

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

of conviction is heard in the central councils of the Church. (There have lately been some encouraging instances of such positive and effective contributions.) May God give strength and guidance for the witness and work that lie ahead, that fundamental scriptural principles are not jeopardized, and that true justice is dispensed by means of this Measure.

The Thirty-Nine Articles: Their Value in the Twentieth Century

BY JOHN TILLER

A PART from an occasional outburst, such as those made recently by the Dean of St. Paul's,¹ when for a moment we wonder again whether the Church has *ipso facto* excommunicated itself by the terms of its own Fifth Canon, it has become increasingly clear since the war that the painful tension in which the Thirty-Nine Articles held many an unhappy subscribing cleric has been resolved. This is not to say that any enactment or official announcement by voice of authority has granted relief to troubled consciences. Far from it: outwardly all remains exactly as before. Nor has there been any change of character in the clergy themselves leading to a universal and wholehearted acceptance of the Articles. On the contrary, what has been agreed upon is that adverse after-effects from the bitter pill of subscription should be avoided by dissolving it in the waters of Lethe. The Articles themselves have been banished by ignorance and forgetfulness from the councils and pulpits of the Church, except when formal occasion demands otherwise. No mention is made of the Articles during negotiations with the other Churches: the doctrinal confession of the Church of England is considered certain to be irrelevant, or at any rate an inconvenient hindrance to close understanding and ultimate unity.

Failing to find any agreed form of doctrine, then, do our Christian brethren from elsewhere seek to investigate our past in an attempt to discover where we stand? As like as not they will be informed that ours is not a confessional church.²

In this situation we have cause to be grateful to those like Dean Matthews, because at least they remind us that the problem really still exists of Articles subscribed to, but not believed in or obeyed. And it

is obvious on grounds of intellectual, moral, and spiritual integrity that it is better to revise the Articles than to pretend that they do not exist. Few, however, would be inclined to suggest that at the present moment there is sufficient theological agreement in the Church of England for a successful revision to be attempted. We are left with two alternatives. Subscription might be abolished entirely, leaving the Articles as no more than an important historical document and the Church as destitute of a confession as is often pretended already. Or the Articles might be once more affirmed as adequate for their purpose, and that purpose declared necessary for the good order of the Church. These are diametrically opposed courses of action. In this essay the latter step is advocated, and it is clear that this will involve an examination of the criticisms that subscription is unnecessary, or even unethical, and that the Articles are in any case out of date and irrelevant.

* * * *

After all, why not solve the problem at one step by doing away with subscription? Several reasons are urged in favour of this course. First, the fundamental importance of liberty of thought in the realm of theology is stressed. This, of course, is an argument which applies equally well to the abolition of the ecumenical creeds; it takes us to a religion of experience and out of sight of Christ and the historic Christian creed. The people who make this argument are in a position clearly stated by James Denney: "The problem is to find a way of securing two things: the unreserved recognition of the place which Christ has always held in evangelical faith and entire intellectual freedom in thinking out what this implies".³ Denney goes on to attempt a solution based upon the requirement of a common allegiance to Christ, but it is not possible to separate Christ from His Gospel, and this involves belief in a number of doctrines: "There cannot be a gospel . . . without an antecedent creed or body of belief".⁴ The truth of this is testified by the fact that we can speak of a New Testament "kerygma": it has been a plain fact of the Church's experience. Neither is it possible to accept the ecumenical creeds alone on the grounds that they confine themselves to the historical truths of Christianity. Not only is this inaccurate, but the historical events themselves are viewed by these creeds every bit as much from the standpoint of the Christian Gospel as is the case with the later confessions of faith. Any creed designed for subscription might, of course, be unpardonably detailed in its delineation of doctrine, and we shall have to consider whether the Thirty-Nine Articles may be criticized fairly on this ground. At the time of the Reformation, such confessions proliferated and there was some truth in the sarcasm of Erasmus: "The Christian Creed began to reside in writings rather than in men's minds, and there were well nigh as many faiths as there were men. Articles grew but sincerity declined. Contention boiled over, charity was frozen . . . Thousands of articles of faith rushed into publicity".⁵ It was easy at such a time to insist upon fixing doctrines too precisely. But the mainspring of all this activity was the truth which Luther had grasped: "Christians need certainty, definite dogmas, a sure word of God, which they can trust to live and die by".⁶ As one such definition

