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Recovering Confessional Anglicanism

Gillis J. Harp

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you CAN make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

(from *Through the Looking Glass*)

If the story of North American Anglicanism in the last generation has demonstrated anything, it is the catastrophic consequences of ignoring our Reformation formularies. Forgetting the Thirty-Nine Articles has, of course, been part of a larger assault on traditional doctrine. Relegating the Articles to the ‘Historical Documents’ section of the 1979 American BCP was a small part of this shift but a revealing one nonetheless. As the costly results of a non-confessional Anglicanism continue to work themselves out in the Episcopal Church and in the Anglican Church of Canada, orthodox Anglicans have homework to do. We need to revisit the Reformation formularies, study them afresh and work to restore them to a central place in the teaching and life of whatever orthodox body emerges from the current mess. A critical part of this study is learning how to interpret the Articles correctly in the wake of decades of misinterpretation and obfuscation.

My approach in the following essay is both descriptive (surveying quickly some of the history of interpretation) and also prescriptive, that is, arguing for what I think is the most responsible, historically-informed and fruitful way to read, understand and apply the Articles today.

Although I have long been an amateur student of the Articles, I confess that I have become more keen about them in recent years. Like many Anglican evangelicals, I have long been an admirer of the Westminster Standards, particularly the Shorter Catechism. My recent interaction with conservative confessional Presbyterians has convinced me of several things: One, the standards of preaching in the Episcopal Church at large are abysmal. Two, the practice of biblical discipline in most Episcopal congregations (even

'evangelical' ones) is virtually unknown. Three (and more to the point here), the Westminster Standards, despite their many virtues, are occasionally too detailed and precise about secondary matters. This feature of Presbyterian confessional standards has created problems within conservative Presbyterian circles. Read about the current arguments within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) regarding the Confession's wording about the days of creation (were they twenty-four hour periods or not? etc.) and you will understand my point. I would argue that the Articles' brevity is a wonderful virtue (note here that I said brevity and *not* ambiguity—on the core issues, the Articles are decidedly not ambiguous, as we shall see). The Articles (along with the classic 1662 BCP) are one of Anglicanism's great treasures.

The Articles of Religion were a product of the English Reformation and, in their final form, of one particular phase of that Reformation, the Elizabethan Settlement. As such, they naturally reflect the concerns of the Reformation era, in addition to affirming the creedal bedrock laid in the first five centuries of the history of the Christian church. Philip Schaff best summarized the main characteristics of the Articles long ago: '[They] are Catholic in the ecumenical doctrines of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation', especially drawing upon the Lutheran Augsburg and Württemberg Confessions. 'They are Augustinian in the anthropological and soteriological doctrines of free-will, sin and grace... They are Protestant and evangelical in rejecting the peculiar errors and abuses of Rome.... They are Reformed or moderately Calvinistic in the two doctrines of Predestination and the Lord's Supper... [and] they are Erastian in the political sections....' Hence the Articles' original historical context is the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, and not just the English Reformation but the Continental Reformation as well. Schaff wrote that the Articles taught 'those doctrines of Scripture and tradition, justification by faith, faith and good works, the Church, and the number of the sacraments, which Luther, Zwingli and Calvin held in common.'¹

If one is seeking to define clearly Anglican identity in this muddled age, one is met, then, with a major obstacle at the outset. The vast majority of American Episcopal layfolk (and, in my experience, many of its clergy) are woefully ignorant of the Reformation. If the defining documents of Anglicanism, the Reformation formularies (Articles, BCP, Ordinal and Homilies) are products

of an era that most Anglicans know little or nothing about, we do have a problem. And the problem is not solely one of ignorance but of unease or downright hostility. Episcopalians are embarrassed about Henry VIII. Many take pride in that Anglicanism broke with Rome but ‘avoided Luther’s extremes’ (whatever that is supposed to mean!). I have been struck with how *other* churches of the magisterial Reformation show a much greater knowledge of and appreciation for their Reformation roots. Lutherans and Presbyterians celebrate Reformation Sunday and sing ‘A mighty fortress’ with gusto. Why shouldn’t Anglicans do so also? Episcopalians seem vaguely embarrassed by it all. In the ECUSA calendar, the Oxford martyrs are lumped together in a single day—is it ever observed in Episcopal churches? (At least in Canada and England, Cranmer has his own day and Latimer and Ridley appropriately share one.) Much of this myopia regarding the Reformation stems from the Tractarian movement and its Anglo-Catholic successors but one must frankly recognize it as a serious problem undermining the recovery of authentic Anglicanism in North America.

