as “the Church which the State recognises” rather than “the Church which the State controls.”

One of the policies Article Thirty Seven was rejecting was a medieval understanding of the clergy and lay people as different “estates” of life subject to different “courts.” Previously, if a clergyman or member of a religious order got in trouble with the law, he could only be tried by a Church court. This gave the Church and her clergy potential to meddle in civil affairs across Europe without sanction.

The last two lines of this Article provide two important results of the political-theological position set forth here. First, the State is allowed to wield the death penalty, and second, Christians are allowed to serve and fight in combat. On both these counts the primary ideological opponents were the Anabaptists, who were becoming known for their radical views of the separation of Church and State and the Christian call to nonviolence (excepting only self-defence, though some went to the full extreme). In both cases, appeal to the Old Testament Law provides a great deal of support for the state’s legitimate engagement in war and use of the death penalty, even though the Church (as taught in the Gospel) is called to minister grace and pardon. Martin Luther’s political views were similar on this count: the Church and the State were to him the “two hands of God”, ministering grace and justice, respectively.

Finally, Article Thirty-Seven rejects the supremacy of the Pope over the Catholic Church. Again reaching back to the Early Church, the idea of the Church governing her own affairs within the confines of each secular nation is brought to the fore in Anglican political theology.

### **38. Of Christian men's Goods, which are not common.**

*The Riches and Goods of Christians are not common, as touching the right, title, and possession of the same, as certain Anabaptists do falsely boast. Notwithstanding, every man ought, of such things as he possesseth, liberally to give alms to the poor, according to his ability.*

As a whole, The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion are a collection of points of faith that set out both statements of belief as well as boundaries that identify what is outside the biblical faith of the Church. A few Articles have already named one extreme that is outside the bounds of the Anglican tradition, namely the “Roman” or “Papist” accretions to catholic doctrines. Article Thirty Eight names another tradition that puts forth doctrines contrary to Anglican belief: that of the Anabaptists. They were implicitly warned against in Article Twenty Seven, wherein the practice of infant baptism is upheld, but this is the first (and only) time they are named specifically.

One of the features of the Anabaptist traditions when these Articles were written was their tendency to form tight-knit communities and renounce individual ownership of possessions in favour of common ownership among the members of the church. They did so with arguments to defend their views drawn both from the Scriptures and the Early Church, most notably Acts 4:32 – “the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.” The critical error of the Anabaptists was that the sharing of possessions ended up being church-enforced. And besides, there are no universal teachings anywhere in the Scriptures that private ownership is to be eschewed.

Rather, God's people are called to be liberal, “according to his ability”. This doesn't mean we are to give if we are able, but as we are able. The difference is key: generosity is not the sole purview of the comfortably rich, but of all God's people.

### **39. Of a Christian man's Oath.**

*As we confess that vain and rash Swearing is forbidden Christian men by our Lord Jesus Christ, and James his Apostle, so we judge, that Christian Religion doth not prohibit, but that a man may swear when the Magistrate requireth, in a cause of faith and charity, so it be done according to the Prophet's teaching, in justice, judgement, and truth.*

As with the previous Article, this final Article addresses an issue of civil life which had been raised in the Anabaptist tradition: they refused to swear oaths of any kind. Following the New Testament passages alluded to in this Article (Matthew 5:33-37 and James 5:12), they concluded that Christians were not allowed to swear any sort of oath, including the standard oath to speak the truth in a court of law. To this day, certain religious traditions refuse to participate in that standard practice. Countering this, Article Thirty Nine cites “the Prophet's teaching” from Jeremiah 4:2, which says “*and if you swear, 'As the Lord lives,' in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory.*” Thus, it is quite permissible for us to comply with civil law and custom

concerning solemn oaths – whether it’s swearing to tell the truth in the court or “swearing in” to a public office.

What is taught against, in this Article, is “vain and rash Swearing”. The most basic application of this is the Third Commandment: we are not to take the Lord’s name in vain. That is the usual biblical meaning of swearing – thoughtlessly using the name of God to back up something we say or promise, or simply using God’s name as a mere exclamation. All of that is sin, and therefore “is forbidden”.

All in all, this is a simple Article of faith. We are to mean what we say, and say what we mean. The sacred names of God are holy, and we are to speak of him and invoke his name only “in justice, judgement, and truth.” If we do so off-the-cuff, as it were, we are very likely being rash and falling into sin. But a considered promise or appeal to God’s name, such as those we make at Holy Baptism or Confirmation, is entirely in line with biblical teaching about Christian conduct and speech.



# SOLEMN DECLARATION 1893

**In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Amen.....**

**We**, the Bishops, together with the Delegates from the Clergy and Laity of the Church of England in the Dominion of Canada, now assembled in the first General Synod, hereby make the following Solemn Declaration:

**We** declare this Church to be, and desire that it shall continue, in full communion with the Church of England throughout the world, as an integral portion of the One Body of Christ composed of Churches which, united under the One Divine Head and in the fellowship of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, hold the One Faith revealed in Holy Writ, and defined in the Creeds as maintained by the unaided primitive Church in the undisputed Ecumenical Councils; receive the same Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as containing all things necessary to salvation; teach the same Word of God; partake of the same Divinely ordained Sacraments, through the ministry of the same Apostolic Orders; and worship One God and Father through the same Lord Jesus Christ, by the same Holy and Divine Spirit who is given to them that believe to guide them into all truth.

**And** we are determined by the help of God to hold and maintain the Doctrine, Sacraments, and Discipline of Christ as the Lord hath commanded in his Holy Word, and as the Church of England hath received and set forth the same in the Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, according to the use of the Church of England; together with the Psalter or Psalm of David, pointed as they are to be sung or said in Churches; and the Form and Manner of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons; and in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion; and to transmit the same unimpaired to our posterity.

Scribe: Erik Jacobson.

From the Book of Common Prayer, as used in the Anglican Church of Canada



# Holy Trinity Anglican Church

Welcoming ♦ Relevant ♦ Traditional ♦ Evangelical

1440 West 12th Avenue Vancouver BC

[www.holytrinityvancouver.org](http://www.holytrinityvancouver.org)