of dogma, our Articles are wonderfully restrained. This is all the more remarkable because, as Hoskyns reminds us: "If you read the Thirty-Nine Articles, you are not reading a theological discourse spun out of the quiet, reflective training of men remote from the world. You are reading statements wrung out of controversy; more than that, wrung passionately out of the complete insecurity of life, and written in the blood of men".⁷ Yet compared with, say, the Westminster Confession of Faith, we see at once their suitability as articles designed for subscription, however superior the presbyterian confession may be as a *summa theologica*. An obvious example is Article XVII. Bishop Ryle, in his tract on Election,⁸ notices the scriptural restraint of this Article, in which a principle is laid down which applies also to the code as a whole: "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". And Article VI makes it plain that "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". This rule of the Articles applies to the Articles themselves. They are not to bind us, even when we have subscribed to them, any more than Scripture itself. In other words, subscription leaves us with as much intellectual freedom as we had before with that reverent submission to "God's word written" which is the starting point of all constructive Christian theology. We deplore those who, as Bacon put it, "delight in giddiness, and count it a bondage to fix a belief".

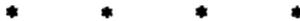
A second suggested reason for doing away with subscription is that at present the Articles, as already mentioned, are felt to be a hindrance to union with other branches of the Church. Why, it is asked, should we be tied to the divisions of our forefathers? There in the pages of the different confessions the old controversies linger on, blighting the efforts at reunion of later generations. If it be objected that we must know where we stand before we can decide on what ground reunion would be acceptable, the answer is given that the ecumenical creeds would do very well as a basis of faith for a reunited Church (whether this is true we shall consider in a moment); and that in any case the Church of England has laid down its terms as regards reunion, and they are not the Thirty-Nine Articles. All the conversations which have taken place during this century have had as their basis some form or other of the famous Lambeth Quadrilateral. This is so; but what those four points define is not Anglicanism. They represent part of a general ecumenical escapade which does not bother to be reconciled with the past. This past is particularly enshrined in creeds and confessions which are always "wrung out of controversy", when truth needs safeguarding. Thus it is inadequate, for example, to define historic Anglicanism in terms of the Prayer Book alone. For one thing, Articles and Prayer Book are the products of one reforming movement, in fact of one group of Reformers. They are twin rocks in the foundations of Anglicanism. "Any Prayer Book which does not contain the Articles is a most imperfect, mutilated, and barely honest copy of the Liturgy".⁹ Thus it is sheer disregard of the history of the

Church of England to neglect the Articles. "Cranmer, and Laud, and the latitudinarian Burnet, and the eighteenth and nineteenth century Evangelicals, and the Tractarians, and Pusey, and the judges who gave verdicts in the heresy and ritual trials of the last century . . . will tell us . . . historic Anglicanism is not just a style of worship; it is also, and fundamentally, a confessional position."¹⁰

Apart from the present situation, it would be amazing that anyone could dream otherwise. The need which the Articles were intended to meet is clearly stated by Archbishop Parker: "For want of plain certainty of Articles of doctrine by law to be declared, great distraction and dissension of minds is at this time present among your subjects."¹¹ "That the Articles were intended to be the legal and authorized statement and test of Church of England doctrine on all subjects treated in them is quite clear from all we know of their origin, history, and purpose."¹² The confessional position of the Anglican Church as stated in the Articles was established, as the Reformers and later writers frequently pointed out, mid-way between the extremes of Romanism and the ultra-Protestant sects. And this is Anglicanism: this is that celebrated *via media*, the very thing which is claimed to qualify our Church to plan a special part in the work of reunion.¹³ Surely, so far from forgetting the Articles in our ecumenical discussions, we ought instead to keep a very firm hold upon them, to ensure that we remain true to that *via media* which is our confessional position and vocation; lest, talking to some Churches with one type of face, and to others with an altogether different one, we find instead that our *via media* has simply become being all things to all men.