J.I. Packer and Roger Beckwith have ably refuted the old saw that the Articles are ambiguous and equivocal. On the main points of contention with Roman Catholicism they are indeed crystal clear. Scripture is clearly identified as the supreme rule of faith and other essential matters follow: the fact of human depravity; the Biblical understanding of justification (what Luther aptly labeled the doctrine on which the church stands or falls); the doctrine of assurance; the meaning and purpose of the sacraments. On the flip side of the coin, they are also admirably clear in their negative teaching—*i.e.*, their rejection of medieval tenets: purgatory, transubstantiation, denying the cup to the laity, the sacrifice of the mass and several others. What one often forgets is that they are also very clear about what Anabaptist distinctives they repudiate: Pelagianism, deprecating the sacraments, rejecting infant baptism, inattention to the order of the church visible and other matters. Indeed, often what strikes us as an odd turn of phrase has its roots in a point arising from Anabaptist teaching.² Some Anglican evangelicals today seem to forget this side of the question; they are savage in their treatment of Rome but strangely silent regarding serious Anabaptist errors.

As noted already, the Articles do leave many secondary matters open or unresolved. Bishop Pearson concluded in 1660 that they were not ‘pretended to be a complete body of divinity’ but, rather ‘an enumeration of some truths’,

truths that were the minimal doctrinal requirement for those charged with the pastoral ministry in the Church of England.³ Subscription to such a modest set of doctrines by the clergy would secure theological (and political) peace in a necessarily comprehensive national church. Of course, 'comprehensive' here does *not* mean what Anglican liberals in the twentieth century have meant by that term.

Packer and Beckwith identify roughly three traditions of interpretation of the Articles over the centuries. They label these Reformed, Latitudinarian and Catholic. In the first group, one should include T.P. Boulton, *A Commentary on the Thirty Nine Articles*, E.A. Litton, *Introduction to Dogmatic Theology* and, most notably, W.H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology*. (Litton's commentary has recently been reprinted.) Perhaps the very first commentary in this Reformed tradition was Thomas Rogers, *The Catholic Doctrine Believed and Professed in the Church of England (1607)* reprinted by the Parker Society in the nineteenth century (see below). These commentators understood most of the key Reformation issues as central to the faith and sympathized with most of the answers furnished in the Articles. Naturally, they stressed the centrality of the Articles to understanding the fundamental, doctrinal character of Anglicanism. The party battles of the nineteenth century sometimes gave them different concerns or emphases than those of the sixteenth-century Reformers, but their approach to the Articles was certainly sympathetic.

The second, or moderate latitudinarian approach was best represented by Burnet's *Exposition* (1699) which was popular for decades among many and not just latitudinarians (Burnet can often sound fairly high church). These commentators adopted a Whiggish view of the Reformation as a grand deliverance from the superstition of the Dark Ages and part of a larger march of progress toward common sense and rationality. Theological liberals extended this approach at the beginning of the twentieth century. One used to encounter such an interpretation of the Reformation in high school and college textbooks that portrayed Luther as a champion of individual liberty (quite a stretch for a figure as thoroughly medieval as Luther). Sometimes one got the impression from these accounts that the greatest achievement of the Reformation was that it made Higher Criticism possible!

In summarizing the approach of so-called Catholic interpreters of the Articles, one must take care to draw a critical distinction. Some of these (especially

those old High Churchmen who wrote before the Ritualist movement) were sharply anti-Roman Catholic and usually careful to exclude a sacerdotalist definition of the ordained ministry. The two best examples here are Bishop William Beveridge (1710) and Bishop Harold Browne (1850).⁴ All of this, of course, changed with the publication of John Henry Newman's infamous *Tract 90* in 1841. Despite the almost universal condemnation it received at the time, *Tract 90* has, in fact, exercised a powerful influence over the years and, as such, it warrants further examination here.