At this point, before proceeding to the third objection to subscription, it would be as well to deal with an argument, arising from the debate over the confessional nature of the Articles, which is held by many to reduce subscription to a very minor matter. The pacific purpose of the Articles is noted, the title of which declares them to be "for the avoidance of diversities of opinions and for the establishing of consent touching true religion". But they have come to be regarded as "Articles of Peace" in a sense their title and function do not at all support. Ever since kindly and easygoing well-wishers tried to make it easy for the honest Chillingworth to subscribe in the seventeenth century, there has been a widespread notion that the Articles simply determine which doctrines shall not be spoken against by Anglican clergyman, for the sake of peace, whatever private views they may legitimately hold. This idea was thus current long before the Act of 1865, despite the fact that subscription was required *ex animo*. For example, John Bramhall writes as follows: "We do not suffer any man 'to reject' the 39 Articles 'at his pleasure'; yet neither do we look upon them as essentials of saving faith or 'legacies of Christ and of His Apostles'; but in a mean, as pious opinions fitted for the preservation of unity. Neither do we oblige any man to believe them, but only not to contradict them."¹⁴ The idea of Articles of Peace is built upon such statements as the last sentence here. It is uncertain that Bramhall himself held this view, however, because Bishop Burnet tells us that he is here referring to the assent of the laity, not the subscription of the clergy.¹⁵ For the laity, says Burnet, they are only Articles of

Communion, to enable them to determine whether they are sufficiently in sympathy to remain within the communion of the Church of England; but the subscription of the clergy implies more than this: the title of the Articles, the Fifth Canon, the Statute of Elizabeth, "make it appear very plain, that the subscription of the clergy must be considered as a declaration of their own opinion, and not as a bare obligation to silence". Although Burnet went on to explain that the Royal Declaration of 1628 somewhat modified this conclusion, a statement which we shall have to investigate when we consider the interpretation of the Articles, it is so far true that the Articles lay down the confessional position, not only of the Church as a body, but also of each individual subscribing clergyman.



We must, however, take as a final objection to the continuation of subscription that which denies the necessity of such a confession, even though it imposes no intolerable restriction upon the intellect, or unbearable handicap in ecumenical relations. It is suggested that a reunited Church will need no more than a united Church once had, namely, the Creeds; and moreover these creeds are, by nature, different from any particular confession. E. J. Bicknell elaborates upon this contention in his *Theological Introduction to the 39 Articles*.¹⁸ "While Creeds are a necessity, 'in a world where all expression of spirit is through body', Articles are a consequence 'not of the Church's existence but of the Church's failure . . . The one is a necessary feature of spiritual reality. The other is an unfortunate consequence of spiritual failure. . . .' Though both have been shaped by that discussion, which alone can sift out error and bring to light the truth: yet in origin, value, and aim they differ. Creeds belong to the life of the Church and Articles to its life in a sinful world".

We must examine the points which Bicknell enumerates to see whether he makes good this distinction. First he claims that "in their essential nature Creeds grew up out of the positive statement of belief required of every Christian at his baptism," and thus unlike the later confessions they are not controversial statements designed to rule out error, although he admits that this was the case with "particular clauses". But he neglects to ask why such a statement was ever required at baptism; or why a statement of simple belief in Jesus Christ came to be lengthened into the creeds. The fact is that the creeds reflect the conflict with heresy throughout the first three centuries of the Christian era, and the "particular clauses" are simply those added in the controversies which come at the end of the period and are better known to us. Throughout this period the creeds were controversial statements of exactly the same type as later confessions, and in a measure they still are today. If they appear to us to be of a different "genus", the reason lies in the history of the medieval church, and the fact that they were written at a time when it was still possible to make a sufficient statement of faith brief enough for inclusion in public worship. This and the benefit of liturgical antiquity account for the fact that they remain today along with the Articles.

But the Articles themselves are, as Ryle reminded us, a proper part of our liturgy. Throughout the Church's history the tendency has always been towards a fuller statement of belief and a more careful exclusion of heresy, and this tendency appears in the formation of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds themselves and in the later production of the Athanasian Creed.

When this is realized the kinship of the Creeds with the later confessions will be obvious. Bicknell, however, has still to make his second point, namely, that "Creeds have behind them the authority of the universal and undivided Church . . . Hence, Creeds have a permanent value, Articles only a temporary value. We do not condemn, say, the Churches of the East, because they do not possess the 39 Articles. We should condemn a Church that rejected the Apostles' or Nicene Creed". In that case we shall, in fact, have to condemn the Churches of the East because they have never bothered to use the Apostles' Creed: as far as they are concerned it does not exist. The Athanasian Creed is not mentioned: this also has not been accepted in the East. Neither is there complete agreement even over the Nicene Creed. Therefore we dissent from Bicknell's conclusion that while there is no breach in catholicity when the Articles are discarded, "to reject the Creeds would be to part company with the life of the Universal Church". The Creeds are no test of catholicity, we have them because we are a branch of the Universal Church, but not vice versa. So we have the Apostles' and Athanasian Creeds because we are a branch of the Western Church, and the Eastern Churches do not have them because they are not branches of the Western Church. The question is one of genealogy, not catholicity.

Bicknell's final point is that the Articles are for the clergy, and "set a limit to official teaching", while "Creeds are for teachers and learners alike". It is true that only the clergy are required to subscribe to the Articles; but that is not to say that they do not concern the laity. Clergy, members of Parliament, and other officials take an oath of allegiance to the Crown, but no one supposes that those not required to do so are exempt from such allegiance. We refuse to draw distinctions between the Creeds and the Articles from the deplorable fact that "a loyal churchman may go through his whole life without necessarily coming into contact with the 39 Articles". For the Creeds and the Articles are both results of what is a continuous duty of the Church on earth: to establish a standard of orthodoxy and give protection from error. The Reformation came at a time when it could no longer be said that the old creeds were proving adequate for this purpose. Thus the Reformation Confessions, published chiefly between 1530 and 1571 were both apologetic and disciplinary in their aims. "They set forward in the face of Christendom the various 'platforms' on which their systems were builded. The Unreformed Church, since it also had become but a fragment of the Western Church, albeit in extent the largest, lay under the same compulsion. It, too, had to accept the necessity of Reformation."¹⁷ Thus the "Catholic" alternative to the Protestant Confessions is not the old Creeds. All agreed they were no longer sufficiently extensive. If we follow Newman, and, after an attempt to square the Articles with our own opinions, realize our interpretation is impossible¹⁸

and enter the Roman Church, we shall have to accept instead the Creed of Pius IV and the decrees of Trent as well as the ancient Creeds.

So far we have been defensive. We have considered one of the two possible courses before the Church today, that of doing away entirely with subscription to the Articles, and the reasons urged in its favour. We have seen, however, that subscription imposes no intellectual bondage more severe than that entailed in being a Christian, that of "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor. x. 5), whose doctrine is contained in the Scriptures. G. K. Chesterton said that the purpose of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, was to shut it again on something solid; and if we believe in the scriptural position of the Church of England, the Thirty-Nine Articles will be proper matter for our digestion. We have also seen that subscription will not tie us to what have become unrealistic divisions in the Church. And, thirdly, we have seen that subscription acknowledges a necessary development of the Church's declaration of the faith, the inclusion of those doctrines associated with the Protestant Reformation, and doctrines of which the Articles are an expression, as their inclusion in the *Harmony of Confessions* published at Geneva in 1581 serves to show. This *Harmony* was considered by Thomas Rogers, Bancroft's chaplain, who wrote the first commentary on the Articles in 1607, to prove that "not only in every particular state or kingdom, but also throughout Christendom where the Gospel is entertained, the primitive and apostolical days were again restored". To conclude this part of our argument let us quote the words of Bishop Henson, whose painful division of mind over the Articles is typical of the century concluding with the last war. One thing he was quite clear about: "Subscription is really indispensable, as well for the protection of the people, as for the security of the Church".¹⁹