By 1840, the Oxford Movement had come a long way. Its leaders had rightly called Anglicans back to seeing the church as a divine institution, the body of Christ and not simply a branch of the British civil service. Their advocacy of more frequent communion and, generally, attention to better standards both in parish worship and church music—controversial matters in some quarters but many Evangelicals today would agree that they have merit. The Tracts of the Times that began to appear in 1833, turned up the heat under the simmering controversy and made John Henry Newman truly 'the leader of the party'.⁵ Prior to the appearance of *Tract 90*, Newman was in an enviable position. At Oxford, he was revered by most students and faculty and his published sermons had given him a sympathetic following among Anglican clergy throughout the country. Still, Newman remained deeply troubled about the position of the Tractarians within the Church of England. A recent article in the *Dublin Review* by Cardinal Wiseman on the Catholicity of the Church of England had rubbed a raw nerve. Newman responded in another periodical but more needed to be said. If Rome had preserved the fullness of the Catholic faith better than Anglicanism, was it a serious sin to remain in the Church of England? E.A. Knox aptly describes Newman's predicament this way: 'He is anxious to have an answer in controversy why an individual is not bound to leave the English Church, apparently not venturing on anything so bold as a reason why he is bound not to leave it...it was to be shown that the Articles were 'patient of a Catholic interpretation,' and free from all taint of heresy.'⁶

Newman therefore argued that the Articles did actually teach the Catholic faith (or at least they did not explicitly reject it) but this 'Catholic faith' was never really defined with any precision. It was, as E.A. Knox puts it—'a Faith built up by Newman and his friends, and consisting of extracts from the Fathers and the Caroline Divines. Its existence is taken for granted, and the Thirty-

Nine Articles are brought into accordance with it, not by what they do say, but always by what they do not say'.⁷ For instance, regarding Article VI, Newman declared '...Holy Scripture is not, on Anglican principles, the rule of Faith'. Regarding Article XI: 'A number of means go to our justification.' Regarding Articles XII and XIII: 'Works before Justification do dispose us to receive the grace of God.' Regarding Article XXI: 'General Councils may err, unless in any case it is promised, as a matter of express supernatural privilege that they shall not err.' Regarding Article XXII: This 'condemns only the Romish doctrine [of purgatory, pardons, images, invocation of saints]. Others may be held'. Regarding Article XXII: 'The Article before us neither speaks against the Mass itself, not against its being an offering for the quick and the dead for the remission of sins; but against its being viewed...as independent of, or distinct from the sacrifice on the Cross, which is blasphemy,....'⁸

In summary, then, the argument of Tract 90 involved what Knox terms three major 'evasions'. First, 'the comparison of the Articles with a standard of doctrine which was not in existence, but was an ideal that had to be discovered...'. A second 'evasion' was the ignoring of the great historical fact that 'the Articles belonged to an age in which Western Christendom was divided into two great camps, the Roman Catholic and the Protestant, and that the Articles were a declaration that England took her place in the Protestant camp.' The final evasion was that Newman contended that the reference in the Declaration to only 'the literal and grammatical sense' of the Articles 'relieves us from the necessity of making the known opinions of the framers a comment upon the text'.⁹ This last evasion is perhaps most significant for our purposes here for it effectively detaches the 'train' of the Articles from its 'engine' (*i.e.*, its original historical context and the *original intent* of its authors) and essentially allows one to pull Anglicanism anywhere one likes.

Now, some may protest that I am setting up a straw man here just to pulverize it. Tract 90 was, in fact, almost universally condemned and, in the wake of the controversy, publication of the Tracts was suspended and Newman departed for Rome in 1845. Nevertheless, this fanciful, ahistorical approach to the Articles by Anglo-Catholics continued (albeit sometimes in a more subtle form) for decades and has muddied the waters considerably regarding our approach to the Articles. I will use as my example here E.J. Bicknell's *The Thirty-Nine Articles* a volume that has exercised a broad

influence, especially in North America where the standard Evangelical works have long been unavailable.