* * * *

The objections to the Articles which have concerned us so far have been of a general kind which do not involve the actual contents of our confession. In turning to the second proposition, that the Articles be once more affirmed as adequate for their purpose, this will no longer be the case. For we now have to consider the various objections to this course of action on the grounds that the Articles are unsuitable and out of date, even if something of their kind is still necessary. This type of reasoning has been adopted somewhat more than frequently since Gore declared the Articles to be "a theological standard which has ceased to carry either serious obligation or theological enlightenment".²⁰ In fact, we might say that this is the typical twentieth century attitude to the Articles. In considering it we shall be positive, and, taking the various issues which confront the Church today, seek to discover whether the Articles are relevant to them. But since this will entail reference to the contents of the Articles a few words must first be said upon the notorious subject of their interpretation. From an early date in their history this has been an important matter because there have been people interested to put such a construction on the words as would enable them to subscribe.

We referred before to Burnet's judgment that subscription involves the opinions of those subscribing and is not a "bare obligation to silence". He goes on, however, to say that the Royal Declaration of 1628, drawn up by Laud, permits greater liberty. By insisting on the literal and grammatical sense it opened the way for casuistry and invited the ingenuities of Sancta Clara and Newman. Burnet cites the title of the Third Article as literally capable of at least three senses. This unfortunate official ruling (for such it was, strictly speaking, although it was published on the king's authority alone) made it possible to forget the intentions of the Reformers: "Only by isolating the 39 Articles from the historical situation in which they were framed, and from the documents with which they were historically associated, and by disallowing the *contemporanea expositio* of their language, could so gross a paradox have been seriously maintained even by the polemical ardour of ecclesiastical partisanship".³¹ Even before Burnet grasped the significance of the Declaration, another writer, Peter Heylin, had sought to direct interpreters back to the right attitude of mind by emphasizing that the meaning of the Articles where doubtful was to be determined by reference to the doctrine of the Reformers.³² But Newman felt himself to be under no such obligation. "We have no duties towards their framers"—but, "a duty which we owe both to the Catholic Church and to our own, to take the reformed confessions in the most Catholic sense they will admit".³³ What is this "Catholic sense"? Newman uses a similar phrase many times. Thus he writes with reference to the Articles: "The only peculiarity of the view I advocate, if I must so call it, is this—that whereas it is usual at this day to make the particular belief of their writers their true interpretation, I would make the belief of the Catholic Church such".³⁴ Or again, admitting this time that he is no plain expositor: "We do not know yet what the English Church will bear of infused Catholic truth".³⁵ He also speaks of "Catholic principle" and "Catholic tradition". And we might add that such phrases have become not uncommon among churchmen today.

But what do they mean? This is the problem of interpretation of the Articles as it really bears on the present situation. Our interpretation, we are told, must be harmonious with the traditional belief of the Catholic Church. But in any conflict over the precise content of the "Catholic" tradition, who is to decide? *Ex hypothesi* no national authority will suffice, and apart from the Church of Rome there is no other. At present there is no possibility of referring the problem to a General Council. Bishop Henson states precisely the answer to all such talk: "The fact is that an unformulated tradition can never provide a basis for ecclesiastical discipline".³⁶ It is sometimes said that the Articles have failed in their declared purpose of internal unity: it is rather this "unformulated tradition", which men have followed instead of the Articles, that has failed. In order for them to achieve their purpose they must be understood in a Protestant sense, because "their intention, their spirit, and their language are unquestionably Protestant".³⁷

We can begin our examination of current issues in the Church by observing the relevance of the Articles to the Anglo-Catholic movement. This has always been appreciated, ever since Tract XC, and has, of course, largely to do with interpretation. But, as we have just seen, this relationship is now not so narrow as formerly, but has come to apply to the whole idea of following "Catholic tradition". There is also one other modern issue which we have already dealt with: the Articles can claim to have an important function, as yet wholly unappreciated, in the task our Church has set itself of achieving closer understanding with and between the other Churches. What other burning questions occupy the mind of Churchmen today? We propose to take the following subjects as being those of major importance: the future of the Anglican Communion, the demand for liturgical revision, the current Anglican emphasis on the Incarnation, the return of a biblical theology, and the relationship between Church and State. Is it true that the Articles are so irrelevant to all of these questions that it is impossible to charge with significance an act of subscription to a code fully occupied with long-forgotten, sixteenth-century points?