For the authors of the Articles, the heart of the matter was justification. Regarding Article XI, Bicknell contends that it teaches justification by faith but wisely avoids the more 'extreme' Reformation teaching on this subject. Bicknell goes on then to explain that the Article does not teach Luther's peculiar understanding:

...Luther in his attempt to explain justification spoke of 'an imputed righteousness'. God, he laid down, can treat us as righteous because Christ's righteousness is imputed to us and our sins are imputed to Him. This is a 'legal fiction', and happily our Article, like Scripture, is silent about it....The metaphor expresses a real truth, but is far too external. We cannot put on righteousness like a garment.¹⁰

This is truly a remarkable assertion, based as it is, on both an amazing misreading of both Scripture and the clear historical position of the authors of the Articles. Article XI makes explicit reference to the 'Homily on Justification'. Although this Homily does not use the word imputation (at least in its positive sense), it clearly describes such a perfect righteousness, external to the believer, that is applied (i.e., imputed) to the believer by God's gracious action in Christ and received through faith alone. The actual word is not there but all that it implies is carefully laid out. Of course the word itself was used by the chief author of the Articles, Thomas Cranmer. In his 'Second Sermon on the Creed' from *Catechismus* (1548), Cranmer explains that '... by our lively faith in him [i.e., Christ], our sins are forgiven us,...For then God no more imputes unto us our former sins; but he imputes and gives unto us the justice and righteousness of his Son Jesus Christ, who suffered for us'.¹¹

As is often the case, Griffith Thomas furnishes a welcome corrective here. Regarding Article XI, he writes:

This is the great and satisfying doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ which is clearly taught by the Article as meritorious on our behalf. It is sometimes argued that this theory is not mentioned in the Article because of its association with what is sometimes called a 'legal fiction'. But in the light of the teaching of the Article on our Lord's merit by which

we are accounted righteous before God, the doctrine of imputation is clear, and, indeed, has been taught plainly, as we have just seen, by so representative a man as [Richard] Hooker.¹²

Bicknell provides an equally fanciful reading of Article XXXI. The latter states in disarmingly forthright terms: ‘...the sacrifices of Masses in the which it was commonly said that the priests did offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, were blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits.’ Bicknell stresses that the language here ‘is most carefully chosen’ and then proceeds essentially to gut the original meaning of the Article’s authors. He argues that

There is no denial of the Eucharistic sacrifice, but [only] of popular perversions of it, as embodied in the practical system of worship during the Middle Ages....So it is not ‘the sacrifice of the Mass’ but the ‘sacrifices of masses’ that is condemned: not any formal theological statement of the doctrine—for such did not exist—but popular errors.¹³

It is easy to discern Bicknell’s sleight of hand here. Again, employing what Newman called ‘the literal and grammatical sense’, he effectively removes the historical context and draws a sophistical distinction without a difference. (Bicknell is also again following Bishop. E.C.S. Gibson’s commentary published in 1897.) Griffith Thomas’ fifteen-point refutation of this particular interpretation of Article 31 is a tour de force. For one, although there was no formal Roman statement of the doctrine in 1553, many earlier statements of it had received some official sanction. Two, Roman Catholic commentators have, in fact, always interpreted this Anglican Article in its plain historical sense as repudiating the official Catholic teaching regarding eucharistic sacrifice! Three, the use of the plural form here is in fact irrelevant, since it was a common expression of the time (employed even by Roman authorities) and was always treated as synonymous with the singular. The connecting ‘Wherefore’ in the Article’s wording clearly links the previous part of the Article that ‘condemns all teaching inconsistent with the uniqueness and completeness of the sacrifice of Christ’. Four, the word ‘altar’ was omitted in the Prayer Book of 1552 and never reinserted in subsequent revisions; obviously this fact speaks volumes about the doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice. Five, and perhaps most poignantly, ‘Cranmer and Ridley died for denying the

Roman doctrine of transubstantiation and the Mass; yet this was [like the 42 Articles] before the Council of Trent'. In Cranmer's own work on the Lord's Supper, the Archbishop and martyr called the Roman Catholic teaching 'that the priests make their Mass a propitiatory sacrifice, to remit the sins as well of themselves as of others, both quick and dead...the greatest blasphemy and injury that can be done against Christ...'.¹⁴ Any repetition of Calvary in the Eucharist was forcefully excluded by all the authors of the Articles; the only sacrifice viewed as a legitimate part of worship in the Holy Communion was the responsive sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving that the faithful communicants offered after receiving the bread and the wine. The whole structure of Cranmer's 1552 rite was designed to underline this truth and no revision up to and including that of 1662 changed this one iota.

Incidentally, Bicknell actually appears here to differ with Newman's mature assessment of this question. In *Via Media* (1883), Newman candidly admitted, 'Nothing can come of the suggested distinction between Mass and Masses....What then the 31st Article repudiates is undeniably the central and most sacred doctrine of the Catholic Religion.'¹⁵

Bicknell thus provides ample evidence of how not to interpret the Articles. It remains for me to clarify how one can best approach such a confessional statement. What is the best way to interpret any historical document? Since the 1960s and seventies, several historians of political thought (sometimes called the 'Cambridge School') have advocated a 'contextualist' approach to historical texts. A student of John Locke, Professor John Dunn, has summarized the method of the Cambridge School as treating 'the historical character of the texts as fundamental, and understands these, in the last instance, as highly complex human actions'. For these scholars, it is crucial that (to quote another theorist) 'the texts are treated in a self-consciously historical manner, through locating them in time and place and, moreover, examining them in their linguistic contexts...[the Cambridge School seeks] to introduce a reflexive historical sensitivity to the process of interpretation.'¹⁶ Not only is the document's original purpose and historical context crucial to discover and reconstruct but one must attempt to recreate the linguistic context within which particular words or phrases were used. For example, surveying what has been said about liberty from Plato to Mill is rather meaningless unless one is acutely aware of *how* the meaning of the word liberty has shifted and developed over time. The job of an intellectual historian

is akin to that of the archaeologist—he attempts to get at the meaning of texts by examining and reconstructing the community of discourse that originally produced a particular text.

What does all this have to do with church confessions? The methodological concerns of intellectual historians should alert us to how naïve and biased Anglicans have been in interpreting our formularies. Both Anglo-Catholics and Evangelicals have been guilty of ahistorical and partisan readings (although because Evangelicals have more often been in sympathy with the central concerns of the Reformers, they have often been fairer interpreters than their High Church opponents). What then would this more thoughtful approach entail for our interpretation of the Articles? Clearly, we must first attempt to reconstruct the communities of discourse that produced the original 42 Articles and its modest Elizabethan revision. We would include in this context the other Reformation formularies such as the Prayer Book (1552), Ordinal and the two Books of Homilies. It would be helpful to also include the extant sermons and letters of the Anglican Reformers (thankfully, we have much of this material reprinted in the Parker Society series and beautifully distilled for us in Philip E. Hughes' classic, *The Theology of the English Reformers*). So we do indeed have the resources at hand to be more accurate, responsible interpreters of the Thirty Nine Articles. But it is hard work that requires the patience of an 'archaeologist of ideas'.

One valuable historical source that has often been overlooked but which can aid us in what I might term 'confessional hermeneutics', is the first complete commentary on the Articles penned by Thomas Rogers. Rogers died in 1616 (we don't know his birth date). He was a graduate of Christ Church, Oxford (BA 1573, MA 1576) and rector of Horningsheath in Suffolk. It is ironic that the commentator favoured by Reformed and evangelical churchmen was perhaps most famous during his own time as an opponent of the Puritan Nicholas Bound (d 1613) in the sabbatarian controversy (Rogers believed the sabbatarian teaching of the early Puritans represented a sort of Pharaasaical Judaizing and criticized it harshly in several polemical works). Rogers wrote *The English Creede* in 1579 and it was published later in 1607 in a revised form as *The Faith, Doctrine, and Religion* professed and protected in the Realm of England and Dominions of the same, expressed in the Thirty-Nine Articles. When Augustus Toplady set about to prove the Calvinist credentials

of the Church of England in 1774 in his book *Historic Proof of the Doctrinal Calvinism* of the Church of England, he highlighted Rogers' commentary. According to Toplady:

There was only one commentary on the Thirty-Nine Articles published in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, that by Thomas Rogers. He dedicated his book to Archbishop Whitgift. In 1607 Rogers dedicated another edition to Archbishop Bancroft. Here is proof that the doctrine of the Church of England is Calvinistic, when the official commentary on the Articles dedicated to two Archbishops of Canterbury and approved by them is thoroughly Calvinistic in tone.¹⁷

One other source that Toplady mentioned and that is often now neglected is Nowell's *Catechism*. Probably the composition of Alexander Nowell (1507-1602), Dean of St. Paul's, who had been a Marian exile in Strassbourg, it was approved officially by Convocation in 1572. Translated into English from the Latin in 1570 by Thomas Norton and (like Rogers' volume) reprinted by the Parker Society in the 1850s. B.G. Felce refers to the Catechism as 'a kind of commentary on the Articles' and, as such, it is an invaluable early source for students of the Articles.¹⁸

Although he wrote only about a single generation after Cranmer's martyrdom, Thomas Rogers began his commentary on the Articles appropriately by laying out their historical and theological context. In his Preface, he relates the story of Cranmer's correspondence with Calvin regarding a Pan-Protestant meeting to agree on a common doctrinal statement. Sadly, the meeting never materialized but Rogers recounts the exchange in order to stress the unity of doctrine among all the Reformation churches—a 'harmony', says Rogers, that 'all their confessions doth most sweetly record'.¹⁹ Rogers' point here is to lay out the historical and doctrinal context—explain that the Articles should be understood within their Reformation milieu.

Hence one begins to see what an historically-informed interpretation of the Articles might look like. With Rogers and Nowell as our principal guides, often disputed passages become clearer. The contemporary theological context certainly helps elucidate Article XXXI, for example. Rogers' commentary cites in detail and at considerable length those very decrees of Trent that Bicknell

and others claim were not actually condemned by the Article. Apparently Rogers was not under any confusion:

It is a fable that the mass is a sacrifice and that propitiatory; a fable, that a few words of a priest can change bread into a living body, yea, many bodies with their souls, and that of Jesus Christ, God and man; a fable, that one and the same sacrifice is offered in the mass which is offered on the cross; a fable, that the said mass is any whit profitable for the quick, much less for the dead.²⁰

Now, some may still respond that Article XXXI condemns only an exaggerated medieval understanding of the eucharistic sacrifice. Many since the mid-twentieth century have put forward a more modest conception of the sacrificial character of the eucharist. The action of the sacrament does not repeat Christ's once for all sacrifice on Calvary's cross but through holy communion worshippers 'enter into Christ's self offering'. The sources of this approach are varied (among them Gustav Aulen) and it has had a wide influence: in ecumenical circles as a way to transcend the allegedly arid and unproductive controversies of the Reformation and even among Evangelicals interested in renewing worship (Wheaton worship guru Robert Webber follows this line, for example). John Stott in his superb chapter on the Lord's Supper in *The Cross of Christ* rightly rejects this more refined doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice; I think an application of Article XXXI that interprets it in line with the teaching of its authors must do so also. Roger Beckwith, for example, concludes

The idea that the eucharist is a ritual sacrifice offered by a ministerial priesthood is...quite foreign to the New Testament, as is ceremonial suggestive of such an idea; and when the further idea is added that this ritual sacrifice is identical with Christ's sacrifice on the cross, or with some heavenly sacrifice of equal or greater importance, the very foundations of Christianity are being overturned, and the language of Article XXXI, 'blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits', becomes appropriate.²¹

Yet the current (1979) American BCP teaches such a doctrine implicitly in most of its eucharistic prayers and explicitly in its catechism. The latter describes the Eucharist 'is the way by which the sacrifice of Christ is made present, and in which he unites us to his one offering of himself... it is also

known as the Divine Liturgy, the Mass, and the Great Offering’.