Let us look then at the direction in which the Anglican Communion is tending. It is plainly a road of centralization and standardization. We now have our first officer of the Anglican Communion; the Lambeth Conferences become increasingly important; and at the latest Conference, it was hoped "that it is now possible to work towards a liturgy which will win its way throughout the Anglican Communion".²⁸ In all this the Articles are as usual left out of the picture as sure to be irrelevant. Liturgical unity may be desired, but it is not thought wise to concern the Anglican Church overseas with the Articles.²⁹ It is the familiar notion of "the Catholic faith" rather than the Anglican confession which is made the point of doctrinal unity. The 1930 Conference affirmed that the churches of the Anglican communion are a company, "whose faith has been grounded in the doctrines . . . for which the Church of England has always stood"; but these are then described in the following manner: "the Catholic faith in its entirety: that is to say, the truth of Christ, contained in Holy Scripture; stated in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds; expressed in the Sacraments of the Gospel and rites of the Primitive Church as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer with its various local adaptations; and safeguarded by the historic threefold order of the Ministry".³⁰ It would be difficult to insist on the Articles because most other churches in the Communion have abolished clerical subscription, and some no longer print the code in their Prayer Book; yet it ought to be done because of their significance for the Church of England.

But, whether this happens or not, the point we are now making is that the Articles are in themselves of extreme relevance for the whole communion. What more valuable than a reminder of the truths of Article XX at each Lambeth conference? Again, along with the increasing standardization and desire for a uniform liturgy, we place the pertinent words of Article XXXIV: "It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, and utterly alike; 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 again God's Word". In the third place, we still have the example of the Roman Church as a warning against excessive standardization. The successful achievement of a common liturgy in the Anglican communion could lead to more obnoxious developments against which Article XXIV is designed to safeguard us. Hardly, then, can we pretend that the Articles have nothing to say about this situation which confronts our Church.

Some of the points in the Articles we have just been referring to apply also to the proposals for liturgical revision. The man who upholds the Articles will not be a die-hard obscurantist on this question because he knows well that "Traditions and Ceremonies . . . may be changed" and that the Church "hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies". But he also knows that "it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written". By disobeying this we are in danger of producing a liturgy hopelessly at variance with the Articles and the scriptural principles they lay down. The disastrous consequences of this are often concealed by talk of an imagined antipathy between the Articles and the existing Prayer Book.

As an example of revision proceeding in a direction ruled out by the Articles let us take the doctrine of Eucharistic Sacrifice which is sure to be pressed for inclusion in any future order for the Holy Communion. In its modern form, the doctrine may still readily be shown to be unscriptural. The delusion rests upon a confusion of priesthoods, that of Christ and that of all believers, which are quite clearly two completely separate ideas in the New Testament. Yet in the following quotation from the 1958 Lambeth report the two are patently confused: "We offer our praise and thanksgiving for Christ's sacrifice for us and so present it again, and ourselves in Him, before the Father . . . We ourselves, incorporate in the mystical body of Christ, are the sacrifice we offer. Christ with us offers us in Himself to God".³¹ Again the doctrine is often expressed as that of "the whole Church offering the whole Christ". Such a doctrine cannot properly appear in the worship of a Church whose confession is the Thirty-Nine Articles. Not only is anything contrary to Scripture condemned, but the whole modern emphasis in the Eucharist of man approaching God is explicitly contradicted by Article XXV. Once again the Articles speak, and speak loudly, to our present situation, and on grounds which cannot be said to belong solely to the sixteenth century.