Our troubles with the Articles, however, do not only arise from its Anglo-Catholic interpreters. There are, in fact, at least a couple areas where contemporary Evangelicals may be seriously out of step with the teaching of the Articles. For one, what is our doctrine of the ministry? Most evangelical Anglicans would agree with the classical position of Anglicanism that the Christian ministry is not mediatorial or sacerdotal in nature but pastoral. Although I am sorry to see the wide acceptance of the title ‘Father’ for Episcopal clergy, I am frankly more concerned these days about evangelical clergy who appear to have adopted a view of the ministry that seems to owe more to the Plymouth Brethren than to Anglicanism. Article XXIII is quite clear about the role and responsibilities of the ordained ministry

Of Ministering in the Congregation.

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

Is it not, for instance, contradictory to affirm the Articles and then argue for lay presidency at the Lord’s Supper? I am not speaking here about extraordinary circumstances nor about the validity of the sacrament administered by a layman. While all of the Reformers rejected the sacerdotal model of the presbyterate, they simultaneously held to a high doctrine of the ministry. This is not clericalism but instead has to do with the proper ordering of the church. Evangelicals have often embraced an egalitarian ethos that owes more to the Enlightenment and democratic individualism than it does to the Bible. I recall chatting with an English evangelical rector who proudly announced that he sat in the congregation during Sunday worship since laymen usually prayed, preached and led the singing. This is not the position of the Articles nor of Reformed theology in general. Since Evangelicals would be unlikely to argue that very frequent reception of the sacrament was absolutely essential to the Christian faith, can one really make a case for the sort of emergency situation that would require such an extraordinary response as lay administration? I

am doubtful that this would be the case, at least in the continental US.

I suspect that support for lay presidency is also rooted in an unAnglican attitude toward tradition that I see among some Evangelical churchmen at present. Of course the English Reformers stressed emphatically the supremacy and sufficiency of Scripture. But at the same time, they recognized a subsidiary role for church tradition, always under and corrected by the Word of God but carrying a certain weight. Roger Beckwith again explains helpfully:

The rule that only bishops and presbyters may celebrate communion is... extremely ancient. It is not Scripture but tradition, so it is not unalterable. Nevertheless, one does need a good reason to alter it. If traditional customs still serve their original purpose, we should, as Cranmer said, 'have reverence unto them for their antiquity' and not prefer 'innovations and new fangleness'.²²

When ancient practices are not unscriptural, do they not merit our deference?

Finally, at a time when many Episcopalians are asking about their future within the Episcopal Church, some careful reflection on Article XIX is surely in order. It states:

Of the Church.

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in 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.

Since we probably don't need to be reminded about denominations that have erred, direct your attention instead to the first half of this Article. This passage enumerates two marks of the true church, that is, pure doctrine and the sacraments being 'duly administered according to Christ's ordinance...'. Other Protestant Reformers often listed a third mark—biblical discipline. Actually, the Homilies contain a sermon that includes this third mark (a sermon usually attributed to Bishop Jewel), highlighting the importance of 'the right use of ecclesiastical discipline'. Jewel calls this tripartite definition

‘agreeable both to the Scriptures of God and also to the doctrine of the ancient Fathers, so that none may justly find fault therewith’.²³ Griffith Thomas notes that this third mark may be implied in the word ‘duly.’ It is rightly ‘interpreted’, writes Thomas, ‘to mean all necessary discipline, even to the extent of excommunication of the willfully disobedient’.²⁴

This sort of discipline has not characterized the Episcopal Church for thirty years or more. What is more disturbing is that many theologically conservative parishes seem to pay little attention to this dimension. They seem to confuse ‘open communion’ which Anglicans practice (unlike Confessional Lutherans, you don’t have to have an identical eucharistic theology in order to communicate) with simple indifference. This should not be the case. The teaching of the Articles provides a much-needed corrective here also.

To sum up, an example from juridical theory may be helpful. Legal theorists and politicians have talked a lot about ‘original intent’ in recent years when interpreting the founding ‘confession’ of the American republic, that is, the Federal Constitution of 1787. Note the words of one of its chief architects, James Madison: If ‘the sense in which the Constitution was accepted and ratified by the Nation...be not the guide in expounding it, there can be no security for a consistent and stable government,....’ Or as his friend and neighbour Thomas Jefferson remarked: ‘Our peculiar security is in the possession of a written constitution. Let us not make it a blank paper by construction [i.e., “interpretation” in modern English].’²⁵

Surely much of the dissension within Anglican churches since the mid-nineteenth century is the bitter fruit of not respecting the original intent of our framers. When the Anglican formularies become a kind of wax nose that can be shaped by partisans who were avowed enemies of the principles of the English Reformers, then is it any wonder that Anglicanism is in dire straits? As many of us are now involved in the recovery of authentic Anglicanism in North America, let us not shrink from the hard work of understanding the original intent of the Articles and the even harder job of really applying them to the teaching and practice of our congregations.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Schaff quoted by Wayne J. Hankey, "The Thirty-Nine Articles as a Theological System," in G. Richmond Bridge, ed., *The Thirty-Nine Articles* (Charlottetown, PEI: St. Peter Publications, 1990), 4.
- 2 I highly recommend Packer and Beckwith's superb booklet *The Thirty-Nine Articles: Their Place and Use Today*, Latimer Studies 20-21 (Oxford: Latimer House, 1984). Substantial portions of this essay are based upon this work. Calvin once wrote that some Anabaptists were 'a hundred times worse and more pernicious...[than] the papists.' [Calvin quoted by Benjamin Wirt Farley, ed., *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 222. I am indebted to my colleague T. David Gordon for this reference.]
- 3 Pearson, quoted in *The Thirty-Nine Articles: Their Place and Use Today*, 36.
- 4 Packer makes this point. See *The Thirty-Nine Articles: Their Place and Use Today*, 37.
- 5 Stephen Neill, *Anglicanism* (London: Mowbray, 1977), 256.
- 6 E.A. Knox, *The Tractarian Movement, 1833-1845* (London: Putnam, 1933), 239, 246.
- 7 Knox, 259.
- 8 Newman quoted in Knox, 261-263, 248.
- 9 Knox, 259-261.
- 10 E.J. Bicknell, *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* (London: Longmans, 1955 [1919]), 206-207.
- 11 Cranmer in *Writings of the Rev. Dr. Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury and Martyr*, 1556 (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1842), 173.
- 12 W.H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology: An Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles* (London: Longmans, 1930), 190.
- 13 Bicknell, 417-418.
- 14 Griffith Thomas, 418-419.
- 15 Newman quoted in W. Prescott Upton, *The Churchman's History of the Oxford Movement* (London: Church Book Room, 1933), 129-130.
- 16 S.A. Bell Duncan, "The Cambridge School and World Politics: Critical Theory, History and Conceptual Change," unpublished article on the Internet at: www.theglobalsite.ac.uk/press/103bell.htm
- 17 Toplady quoted in B.G. Felce, "Toplady's View of Doctrinal Continuity After the Reformation" in David N. Samuel, ed., *The Evangelical Succession in the Church of England* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1979), 35. Toplady once quipped: "Open

the liturgy where you will, Calvinism stares you in the face.” *Ibid*, 33.

18 Felce, “Toplady’s View,” 33.

19 Thomas Rogers, *The Catholic Doctrine of the Church of England: An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1854), 4.

19 Rogers, *Catholic Doctrine*, 300.

21 Beckwith, *The Thirty-Nine Articles: Their Place and Use Today*, 75.

22 Beckwith, Latimer Comment, #49, 5.

23 Jewel quoted in Thomas, *Principles*, 271-272.

24 Griffith Thomas, *Principles*, 272. Rogers was more critical of this approach. See *Catholic Doctrine*, 176-77.

25 Madison and Jefferson quoted by Raoul Berger, *Government by Judiciary: The Transformation of the Fourteenth Amendment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), 364.