By now our method of argument will be plain, and a brief examination of how it applies to the remaining issues will be sufficient. In his book *From Gore to Temple*, the Archbishop of Canterbury describes the current emphasis of Anglican theology upon the Incarnation. He admits that this is not a scriptural emphasis. But, of course, it blends well with modern notions of the Eucharist. There is nothing in the Creeds to show us anything different unless it be indirectly in practice through the incongruity striking us of rising to our feet at the words ". . . and was crucified". Here we have a modern reason for a more explicit statement of the faith than the Creeds contain. The central importance of the cross in the Gospels is reflected in the Articles, and the fulness of its doctrine presented through various individual Articles. There we have the ideas of reconciliation (II), sacrifice (II, XV),

merit (XI), redemption (XXVIII, XXXI), propitiation (XXXI), satisfaction (XXXI). These statements ensure the constant "cruciality" of the cross. Likewise, the return to a truly biblical theology is commended by the Articles, even in some of its detailed characteristics, such as the importance of Old Testament studies (VII). Other points made are the sufficiency of Scripture (VI); the limits imposed by Scripture upon theological speculation (XVII); the submission of the Church to Scripture (XX)—all of which can guide the development of theological thought from its present stage.

A final issue, and one which is coming very much to the fore at the moment, concerns the relationship between Church and State. Here, perhaps more than anywhere, the Articles, with their reference to "every particular or national church", are considered to be dated by sixteenth century modes of thought. But again the idea of the "Catholic Church", is liable to obscure the equally scriptural identity of the local church, so that the Articles legitimately speak of the "Church of Jerusalem" and the "Church of Rome". Now it would certainly be intolerable for the Catholic Church to be in bondage to the powers of this world, but we must appreciate the problems which confront fragments of that universal community. For the individual believer, for example, there is the clear scriptural duty of obedience to temporal authority and subjection to its discipline (see Article XXXVII). Likewise, what is the local church to do when the government of that place desires to recognize the Christian faith? Should it withdraw as a Holy clique from the rest of the nation? "A National Church should mean a Church which exists to purify and elevate the mind of a nation; to give those who make and administer and obey its laws a sense of the grandeur of law and of the source whence it proceeds, to tell the rulers of the nation, and all the members of the nation that all false ways are ruinous ways, that truth is the only stability of our time or of any time" (F. D. Maurice).²³ So long as our Church is called to perform such a prophetic function, it will be sheer escapism to seek liberty from its duty to the State. The initiative in disestablishment must always come from the State. Until such initiative is taken, Article XXXVII will be relevant. A statement such as: "The laws of the Realm may punish Christian men with death, for heinous and grievous offences" may seem unnecessary today; but, together with the declaration that rulers should "restrain with the civil sword the stubborn and evildoers" of all estates and degrees, "whether they be Ecclesiastical or Temporal", it puts a welcome end to a chapter in the quarrel between Church and State which had already wasted more than enough time and energy.

* * * *

We are now in a position to put some conclusion to our argument. We have seen in the first place that subscription to a code of belief is still necessary. It is designed to guarantee both the orthodoxy of the clergy and the protection of the laity.²⁴ Moreover, we have seen that there is no justification for abolishing subscription to a specifically Anglican confessional position. We then proceeded to investigate whether that confession is adequate for modern use. We say adequate

because we do not wish to suggest that no revision could possibly improve upon the present version. Surely we have seen that no creed is ever final. But revision was ruled out at the beginning as an impracticable course of action at a time of considerable theological disagreement within the Church of England. With a smile we remember Erasmus's words about the multiplying of confessions until there were "well nigh as many faiths as there were men", when we find C. B. Moss coming into print with his own private revision of the Articles.⁸⁴ In passing we may note that he considers the Blessed Virgin, the Anglican Communion, the Roman See, and Ordination to be the points on which the Articles need supplementing for the twentieth century; while the Articles on self-righteousness (XIII), the sovereignty of God (XVII), faithless communicants (XXIX), and the Homilies (XXXV) are no longer relevant, although it is not explained why this is so. Disregarding revision, then, as a possible course of action, we took the Articles as they stand and found them by no means irrelevant to the present time. On every major issue they produce relevant principles for Anglicans, because Anglicanism is a Reformed faith. The words of Bishop Henson express the conclusion we have reached: "I think that in the future, as in the past, Anglicanism must justify itself on the principles of the Reformation. I believe that the religious crisis of our time" (and Henson had in mind very much the issues which we have been discussing—Anglo-Catholicism, Establishment, Reunion) "can only be handed successfully in the spirit, at once conservative and courageous, which led the English Reformers to bring the established medieval system of faith, worship, and discipline to the test of the New Testament".⁸⁵ That is the fundamental reason why the Articles are relevant today, and for that matter will always be relevant, because they contain the principles of the Reformation. To uphold them and to believe in them is therefore to be truly Anglican. This is no mere party issue. F. D. Maurice could say: "I look upon them (the Articles) as an invaluable character, protecting us against a system that once enslaved us and might enslave us again; protecting us also against the systems of the present day—against 'Records' and 'Times' newspapers, and Bishops of Exeter, and Heads of Houses".

So then, instead of abandoning the Articles and trying to pretend they do not exist, let us do what has been the practice in the past at times of theological division: let us reassert the adequacy of the Articles and subscription, as it was asserted in the Declaration of 1628 and in the Royal Circular of 1721. The Revised Canon 2 will give us our starting point: "The 39 Articles are agreeable to the Word of God and may be assented to with a good conscience by all members of the Church of England". But much more is required than this. Let us not only assent to the Articles, but use them, to provide that dynamic which shall save us from "a doctrinal incoherence which has no parallel in any other church claiming to be traditionally orthodox".⁸⁶

REFERENCES

- ¹ Sermon at opening of Convocation, 1959; *Church of England Newspaper*, March, 1960.
- ² E.g., S. C. Carpenter, *Church and People* (1959), p. 85.
- ³ *Jesus and the Gospel* (1908), p. 384.
- ⁴ W. A. Curtis, *Creeeds and Confernces of Faith* (1911), p. 431.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 418.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 419.
- ⁷ *Cambridge Sermons*.
- ⁸ From *Old Paths*, reprinted separately 1961.
- ⁹ J. C. Ryle, *Knots Untied* (1896), p. 78.
- ¹⁰ J. I. Packer, *The Thirty-Nine Articles* (1961), p. 5.
- ¹¹ Letter to the Queen with 13 other Bishops, *Correspondence*, p. 293.
- ¹² W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Principles of Theology* (1930), p. liv.
- ¹³ E.g., G. K. A. Bell, *Christian Unity* (1948), chap. 1.
- ¹⁴ *Works*, II, p. 470.
- ¹⁵ *Thirty-Nine Articles*, p. 8.
- ¹⁶ Pp. 23-25.
- ¹⁷ H. H. Henson, *Bishoprick Papers*, pp. 102-110.
- ¹⁸ *Via Media*, pp. 351ff.
- ¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 102-110.
- ²⁰ *Reconstruction of Belief*, pp. 974f.
- ²¹ H. H. Henson, *Anglicanism* (1921), p. 51.
- ²² *Historia Quinquarticularis* (1660).
- ²³ Quoted in Henson, *op. cit.*, pp. 60f.
- ²⁴ Public Letter to Self.
- ²⁵ Letters II, p. 318.
- ²⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. xix.
- ²⁷ W. A. Curtis, *op. cit.*, p. 182.
- ²⁸ 2. 81.
- ²⁹ E. J. Bicknell, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
- ³⁰ From J. I. Packer, *op. cit.*, pp. 4f.
- ³¹ 2. 84.
- ³² Quoted in S. Neill, *Anglicanism* (1958), p. 252.
- ³³ See Henson in e.g., *The Church of England* (1939), p. 107.
- ³⁴ Published by Mowbray, 1961.
- ³⁵ *Anglicanism*, pp. xxxixf.
- ³⁶ Henson, *The Church of England*, p. 108.